

**POLITICAL SCIENCE 302
CLASSICAL AND MEDIEVAL POLITICAL THEORY**

BULLETIN INFORMATION

POLI 302 – Classical and Medieval Political Theory (3 credit hrs)

Course Description:

Political theories from the Greeks to the Renaissance.

SAMPLE COURSE OVERVIEW

An introduction to key texts and thinkers in classical and medieval political theory. This course emphasizes the critical analysis of values/ideals like justice, equality, liberty, and virtue, the impact these values/ideals do and can have on individuals and on collective life, and how reflection on the classical and medieval history of these values/ideals has shaped and continues to shape personal and political ethics, decision-making, and social responsibility and action. The course explores competing treatments of these ideals/values and important differences as well as commonalities regarding the alleged sources and functions of these values/ideals across the ancient, classical, and medieval periods (8th century BCE-13th century CE) and with a view to their ongoing relevance.

ITEMIZED LEARNING OUTCOMES

Upon successful completion of POLI 302, students will be able to:

1. Recognize and analyze basic ethico-political terminology and concepts.
2. Demonstrate understanding of the fundamental elements of political society, and the differing methods and goals of modern political theories.
3. Develop interpretive and critical political arguments based on primary sources.
4. Identify and analyze the political, social, and ethical values that shape specific theories and the regimes they produce.
5. Demonstrate understanding of the sources and functions of values and how they shape the foundation of a political community, and the personal and community ethics, and decision-making that go on in it.
6. Apply past theories of politics to the present in order to understand the continuities and differences between past and present theories, practices, and values of politics.

SAMPLE REQUIRED TEXTS/SUGGESTED READINGS/MATERIALS

Readings in Classical Political Thought, edited by Peter J. Steinberger, Hackett, 2000.

SAMPLE ASSIGNMENTS AND/OR EXAMS

1. **Participation:** The evaluation of class participation will include attendance, performance in large- and small-group class discussion, brief writing assignments, and quizzes.

2. **Midterm Exams (2):** The first test covers covers material up to and including Sophocles, *Antigone*. The second covers Plato and Aristophanes.
3. **Final Exam:** The final exam will cover all the material in the course.

This course will assess student achievement through the evaluation of class participation and exams. From time to time, you will be asked to bring to class a question about the assigned reading. In-class exercises and homework assignments count toward the attendance and participation portion of your grade. Since discussion of the readings is a central part of the course, your attendance and participation grade will also be based on how well prepared you are for in-class discussions. The texts we read can be difficult; they must be read closely and carefully, often many times. In-class writing assignments and written short answer and essay exams are based on individual and collective close readings and interpretation of primary sources, and class discussion. The exams require students to define, explain, analyze, compare, and evaluate, through the lens of selected thinkers and the values they explore, foundational problems of politics, such as the sources of order and disorder and/or of power and responsibility, the sources and character and functions of conflict, and sources of political legitimacy, the nature of liberty, equality, and justice, virtue, and how these fundamental values/ideals affect collective and individual deliberation and judgment about the distribution of authority, power, and social and material goods.

SAMPLE COURSE OUTLINE WITH TIMELINE OF TOPICS, READINGS/ ASSIGNMENTS, EXAMS/PROJECTS

Week 1: Introduction

Class 1: This course opens by putting to the students the question: what is democracy? Treating the democratic polity as a framework for ethical analysis, reasoning, and decision-making, the course explores diverse critical appreciations of democracy's foundation and development, practices and institutions, the nature of the citizens who comprise a democratic polity, and the differing values/norms/ideals that guide democratic foundation, institutions, and possibilities for self-government. The course explores these features across time, from pre-democratic Homeric times, through the turbulences of 5th and 4th century Athens – the “birthplace of democracy” – to post-democratic or republican Rome and early Christianity, with the largest share of the course focused on the question of democratic authority.

Account 1: Pre-democratic authority

Class 2: Quiz and then small-group work analyzing specific quotations in Homer's *Iliad* to seek and unpack evidence of entrenched status and/or political position and also elements in the poem that may simultaneously call into question that hierarchy and its apparent naturalness.
Reading: Homer, *Iliad* (4-9)

Week 2:

Account 2: Democratic authority

Class 3: Lecture about the historical transition from Homeric times to 5th century Athens, y way of the rise of the polity form, then discussion of Thucydides' account of his

historical method at the start of the *History of the Peloponnesian War* with a view to drawing out his concerns about forms of democratic knowledge. Discussion also of Pericles' first speech to convince the Athenians to go to war, in order to unpack his paradigms of justice, freedom, and honor, and power.

Reading: Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War* (35-42)

Class 4: Quiz and then continued discussion of Pericles' speeches, including the Funeral Oration, and also of the Mytilene debate to explore how the paradigms of justice, freedom, honor, and power, change over the course of the war in Thucydides' representation. We pay special attention to the role Thucydides attributes to different kinds of speech in his ongoing exploration of democratic knowledge.

Reading: Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War* (42-52, 54-58)

Week 3:

Class 5: Guided by pre-prepared questions from the students, the focus is on the Melian dialog and its treatment of justice, freedom, honor, and power, and also on how to position Thucydides as a political theorist relative to the speeches he put on display in his text.

Reading: Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War* (54-58)

Class 6: Quiz and then small-group work analyzing specific quotations in Aeschylus' text to explore questions of justice, fairness, and revenge.

Reading: Aeschylus, *Furies* (all)

Week 4:

Class 7: Guided by pre-prepared questions from the students, the focus is on Athena's institutionalization of justice via Orestes' trial by jury for the murder of his mother, on how Athena persuades the Furies to become the Eumenides, and on how and why democracy depends on the rule of law.

Reading: Aeschylus, *Furies* (all)

Class 8: Quiz and then small-group work analyzing specific quotations in Sophocles' text to explore the differing accounts of law, identity, authority, and justice advocated by Antigone and Creon.

Reading: Sophocles, *Antigone*

Week 5:

Class 9: Guided by pre-prepared questions from the students, the focus is on the similarities between Creon and Antigone specifically on the questions of law and justice and on how both characters, in Sophocles' representation, are impediments to the democratic practice of the rule of law.

Reading: Sophocles, *Antigone*

Class 10: Review

Week 6:

Class 11: FIRST MIDTERM

Class 12: Lecture and discussion of the charges leveled at Socrates in the *Apology* and of his countercharges against Meletus with a view to unpacking the dialog's approach to the question of the relation between law and justice in democratic Athens.
Reading: Plato, *Apology* (17a1-28a1, 147-153)

Week 7:

Class 13: Quiz and then discussion guided by pre-prepared questions from the students about Plato's critique of democracy based on how he depicts Socrates' performance at his trial and the trial's outcome.
Reading: Plato, *Apology* (28a2-42a5, 153-159)

Class 14: Quiz and then discussion focused on the content and nature of the arguments offered in the *Crito* for and against Socrates' accepting the judgment of the people of Athens, with a specific focus on the arguments offered about justice.
Reading: Plato, *Crito*

Week 8:

Class 15: Guided by pre-prepared questions from the students, the focus is on Aristophanes' depiction of the destabilizing effects of the Peloponnesian War on relations of hierarchy and authority and on the ethics, ideals, and values of democratic Athens.
Reading: Aristophanes, *Clouds*

Class 16: Quiz, and then continuing discussion of democratic destabilization against the backdrop of war, with a specific focus on the ideals of freedom, equality, and on the practice of justice and its evaluation.
Reading: Aristophanes, *Clouds*

Week 9:

Class 17: Review

Class 18: SECOND MIDTERM

Week 10:

Class 19: Lecture and then discussion guided by pre-prepared questions from the students on the practices and requirements of citizenship as these are described in Aristotle's *Politics* in comparison with contemporary US practices and requirements of citizenship.
Reading: Aristotle, *Politics*, Book III, chs 1, 4 (394-396)

Class 20: Quiz, and then discussion about Aristotle's treatment of slavery and human nature and the qualifications for exclusion and inclusion in a political life.

Reading: Aristotle, *Politics*, Book I, chs 1-7 (374-382), ch. 13 (383-384)

Week 11:

Class 21: Guided by pre-prepared questions from the students, the focus is on justice as a moral virtue, a political practice, and an institution, with specific attention to the role of equality in Aristotle's treatments of the different forms of justice.

Reading: Aristotle, *Politics* Book III, chs. 9-12 (398-402), *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book V, chs 2-5 (on Blackboard)

Class 22: Discussion of Aristotle's typology of constitutions and of which constitution best reflects the values, ethics, and citizenship practices he prizes.

Reading: Aristotle, *Politics*, Book III, chs 6-8 (396-398), Book IV, chs 1, 3, 11 (402-405), Book VII, chs 1-4, 8-10 (426-428), chs13-14 (429-432), Book VIII, chs 5-7 (438-442).

Week 12:

Class 23: (cont'd.) Discussion of Aristotle's typology of constitutions and of which constitution best reflects the values, ethics, and citizenship practices he prizes.

Reading: Aristotle, *Politics*, Book III, chs 6-8 (396-398), Book IV, chs 1, 3, 11 (402-405), Book VII, chs 1-4, 8-10 (426-428), chs13-14 (429-432), Book VIII, chs 5-7 (438-442).

Account 3: Post-democratic authority

Class 24: Quiz and then small-group work analyzing specific quotations in Cicero's text to compare and contrast Cicero on democracy, law, freedom, virtue, and justice with Aristotle.

Reading: Cicero, *The Republic* (446-60)

Week 13:

Class 25: (cont'd.) Small-group work analyzing specific quotations in Cicero's text to compare and contrast Cicero on democracy, law, freedom, virtue, and justice with Aristotle.

Reading: Cicero, *The Republic* (446-60)

Class 26: Quiz and then small-group work analyzing specific quotations in Aquinas to explore his writings on law and justice.

Reading: Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* (508-529)

Week 14:

Class 27: Guided by pre-prepared questions from the students, the focus is on which political regime best exemplifies political authority for Aquinas.

Reading: Aquinas, *Statesmanship* (542-546)

Class 28: Review and Conclusion

Final Exam: See University exam schedule.