POLITICAL IDEAS

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Office Hours:

Government 6
Dartmouth
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2A (Tues/Thurs 2:00–3:50)
X hour Wed 4:15-5:05

Course Description: Political theory consists in a tradition of thinking about the nature of political power, the conditions for its just and unjust use, the character of human flourishing and its relation to social and political life, the rights of individuals, minorities and majorities, and the nature and bounds of political community. Rather than tackling pressing political problems one at a time, political theorists seek systematic overall visions of just societies, or comprehensive diagnoses of the roots of oppression and domination in political and social orders. In this course we focus on writers who shaped the political imagination of the West and, increasingly, the world by developing the conscious and unconscious ideas about rights, power, justice, democracy, community and the like that we use to make sense of our political lives. Thinkers to be considered include: Plato, Aristotle, Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, Kant, Hegel, Marx, Mill, and Nietzsche. To cover a tradition of discourse that stretches nearly the entire length of Western history in a relatively short academic term without sacrificing depth and focus requires that certain choices be made about inclusion and exclusion. (In this respect at least, this course is like political life itself.) In this course we will focus on what is sometimes called the debate between the ancients and the moderns (paying scant attention to the important tradition of medieval political thought) on the nature of justice (mainly bypassing broader issues of ethics and political theology). In taking this approach, we will circle around the following issues. What is the nature of political power? What is the content of social justice? Is it good to be just? Does the best society encourage its citizens to flourish by educating them to the best life or punishing them for corrupt pursuits? Or does the well-ordered society concentrate instead on a narrower understanding of justice holding citizens to respecting one another's rights and entitlements while allowing each the freedom and equality to pursue their plural understandings of the good in life? Does practical reason allow us to comprehend the good and the just? Or do we construct them according to our own standards? Does democracy threaten basic individual rights? Does it require social equality? Is it more important to respect the individual or the community when the interests of the two conflict? Is a market economy required by or incompatible with democracy? Is the whole discourse of justice imposed by some on others as a way to consolidate their power?

Learning objectives:

- Attain a systematic introduction to some of the most profound and illuminating ideas from the history of Western political and philosophical thought. We will examine the strengths and weaknesses of different ways of conceiving central political concepts like justice, freedom, equality, reason and power. We will then be in a position to trace how different conceptions of these key ideas, in turn, shape institutions and practices as they enter the law, culture and politics of different societies through founding documents, particular events, and persons' interpretations of their own political activity. Finally, the systems of thought and visions of politics contained in these texts furnish analytic lenses

from which to make sense and meaning out of contemporary and historical political events. Seriously studying these texts thus often leads to deeper insights into the presence of the past in our current politics, and a capacity to understand latent potentials for justice or to detect hidden relations of power that operate as the subtexts to ordinary politics.

- Gain a facility with textual hermeneutics at two distinct levels: interpretation of texts that remain relevant in part because they contain complex, multifaceted and sometimes competing strands of thought and meaning expressed through metaphors and allegories that can be read at different levels of meaning, ironic or unexpected claims, etc.; and analysis of the arguments these texts make, addressed not only to their contemporaries but also to their sometimes historically distant predecessors or to a posterity they hope to call into being, and centered on the most fundamental questions of how to organize and understand the potentials contained in human social and political life. Even if you resist the pull of political philosophy in your future studies, the facility with textual interpretation gained by wresting with these especially dense and complicated texts leaves one well placed to analyze other texts, including those of everyday life.

- Engage in political argumentation in the process of unpacking these texts, debating their meanings and charting their implications. This kind of political argument is more focused and substantive than the ad hoc and ad hominem posturing that animates political campaigning and legislative battles in much of the contemporary world. Political philosophy holds out for a more elevated form of deliberation and argument, one that pulls back from these immediate issues, contests for power, and the issues of strategy, and focuses instead on deeper issues of justice, power, and reason, aiming for lasting clarity and insight. Making sense of these texts requires inserting oneself in this discourse, sympathetically examining the insights as well as the blind-spots of different systems of political thought, taking a stance on their relative merits, and comparing different ways of conceptualizing critical political ideas. These generally valuable deliberative and analytic capacities may be especially well developed by debating these texts.

Requirements, Grades and Related Policies: There are four main requirements: a sixty minute in class exam covering material from the first half of the class; a seven page interpretive essay focused on one author or text from the second half of class; a cumulative final exam; and participation in class discussion informed by an engaged reading of the text under discussion. Please note that the requirement of informed participation counts for nearly a quarter of your grade. There will be opportunities to participate in discussion in every class session.

Grading: Students' overall grades will be determined as follows:

1. Sixty-minute midterm-exam (covers weeks 1-3): 20%

2. Seven-page paper (covers weeks 4-8): 30%

3. Final exam (cumulative): 30%

4. Informed class participation (on a regular basis in class): 20%

Deadlines and Extensions: General deadlines are indicated on this syllabus; precise deadlines will be announced in class. Extensions will only be granted in the case of a valid medical excuse or a genuine emergency. In the absence of an extension, late assignments will be penalized one third of a grade per day late.

Honor Policy: Students are expected to understand and follow the Academic Honor Principle of Dartmouth College in pursuing studies for this course.

Special Needs: Students with any disabilities requiring special arrangements are encouraged to see the instructor within the first week of course, in order to arrange appropriate accommodation.

Texts: Please use the specific edition listed below, available through Wheelock Books and also on line often for a considerable savings through web-sites that link independent bookstores (e.g. Advanced Book Exchange [<www.abe.com>], Fetch Book [<www.fetchbook.info>], and Amazon's used book service [<www.amazon.com>]).

Classics of Moral and Political Theory, ed., Michael L. Morgan, fifth edition, (Hackett, 2011).

Prize: The Andrew Warden Edson Memorial Prize of $100 may be awarded to one or two students who, in the judgment of the instructor, perform superlatively well in the course. This prize derives from the gift of Mrs. Jean Slater Edson in memory of her husband, who was a Dartmouth graduate in the Class of 1925.

Weekly Reading and Course Work Assignments:

Wk.1: PLATO: Socrates' Question(ing) and Thrasymachus' Blush
(June 20)

Plato, Republic, Bks I-II

Wk. 2: PLATO: Justice in the City and the Soul
(June 24)

Plato, Republic, Bks III-X

Wk. 3: ARISTOTLE: The Nature of the Political Life
(July 1)

Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics, Book X, Section 9
Aristotle, Politics, Bk I, Bk II.1-5 & 9-12, Bks III-VII, VIII.1-3

Wk. 4: CONTEST OVER POLITICAL THEOLOGY: Augustine, Machiavelli, Hobbes
(July 8—course will meet for x hour)

Augustine, City of God, Bk XIX

Machiavelli, The Prince (entire)

Hobbes, Leviathan, Dedication and Introduction, Chs. 1-16

Wk 5: HOBBES and LOCKE: Contesting the Social Contract
(July 15—course will meet for x hour)

Hobbes, Leviathan, Chs. 17-19, 21, 24, 30 and Review and Conclusion.

John Locke, Two Treatises of Government: First Treatise, 'Preface,' & paragraph 106; Second Treatise, Chs.I-VII, VIII (paragraphs 95-100; 119-122), IX-XIV, XVIII, XIX (paragraphs 211, 223-233).

* Mid-term Exam

Wk 6: ROUSSEAU: Natural Inequality and Political Equality
(July 22)

Jean Jacques Rousseau, A Discourse on the Origin of Inequality (entire)

Jean Jacques Rousseau, On The Social Contract, Books I (entire)

Wk 7: ROUSSEAU and KANT: Completing the Logic of the Social Contract
(July 29)

Jean Jacques Rousseau, On The Social Contract, Books II (entire), Book III, Chs. 1-2, 4, 10-18, Book IV, Chs. 1-2, 7-8.

Immanuel Kant, "An answer to the question: What is enlightenment?" (on e-reserve)
Immanuel Kant, "Theory and Practice" (on e-reserve)
Immanuel Kant, "Toward Perpetual Peace"

Wk 8: HEGEL and MARX: Alienation and Autonomy
(August 5)

GWF Hegel, "Master-Slave Dialectic" (on e-reserve)

Karl Marx, "Alienated Labor"
Karl Marx, "The Communist Manifesto"
Karl Marx, "Critique of the Gotha Program"

* Interpretive Essay Due

Wk 9: MILL and NIETZSCHE: Liberal Equality and Post-Modernity
(August 12)

JS Mill, On Liberty
JS Mill, On The Subjection of Women

Frederick Nietzsche, On The Genealogy of Morals, First Treatise

Wk 10: NIETZSCHE: Casting a Backward Glance at the Grand Tradition
(August 19)

Frederick Nietzsche, On The Genealogy of Morals, Second and Third Treatises

*Final Exam