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## **POLS 3710: Ancient and Medieval Political Thought**

### **Course Description**

For better or for worse, this is not a course designed to give you a taste of what “people thought back then” (or at least some of them), before everybody came to believe what we now know to be true. On the contrary, the starting assumption of this course is there are some fundamental political questions that we need to ask of ourselves now, and that engaging with these particular thinkers can help us to do so. How do we know if our political system is just? What should a just state be expected to do – what should its purpose be, and why? Does it matter, for achieving justice, if our citizens are good people? What is involved in being a good person?

If the thinkers that we will read this term can help – and they can – it is not because they offer us easy answers. No. They can help because they can give us ways to say and to think things that the dominant ideas of our time do not give us ready ways to say and think. Especially, they make it easier to think radically – i.e., deeply and with an eye to the whole – and critically – i.e., to assess what is, in light of what ought to be.

### **Expectations and Policies**

This is a course in political philosophy, which means that we will be talking about *ideas*, rather than examining empirical circumstances as one might expect to do in an applied course on comparative, international or American politics. Please be sure that you understand this, so that you won't be surprised by the abstract nature of the course material.

The bottom line requirement is that you must do difficult reading very, very carefully (more than once, in most cases), and then come to class prepared to talk about it with others, in order to understand and evaluate it. ***If, for whatever reason, you are not in a position to take on a high level of intellectual responsibility and commitment, you should think hard about whether or not you will be able to meet this expectation;*** this may not be the course for you to take this semester. I will not spoon-feed you information. One of the benefits of political theory courses is that they require you to track complex lines of argument for yourself. Make sure that you are aware that you having to make your way through difficult material is an integral part of the course.

Attendance is mandatory unless you are sick or face an emergency situation. Please do not come to class sick. Cell phones, laptops and other electronic devices must be turned off during class. In keeping with the 5 principles of Jesuit education at SLU, I take it that comportment in the classroom will be good-natured, considerate and intellectually disciplined. I also expect that you will come to class on time.

## Learning Outcomes

In order to pass POLS 3710, you will have to have acquired a basic grasp of the course material, such that you can (a) articulate the positions of the two thinkers upon whom we will focus; (b) identify the strengths and weaknesses of the positions, each from the perspective of the other; (c) write an analytic paper in which you defend an abstract thesis pertaining to the content of the course.

Demonstrated ability to do these things will indicate that you have gained an introductory-level understanding of foundational positions in the history of Western political philosophy, and that you are better equipped to assess our own political situation critically than you might otherwise have been.

## Access to me

The easiest way to contact me is through e-mail, which I check regularly. In most cases I will be able to get back to you within a few hours; if you haven't heard back within 12 hrs, send me another e-mail. I will retrieve phone messages when I am in my office, but I will not be on campus every day; e-mail is much more reliable. I'm also delighted to talk to you in person, during office hours.

## Assignments and Grade Breakdown

Participation – 30%; will include frequent quizzes on the reading.

Mid-term - 20%

Final exam – 30%

Paper – 20%

“Benchmark” assignment – ungraded, but you cannot pass the class if you don't do it.

Your grade will be based on your performance on the assignments listed above. There is no extra credit available for the completion of additional work. Make-up exams will be offered only under the most extraordinary of circumstances. I give letter grades, corresponding to qualitative assessment criteria. I do not grade on a distributional curve; your grade is based solely on the quality of your own performance. I am a very transparent grader, and I am happy to talk with you about how to do your best in the course and to develop intellectually. The College of Arts and Sciences' common grading scheme is as follows, though it does not apply in courses in which number grades are not assigned: A=93-100; A-=90-92; B+=87-89; B=83-86; B-=80-82; C+=77-79; C=73-76; C-=70-72; D=60-70;F=below 60.

## Note

In this class, final grades designate the following:

**A-range** = Excellent at political philosophy;

**B+** = Very good at political philosophy;

**B** = Good, solid work in political philosophy;

**B-** = Acceptable degree of competence in political philosophy;

**C-range** = Weak in the area of political philosophy;

**D-range** = Poor in the area of political philosophy.

If you receive a split grade on an assignment (B/B+, for example), it means that a case could have been made for either grade, and that I want to be able to take all of your grades into consideration when I assign the final grade for the course.

I don't accept late papers, unless you have contacted me ahead of time or it is an emergency.

Around mid-semester, you will be required to have a short meeting with me in my office, to check in on your progress in the course and to give you feedback on your benchmark paper.

## **Additional University Information**

### **Academic Integrity Syllabus Statement**

*Academic integrity is honest, truthful and responsible conduct in all academic endeavors.* The mission of Saint Louis University is "the pursuit of truth for the greater glory of God and for the service of humanity." Accordingly, all acts of falsehood demean and compromise the corporate endeavors of teaching, research, health care, and community service via which SLU embodies its mission. The University strives to prepare students for lives of personal and professional integrity, and therefore regards all breaches of academic integrity as matters of serious concern.

The governing University-level Academic Integrity Policy was adopted in Spring 2015, and can be accessed on the Provost's Office website at:

[http://www.slu.edu/Documents/provost/academic\\_affairs/University-wide%20Academic%20Integrity%20Policy%20FINAL%20%206-26-15.pdf](http://www.slu.edu/Documents/provost/academic_affairs/University-wide%20Academic%20Integrity%20Policy%20FINAL%20%206-26-15.pdf).

Additionally, each SLU College, School, and Center has adopted its own academic integrity policies, available on their respective websites. All SLU students are expected to know and abide by these policies, which detail definitions of violations, processes for reporting violations, sanctions, and appeals. Please direct questions about any facet of academic integrity to your faculty, the chair of the department of your academic program, or the Dean/Director of the College, School or Center in which your program is housed.

### **Title IX Syllabus Statement**

Saint Louis University and its faculty are committed to supporting our students and seeking an environment that is free of bias, discrimination, and harassment. If you have encountered any form of sexual misconduct (e.g. sexual assault, sexual harassment, stalking, domestic or dating violence), we encourage you to report this to the University. If you speak with a faculty member about an incident of misconduct, that faculty member must notify SLU's Title IX coordinator, Anna R. Kratky (DuBourg Hall, room 36; [akratky@slu.edu](mailto:akratky@slu.edu); 314-977-3886) and share the basic fact of your experience with her. The Title IX coordinator will then be available to assist you in understanding all of your options and in connecting you with all possible resources on and off campus.

If you wish to speak with a confidential source, you may contact the counselors at the University Counseling Center at 314-977-TALK. To view SLU's sexual misconduct policy and for resources, please visit the following web address: <http://www.slu.edu/general-counsel-home/office-of-institutional-equity-and-diversity/sexual-misconduct-policy> [www.slu.edu/here4you](http://www.slu.edu/here4you) .

### **Student Success Center Syllabus Statement:**

In recognition that people learn in a variety of ways and that learning is influenced by multiple factors (e.g., prior experience, study skills, learning disability), resources to support student success are available on campus. The Student Success Center, a one-stop shop, which assists students with academic and

career related services, is located in the Busch Student Center (Suite, 331) and the School of Nursing (Suite, 114). Students who think they might benefit from these resources can find out more about:

- Course-level support (e.g., faculty member, departmental resources, etc.) by asking your course instructor.
- University-level support (e.g., tutoring services, university writing services, disability services, academic coaching, career services, and/or facets of curriculum planning) by visiting the Student Success Center or by going to [www.slu.edu/success](http://www.slu.edu/success).

### **Disability Services Academic Accommodations Syllabus Statement**

Students with a documented disability who wish to request academic accommodations are encouraged to contact Disability Services to discuss accommodation requests and eligibility requirements. Please contact Disability Services, located within the Student Success Center, at [Disability\\_services@slu.edu](mailto:Disability_services@slu.edu) or [314.977.3484](tel:314.977.3484) to schedule an appointment. Confidentiality will be observed in all inquiries. Once approved, information about academic accommodations will be shared with course instructors via email from Disability Services and viewed within Banner via the instructor's course roster.

### **Books**

The following books are or will be available at the bookstore:

Plato, *Republic* (Bloom translation)

Recommended: *The Blackwell Guide to Plato's Republic* (ed., Santas)

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (Ostwald translation)

Aristotle, *Politics* (Oxford Classics edition)

## Approximated Reading Schedule

### Week 1

Jan 16 – Introduction to the course  
Jan 18 – Introductory lecture

Plato – On the Possibility that Our Whole Society is Unhealthy and Unjust

### Week 2

Jan. 23 – Is it Better to be Good?  
*Republic*, Book 1  
Jan. 25 – Might Makes Right  
No new reading

### Week 3

Jan. 30 – “Feverish” Desires and the “Healthy” Pretend City  
*Republic*, Book 2  
Feb. 1 – Discussion continued, no new reading

### Week 4

Feb. 6 – Character Formation, Morality Tales and the Imaginary  
*Republic*, Book 3; ch 2 in Santas, recommended  
Feb. 8 – The Well-Ordered Whole: Self and Society  
*Republic*, Book 4

### Week 5

Feb. 13 – The Achievement of Harmony  
Chapters 8 and 9 in Santas, recommended  
Feb. 15 – The Ontology and Epistemology of Goodness,  
*Republic*, Books 5-7

### Week 6

Feb. 20 – Insight, Radical Action, Goodness  
Chapter 6 in Santas, recommended; re-read Book 7  
Feb. 22 – Politics?  
Chapter 10 in Santas, recommended; re-read Book 6

### Week 7

Feb. 27 – The Problem of Limitless, Purposeless Choice  
*Republic*, Book 8  
March 1 – What Makes for Strength?  
*Republic*, Book 9

### Week 8

March 6 – Review  
March 8 – Mid-term

\*SPRING BREAK\*

Aristotle – What Does It Take to Flourish?

Week 9

March 20 – Form, Activity & Virtue: Being an Excellent Version of the Kind of Thing That One Is - Introductory lecture

March 22 – Flourishing as a Human Being  
*Nicomachean Ethics*, Book 1

Week 10

March 27 – Wanting to do the Right Thing...  
*NE*, Books 2 and 7

March 29 – No class

Week 11

March 29 – ... and Knowing What That Would Be  
*NE*, Book 6

March 31 – The Practice of Being an Excellent Person (1) – The Character Friendship  
*NE*, Books 8 and 9

Week 12

April 5 – The Practice of Being an Excellent Person (2) – The Polis  
*NE*, Book 10, *Politics*, Book 1

April 7 – Different Political Associations, Different Purposes  
*Politics*, Book 3

Week 13

April 12 – Citizenship and Excellence in the Proper Polis  
*Politics*, Book 7; *NE* Book 5;

April 14 – The Problem of Rule by the *Demos* – The Poor are the Majority  
*Politics*, Books 4-6

Aquinas – Natural Moral Law

Weeks 14 – 15

April 19, 21, 26, 28 – *Summa Theologica*, selections

Note: I may assign additional articles as needed. These will be scanned and sent to you.