

POLI 210AA: History of Political Thought: Plato to Rousseau
Fall 2018

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Course Description

This seminar offers a brief introduction to six canonical political theorists. The main purpose of the course is to help theory students prepare for comprehensive exams. The discussion will focus on the concepts and models of these theorists and their potential applications to understanding political phenomena.

Books

You should find copies of these books on your own prior to the start of the quarter. Hackett Publishers or the Cambridge Texts “blue book” series provide good scholarly editions at a fair price.

Plato, *Republic*
Aristotle, *Politics*
Machiavelli, *The Prince*
The Discourses
Hobbes, *Leviathan*
Locke, *The Second Treatise on Government*
Rousseau, *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*
On the Social Contract

Assessment

Memos. Students will submit a short memo on each week’s reading (no more than 500 words). The main purpose of the memo is for you to identify something in the reading that you find puzzling (e.g., Hobbes’s argument that the state of nature would degenerate into a state of war, or Rousseau’s concept of a general will) and briefly articulate what it is about this puzzle that you find confusing/frustrating/mistaken/etc.

Submission details. Submit via TED 24 hours before class.

In-class presentations. Each student will do 2–3 presentations on the assigned readings. *Presentations should not try to summarize the entire reading.* Instead, focus on reconstructing a central argument or concept from the week’s readings, and posing a few questions or concerns for class discussion. Try to limit your presentations to 15 minutes.

Details. We will assign presentations during Week 1.

Grades

Everyone starts with an A. You should not be motivated by anxiety about your grade. Focus on skill development. If you develop the relevant skills (see below)—and this requires taking initiative and even some risks—your grade will take care of itself.

Grades are a means for us to signal where you are at in your development. Individual assignments are graded on a ✓/✗ basis. The minimum standards for a ✓ are basically equivalent to a B+. More specifically, you receive a ✓ if your memo/presentation provides evidence that you are developing the core skills of good scholarship (to an appropriate degree):

- Memos and presentations use plain, descriptive language. No more technical jargon than necessary, and jargon is clearly defined when used (i.e., demonstrates that you understand what the jargon means and why you are using it).
- Others' arguments are charitably reconstructed; texts are not willfully distorted.
- Memos and presentations demonstrate familiarity with the relevant assigned texts, and make judicious use of textual evidence when appropriate.
- Memos and presentations exhibit at least a moderate level of intellectual ambition (appropriate to the student's stage of development). That is, they take on relatively significant issues and do not simply take on insignificant/banal/trivial points of detail.
- Memos and presentations engage with readings in a constructive spirit; they do not simply point out flaws in the reading but use these readings as a basis for improving understanding.

Treat everything as work in progress. We do not expect you to demonstrate expertise; but we do expect you to demonstrate initiative and good-faith effort. You should use written assignments and presentations to test out ideas and see where they lead. There are no penalties for attempting an argument that ultimately fails. Memos and presentations are only penalized for being tedious, unimaginative, careless, or sloppy.

Either of the following conditions is sufficient for **dropping to a B**:

- ✗ on 3–4 memos;
- ✗ 1–2 memos, plus ✗ on 1–2 presentations.

Either of the following conditions is sufficient for **dropping to a C**:

- ✗ on 5+ memos;
- ✗ on 3–4 memos, plus ✗ on 1–2 presentations.

In-class participation. Conscientious participation in class discussion is expected. Consistently poor or destructive participation in class leads to a one-third step decrease in your final grade.

Pass/fail. A letter grade of B– or above is a pass; fail otherwise.

General Expectations

1. A PhD program is an apprenticeship. You should think of yourself as an apprentice scholar. Every other expectation follows from this.
2. An apprenticeship is “training-by-doing,” not simply passive information consumption. You become a scholar by acting like a scholar. While we do not expect you to reach the performance standards of experienced scholars at this point, we do expect you to diligently strive to adopt the habits of experienced scholars. This means, among other things, that you take the initiative for your development, that you give good-faith effort, that you seek out intellectual challenges, that you be willing to subject your thoughts to critical scrutiny, that you offer constructive criticism of others’ views, and so on.
3. An apprenticeship involves the performance of repetitive exercises (particularly in the early stages)—for instance, reading and discussing assigned material, writing papers, and solving problem sets (including writing proofs). You will likely struggle to see the point of some (perhaps many) of these exercises in the moment you are performing them, and may even resent being asked to perform them. But keep in mind that these are part of a larger program of habit formation. (Think of Daniel’s apprenticeship in *The Karate Kid*: “Wax on, wax off” was not obviously related to karate. If you don’t understand this reference, [watch this YouTube clip](#).)
4. Trial and error is a key mechanism for developing into a professional scholar—apprentices try to act like a scholar and, in light of feedback, learn what works and what doesn’t. So an apprenticeship requires various mechanisms that give you feedback about your development trajectory—meaningful signals that tell you how you are progressing toward your goal of becoming a scholar.
5. Grades are one (but only one) feedback mechanism—they indicate the areas where you are making good progress as well as areas where you are lagging behind and thus need to make deeper investments. To ensure that grades are meaningful, low grades will be given for subpar performance on assigned exercises. (But you should not treat grades in this course as our judgment about your value as a person or your potential as a scholar. They are solely our judgment about where you are relative to where you need to be with respect to this particular set of skills. It is possible for us to think that you have high potential but that you are currently lagging behind where you need to be to realize that potential.)
6. As intellectual integrity is a cardinal scholarly virtue, it is important that an apprenticeship program implement policies that support the development of intellectual integrity. Hence, there are consequences for those who flout this virtue (more on these consequences below). These consequences are, like grades, a feedback mechanism intended to send meaningful signals about your development and reinforce the formation of scholarly habits.

Academic integrity. Students are encouraged to discuss their memos and presentations with each other outside class. But academic integrity requires that you acknowledge others’ help as appropriate. If we suspect a violation of academic integrity, we will refer the case to the Academic Integrity Office. If they find academic misconduct was committed, the academic penalty

will be immediate failure of the course. The AIO will assign additional administrative penalties.

Plagiarism will be defined as follows:

Plagiarism consists in taking credit for scholarship that did not originate with you. The following are examples: (1) Using the words or ideas of another person without citing the reference. (2) Collaborating on an assignment without acknowledging the contribution of the other author(s).

All written assignments will be submitted through Turnitin (via TED). This is meant to support the ongoing development of academic integrity (see item 6 in General Expectations).

Schedule (provisional)

Week 0 = Thurs, Sep 27 (because Thanksgiving occurs during Week 8)

Week 0	Plato, <i>Apology</i> and <i>Crito</i> <i>Republic</i> (book I)
Week 1	Plato, <i>Republic</i> [books II (to 376e), III (412 to end), IV, V (471c–476b), VI (to 506b), VII (to 521), VIII, IX (to 580d)]
Week 2	Aristotle, <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> [book I, chs. 1–5, 7, 8] <i>Politics</i> [books I (chs. 1–7, 12, 13), II (chs. 1–5), III, IV (chs. 1–13), VI (ch. 2), VII (chs. 1–3, 7, 9, 13–15)]
Week 3	Machiavelli, <i>The Prince</i> <i>Discourses on Livy</i> [book 1 (chs. 16–18, 26), book 3 (chs. 1, 3)]
Week 4	Machiavelli, <i>Discourses on Livy</i> [Dedicatory letter, books I (Pref., chs. 1–12, 16–18, 25–26, 34, 37, 53–55, 57–59), II (Pref., 1–3, 10, 20, 28–30), III (chs. 1–5, 7–9, 29, 43)]
Week 5	Hobbes, <i>Leviathan</i> [Introduction, part 1 (chs. 1–16)]
Week 6	Hobbes, <i>Leviathan</i> [Part 2 (chs. 17–31), Review and Conclusion]
Week 7	Locke, <i>Second Treatise on Government</i> [§§ 1–51, 77–99, 119–142, 159–176, 199–226]
Week 8	No class (Thanksgiving)
Week 9	Rousseau, <i>Discourse on the Origin of Inequality</i> <i>On the Social Contract</i> [books I and II (all), III (chs. 1–5, 12–15), IV (chs. 1–3)]
Week 10	Hamilton, Madison, and Jay, <i>The Federalist Papers</i> [Essays 1, 2, 6, 9, 10, 14–16, 23, 37, 39, 47–49, 51, 62, 63, 70, 78, 84, 85]