

**Politics 2237E Section 001: Introduction to Political Theory****Part One: Plato and the ‘Ancients’ to Machiavelli and Modernity: Sept. - Dec. 2012****Part Two: From Hobbes to the “End of History”****Jan. – April 2013****Instructor: D. Long****Office: SSC 4131****E-mail: [dlong@uwo.ca](mailto:dlong@uwo.ca)****Office hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 11:30 – 12:30 p.m.; Wednesdays 10:30 to noon.**

Prerequisite: Politics 020E

Anti-requisites: Philosophy 237E, 235F/G, 236F/g; the former Philosophy 137E;  
the former Political Science 147E.

**The purpose of this course is NOT to teach you that any particular 'theory of politics' is the ‘right’ one.** Instead, the course aims to promote serious and critical thinking about politics by exposing you to some of the most influential and enduring approaches to political thought that have developed over the past 2300 years or so within the cultural boundaries of the ‘western world’. For better and for worse, ‘warts and all’, the theories we study in this course have shaped our modern assumptions and aspirations, the strategies **and the 'blind spots'**, of modern political theory and practice.

This is not ‘just’ a history course, though the historical stories it includes are both interesting and important. Our core job is to understand as many as possible of the most influential images, ideas and arguments in a selection of famous texts which have had a huge impact on the development of our most basic political ideas – ideas like liberty, citizenship, power, constitutions, law, and government itself. Some of these texts, those of Adam Smith for example, have been systematically distorted by modern commentators for ideological purposes. Putting texts like Smith’s *Wealth of Nations* into their proper historical context helps us to see what is being left out and what is being selected by modern interpreters and ideological ‘spin doctors’. The ultimate goal is to give each student the power and the tools to make a critical, informed and independent assessment of the vocabulary of modern politics. It’s all about today and about our political future in an increasingly interactive and interdependent global environment. Hiding inside the bubble of the dominant North American political paradigm is not good enough. We need to know more, not less, about ways of thinking about and doing politics that are different from our own. This course aims to broaden our political horizons – yours and mine.

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**Synopsis of First (Fall) Term:**

After some preliminary conceptual and historical discussion of political theory generically, we'll begin by focussing on the **classical political philosophy of Greece** in the 4<sup>th</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries BCE, especially on the seminal figure of Socrates (who didn't publish anything in writing) and on works by **Plato** and **Aristotle** which are still objects of study and debate today. We will also look briefly at the Classical Sceptics – the critics and rivals of Plato and Aristotle. The Greeks gave us the very word 'politics'. They started the 'western tradition'.

Next we'll turn to the 5<sup>th</sup> century A.D. to investigate the thought of **St. Augustine**, in which we see the impact on political thought of two great historical developments: **the rise of the Roman Empire and the emergence of Christianity**. The Romans gave us the concept of 'Empire'. The Catholic Church gave the 'west' the idea of 'Christendom'. From 500 A.D. to at least 1650 A.D. European politics was about Princes, Emperors and Popes.

Eight hundred years later, in the works of **St. Thomas Aquinas**, the influences of Plato, Aristotle and St. Augustine are blended in a unique and powerful theory of politics, morality and society based on the important concept of 'Natural Law'. **Modern theories of jurisprudence begin with St. Thomas's theory of natural law.**

Finally we cross the invisible (in fact non-existent) line which divides the 'late middle ages' from the renaissance, to look at the work of the notorious **Niccolo Machiavelli**, an author denounced - and diligently read - by thinkers from Shakespeare to Henry Kissinger. Is Machiavelli the first modern 'realist' in the history of western political thought, or merely the first great irreligious cynic?

The roots of **modern social, economic and political thought**, as something different from ancient and medieval approaches, can be traced to the 17<sup>th</sup> century (1600s), and connected to the core ideas of (at least) three very famous, if not specifically political thinkers: Francis Bacon, Rene Descartes and Isaac Newton. Before the Christmas break I'll give you some key characteristics of modern political thought as it was shaped by these sources.

**Lecture Topics for the Fall term:**

**First Class: Welcome! Everybody comfortable? Discussion of Course Outline, clarification of course requirements, explanation of course 'skill set'. Exploration of the indispensable 'Owl' web site.**

**Introductory Lectures: "What is ...?"**

**What is politics?**

**What is 'Political Theory'?**

**What is the narrative thread of this course? What is the story it tells?**

**Reading:** this is a sort of course overview – there are no specific preparatory readings.

**What is 'Classical Political Philosophy'?**

Who / what are the 'Idealists' and the 'Sceptics'? What's the difference between 'Ancients' and 'Moderns'? Is an 'Epicurean' a sort of 'foody'?

**Reading: Cahn textbook pp. 22-30, *The Crito* (the death of Socrates) and Cahn pp. 5-21, *The Apology* (Socrates's trial)**

**On Scepticism** I have posted an excellent (very readable) section from Hallie's introduction to the Classical Sceptics in the "Additional Readings" folder at 'Owl'.

**1. The Basics of Platonism: 'It's strictly Platonic'.**

'Human nature' - The 'Soul' and the 'Polis'; Philosophy and Sophistry / truth and power; 'Justice'; why 'idealism' is not naivety

**Reading: Plato's *Republic*, Book I (on justice and sophistry) & Books 2 - 5 (the 'Myth of the Metals').** In Cahn's course textbook.

**2. Issues of Platonism: 'Great - but where's the politics?'**

Faking it - Images and Truths

Open and closed systems: The impossibility – and authoritarianism - of the ideal  
The political 'cycle of futility'.

**Readings: *Republic*, Books 7, 8, 9: political regimes.** In Cahn's course textbook.

**3. Aristotle: 'the first political scientist?'**

The Methodology of Political Science

Politics and Ethics in Aristotle

**Readings: Aristotle's [*Nichomachean*] *Ethics*, Books 1 (the Sciences) and 10 (Ethics and Politics).** These are posted at the 'Owl' site for this course, and are reproduced incompletely in Cahn at pp. 154-75

**4. Aristotle: the ‘*zoon politikon*’, the citizen and the state**

The Theory of Associations and the idea of a Polity  
Citizenship, Constitutions and Political Change

**Readings:** Aristotle’s *Politics*, Books I (‘Political Association’) and III (‘Constitutions’); the first two pages (Chap. 1) of Book IV are also really important. These are in Cahn at pp. 175-224

**Test on “The Classics” – Plato & Aristotle: in a tutorial session (i.e. 45 minutes long). Short written discussions of central ideas in their texts as highlighted in lectures and tutorial work.**

**5. St. Augustine: Two ‘Cities’: Rome and Christendom**

The City of God and the ‘Civitas Terrena’  
‘True Justice is not of this world.’

**Readings:** Selections from *The Political Writings of Saint Augustine* at ‘Owl’ site

**6. St. Augustine: Christian Pessimism and Christian Platonism**

**Readings:** Selections from *The Political Writings of Saint Augustine* at ‘Owl’ site

**7. St. Thomas Aquinas: Christian Aristotelianism - Natural Law, Politics and Justice**

**Readings:** Selections from Aquinas’s theory of law and politics, posted at ‘Owl’.

**Note:** The chapter from *Politics and Vision* (1960, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition 2004!) on “Church and State” in the middle ages is recommended if you are interested. It’s not at all compulsory. Available at ‘Owl’.

**Note:** In the second edition (the one ordered for this year) of the textbook, Cahn has added a few bits from St. Augustine (pp. 225-36) and Saint Thomas Aquinas (pp. 237-52). There’s a lot more for each of these authors at the ‘Owl’ site in the “Additional Readings” folder.

**‘Critical textual Analysis’ in tutorials; short answers on material covered in lectures so far.**

**8. The Two Faces of Machiavelli: *The Prince* & *The Discourses***

**Re. Readings:** Excerpts in Cahn. Book One and the Preface to Book two of *The Discourses* are the key texts.

**Note:** I have a special handout on how to approach the study of Machiavelli including a recommended sequence of specific readings.

9. **Machiavelli: Realist? Cynic? Patriot?**

The Cycle of Regimes: nature, history and political necessity;  
From 'virtue' to 'virtu'.

**Note: DO NOT JUST READ The Prince.** Part of it is in Cahn (256-70). You need also to read the excerpts from Machiavelli's Discourses in Cahn (270-81). There is at least one passage from the Discourses that I will put on a Power Point slide for you. It is essential reading, but inexplicably not included in Cahn's excerpts.

10. **Looking ahead to 'modernity':** science, ideology, secularization, democratization, deconstruction: the triumph of having and doing over being. **I will provide some key ideas from three great 'game changing' 17<sup>th</sup> century thinkers: Francis Bacon, Rene Descartes and Isaac Newton.** I may post an article by Sheldon Wolin on 'Modern Theory and Modern Power' at 'Owl', but other than that there will be required readings for this unit.

**[Christmas Test – somewhere between Dec. 8<sup>th</sup> & 21<sup>st</sup>**

**Buying the Book:**

**Cahn, S.M., Political Philosophy: the essential texts, Oxford University Press, Second Edition, 2011.** This is a reasonably priced anthology, which we will use for the whole course, i.e. both Fall and Winter terms. It doesn't have everything I want you to read, but what it does not contain can be had on line or made available to you in a pdf file posted to the "Owl" web site.

Most of the texts we will read are such famous classics, and have been used in so many courses, that they can be found free on line or can be purchased in used book stores or borrowed from just about any library worth its salt. **Note: To save you money and assist you in finding adequate resources for purposes of tests and the essay, we will use the course 'Owl' site to give you excerpts beyond what's in Cahn. Check the "Additional Readings" folder at your convenience.**

**First Term Assignments and Grades:**

1) A **one-hour test** will be given **in tutorials** after we have studied the “ancients” (i.e. Plato and Aristotle and the Sceptics) [tentatively set for **the week of November 5<sup>th</sup> – 9<sup>th</sup>**]. You will be asked to **“identify and explain the meaning and significance of” individuals, stories, concepts etc discussed in lectures and highlighted in the texts**. This is a preliminary chance for you to see how you are doing at retaining important information and understanding concepts and issues.

**Value: 5% of your final grade in this course.**

3) A **“critical textual analysis”** [i.e. an essay-style discussion of a short, specified passage – a quotation - from one of the authors studied to that point in the term]: [**Tentatively set for the week of November 19<sup>th</sup> – 23<sup>rd</sup>**]

**Value: 10% of your final grade in this course.**

4) A **Christmas Test** to be written in the December test period: Dec. 9<sup>th</sup> – 21<sup>st</sup>. It will be two hours long, require one long essay-style answer and two shorter answers, and cover the whole term’s work. Full details of its format will be distributed in class well in advance of the test.

**Value: 15% of your final grade in this course.**

**PLEASE NOTE: Students who do not ‘show up’ for and write the required assignments may be ineligible to write the final examination, and could as a result fail the course. ‘Make up’ tests will only be arranged in cases where documented medical or compassionate grounds for special accommodation are provided.**

**5) Tutorial grades:**

**Each term you will be given a grade out of 5 for attendance** (you lose a point every time you don’t show up without providing documented medical or compassionate grounds).

**Each term you will be given a grade of 10 for the quality (quantity is not enough by itself) of your participation.** This means engaging in reasoned discussion, not haranguing, mud-slinging or indulging in sarcasm or destructive criticism. It refers to the quality of your listening, as indicated by your responses to what other say. It means encouraging others, being informed by reading, and making the discussions better for your participation. Everyone can do their best to achieve these goals. You don’t have to be brilliant. You don’t have to be right. You just have to add your voice to the conversation.

**What you need to do to succeed in this course:**

1. **COME TO CLASS:** I only test people on what the Tutors and I have taught them – or at least tried to teach them. Use lectures and tutorial discussions to ‘shop’ and identify the theorists you might choose for test answers or for the essay – and also the ones you find least attractive or accessible. I truly believe that in this course, more than in most others, missing lectures puts you at a real disadvantage.
2. **READ:** I don’t assume that you will have read the assigned material before you come to the relevant lectures. I hope to incite you to read it by means of the lectures. Accentuate the positive: don’t obsess about reading everything assigned – read what you can, and go deeply into what you can handle best.
3. **SPECIALIZE** ( see 1. Above). You do not have to study every theorists on the course in depth. You will always be given plenty of choice on tests and in essay topics. Go with your strength.
4. **PLAN:** study the schedule of lectures and assignments. Go over the formats for tests, which will always be posted at ‘Owl’ in advance. Know what choices you have, so that you can study effectively.
5. **RESPECT AND LEARN FROM YOUR TUTORS:** they are all graduate students, in some cases doctoral (Ph D) candidates. **They have all done something you all seek to do. They have graduated with a first-class average in Political Science.** They are (usually) more computer ‘savvy’ than I am. And (increasingly) younger than I am. Do not ‘game’ them. Work with them. I know and respect them all. They are your best resources as you seek success in this course. They are charged with assessing your tutorial participation. Make this easy by showing up and participating. I will be working with them all year to try to make the course as rewarding and comfortable for all of you.
6. **DON’T FORGET: I want you to succeed. If you succeed, I succeed.**

**Synopsis of Second Term: January to April 2013**

**We will construct our picture of the foundations of modern western political thought from the following materials:**

- 1) From the 17<sup>th</sup> century: “nature” / “contract” / “civil society” and politics: Thomas Hobbes’s *Leviathan* and John Locke’s *Second Treatise of Government*. Out of this century of religious and political upheaval in England came some of the foundational ideas of modern politics. The most famous English political theories took on a specific form: they became pseudo-historical stories of how ‘human nature’ determines the terms on which individuals can agree to a “covenant” or “compact” which creates government and turns them into citizens. Politics is about the origins, terms and maintenance of this ‘original contract’.
- 2) From the 18<sup>th</sup> century: self-interest, contract and commerce: Jean Jacques Rousseau, David Hume, Adam Smith and Jeremy Bentham. This is the period during which the basics of modern political theory truly emerge: individualism, the priority of commerce, and the emphasis on using law and justice to protect commerce and property all become fundamental in these authors.
- 3) From the 19<sup>th</sup> century: ideological warfare: capitalism and communism: John Stuart Mill and Karl Marx. Mill is one of the founders of the Liberal tradition. Marx is – Marx. This is the century of Darwin, and of ideology. The roots of 20<sup>th</sup> century progressivism and of ideological warfare are here.
- 4) From the 20<sup>th</sup> century: The death of Liberalism and the end of ideology? The end of modernity? Life in ‘the postmodern condition’? We will look at how, after the 1960s, libertarianism largely supplanted liberalism in the politics of the Anglo-American world. Liberal feminism, too, with its initially inspiring call for the inclusion of the marginalized half of humanity in the politics of democracy, has given way to a great extent to more radical versions of the call for empowerment and inclusion of women. **Martha Nussbaum** and **Susan Moller Okin** are liberal feminists. **Bell hooks** and **Iris M. Young** are post-liberal. Liberal feminism has not conquered the globe. “Trans-national feminism” is a problematic and internally conflicted movement. Did the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century - remember Y2K? – mark the end of the liberal ideological era? The death throes of modernity? The ‘death of God’? [Nietzsche]

**And what about the 21<sup>st</sup> century? ....**

The new varieties of theory emerging in the 21st century are so complex and so varied that they make the head of an ‘old school’ theorist like me, trained in the “history of modern political thought”, spin like a top. In the final weeks of the course we will have a look at such new phenomena as:

1. **Michel Foucault’s radical re-thinking of power and freedom: theory as “archaeology” and the “carceral society”**: the history which assures us that we live in the freest societies ever experienced by humans is, Foucault shows, fatally flawed. It excludes too many ‘voices’. It needs to be replaced by an “archaeology” of knowledge, which will show how theories and ‘histories’ (such as the ones taught in Faculties of Social Science at bourgeois Southwestern Ontario Universities!) are instruments of oppression. The society we live in is not libertarian but ‘carceral’ – an elaborate and often comfortable prison based on training, surveillance and the power of ‘normalization’ to induce unquestioning, even enthusiastic, conformity. Above all: modern political theory has completely failed to keep up with the rapidly changing forms and strategies of modern power.
2. **Jacques Derrida and ‘deconstruction’**: a radical reconsideration of what we mean by ‘democracy’, ‘identity’, ‘community’ and ‘justice’. Deconstruction, Derrida writes, IS democracy. It is also a basis for a new ‘take’ on freedom, justice and political ideals generally.
3. **Francois Lyotard and the “postmodern condition”**: a powerful expression of disillusionment with the ideological systems of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, both capitalist and communist, which anyway are spent forces. The ‘meta-narratives’ of modern political theory (e.g. ideologies) are to be distrusted. Faith in progress should give way to fear of entropy. “Complexification” and “problematization”, not simplification and solutions, are what we should expect from political talk generally and political theory in particular.

**That’s where we are today: ‘mainstream’ thinking is modern, and still extremely powerful. But frustration at the unresponsiveness of our political ‘systems’ to environmental issues, economic problems and the most urgent and basic ethical questions (e.g. genocide) is growing. Voter apathy and alienation are an issue in every ‘developed’ democratic system And new paradigms, new worlds, new languages are waiting in the wings. Remember the Chinese proverb, “May you live in interesting times.”? Well you do ...**

#### **Finally:**

**Assignments in second term: (these could be modified in the course of the next few months)**

1. **An essay, due in March (tentatively Thursday, March 14<sup>th</sup> 2012), probably focussing on an issue or idea rather than a specific theorist. There will be lots of choice of topics. Value: 20% of your grade**
2. **A final test (two hours long) in April, covering only the second term’s work. Value: 20% of your grade.**

“Where do my grades come from?” – a summary:

**Fall Term:**

*Tutorials:* attendance 5% and participation 10%: total 15%.

*Tests:*

first in-tutorial test 5%,

second in-tutorial test 10%,

Christmas test 15%

total 30%

**Total for Fall:**

**45%**

**Winter Term:**

Tutorials (as in Fall)

15%

Essay

20%

Final Test

20%

**Total for Winter:**

**55%**

**Grand total:**

**100%**

... and then it will all be over! It's quite a journey. Best taken one step at a time. Enjoy!

**Mission Statement:**

**What is this course about? It's about your freedom and your power.**

**Political theory is talking about talk.** This course gives you – and me - a unique opportunity to stand back from our ways of “talking politics” and see how sloppy, deceptive and often disastrous those ways are. Incomprehension and misunderstanding have killed untold millions of people over the centuries. **Talk is a weapon of mass destruction.** We all know that this is true when we look at Nazi Propaganda. What is disturbing is that we see elements of propaganda in political talk in just about every political system and situation. **Can we not do better than that?**

**We can – if we have the political will, the free space, and the theoretical training. What kind of training is that?** It is the training that is available in this course: training in the careful reading of complex texts, the careful discussion of important and complex issues, and the construction of careful arguments in writing. Do these skills have value? Just ask yourself: how powerful is a lawyer who can't make sense of legal documents, or a legislator who can't understand statutes, or an engineer who can't read blueprints? In every walk of life and in every kind of polity, people need powerful literacy skills to be powerful people. **Politics is communications. Great communicators (even Ronald Reagan!) rule. Politics 2237E is a communications course.** It looks at how ideas like obedience, authority, freedom, equality and justice have been packaged and communicated over the centuries of the ‘western’ political tradition.

**Politics 2237E does not study all of the major available traditions of political thought.** We don't look at the early thinkers of China, Mesopotamia (Iran and Iraq – Persia), India or Africa. The reason is political: the discipline of Political Science in Europe and North America was constructed inside the world view of European imperialism – in Canada's case, the world view of the British Empire. This view sees the British and American Empires as the culmination of world history. Looked at in this ‘ethnocentric’ way, everything in the past is just a prologue to modern, technologically dominated ‘advanced’ capitalism, globalization and ‘market democracy’, i.e. the dominant system ‘here and now’ – the ‘box’ inside which we think in 21<sup>st</sup> century Canada.

**Why should we bother doing this?** Some reasons you might consider:

**1. Serious political thought needs strong foundations - principles.**

In our political thinking and activities most of us rely more heavily on largely unexamined personal prejudices and stereotypes than we would like to admit. We need a more carefully considered and more durable basis for our political judgments and commitments than mere emotive responses to caricatures. But such a foundation is very hard to achieve. In the past, countless individuals have located such a basis in the supposed 'truths' of **philosophy, religious doctrine, science, or political ideology**. This course gives us a chance to examine critically these various kinds of grounds for political passions and political ideas alike, and to consider where we stand in relation to them.

**2. Careful, critical, independent thinking is our best protection against exploitation and manipulation.**

As citizens we accept being governed; when instead we are manipulated we feel like slaves. The citizen's thoughtful and **critical understanding of politics** is an essential defence against enslavement and/or marginalization. **It is hard to ignore or silence a strong, critical, thoughtful and independent voice.**

**3. We tend to think that the current way of viewing politics is the only way or the 'right' way, just because it is familiar and seems 'natural' to us.**

A study of varying ways of understanding politics which have dominated successive eras in the history of western civilization is a good way to gain a fresh and critical perspective on the particular understandings of politics which are most familiar to us here and now.

The study of historical contexts and political writings remote from us in their assumptions can help to liberate us from our own orthodoxies. It can help us to 'think outside the box' about our own political way of life. Our experience of present-day political life can thus be set in a broader and richer context, and seen as part of (even as a critique of) a tradition of thinking about political problems that is more than 2000 years old. Almost certainly, you will want to break with elements of that tradition: that does not change the fact that part of knowing where you want to **go** consists in knowing what you want to leave **behind**, and why. Liberation begins with understanding (consider this in relation, for example, to your parents).