

# POLITICAL THEORY I

## History of Political Thought I: from Plato to Rousseau

DEGREE: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

COURSE YEAR: 1<sup>st</sup>

1<sup>o</sup> SEMESTER  2<sup>o</sup> SEMESTER

CATEGORY:  BASIC

COMPULSORY

OPTIONAL

NO. OF CREDITS (ECTS): 6 LANGUAGE:

ENGLISH

TUTORIALS:

FORMAT: LECTURE & SEMINAR

PREREQUISITES: NONE

---

### 1. SUBJECT DESCRIPTION

This survey class aims to provide students with an introduction to the important themes of Western political thought in both theory and practice and from the Ancient Greeks through to the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Basic concepts and ideas that are foundational to the development of a modern political vocabulary will be explored through primary texts and the class will integrate thematic issues, such as the meaning of the state, the right to property, the function of justice and idea of participation, with the historical context in which those ideas were expressed and practiced.

The first half of the class looks at the Greek foundations of modern political theory, centered around the thought of Plato and Aristotle and concludes with an examination of how Greek political ideas helped shape myths of Roman Republicanism. The second half examines the core ideas in medieval and early modern political thought, starting with medieval conceptions of politics and then moving to Machiavelli, Hobbes and Locke. We end with a review of Rousseau's Social Contract, which portended, in its political declarations, the coming age of Revolutions.

### 2. OBJECTIVES AND SKILLS

#### 2.1 OBJECTIVES

This course is designed to introduce you to and familiarise you with fundamental primary texts that can be both difficult and abstruse to read and understand. The class will also spur you to learn how to engage these ideas critically and energetically with your peers. If you do not read the texts, or read them but do not make the effort to understand them, you will not be able to accomplish either of these goals and you will jeopardise your overall class performance. You are therefore encouraged to make sure you have enough time to complete all the readings at whatever pace is required to ensure you understand as best as you can the author's ideas. At a basic level, this means things like looking up words you do not understand, since acquiring

facility with this vocabulary is a fundamental part of your education. At a deeper level, it means trying to work through ideas that may seem hard to understand.

Even if you are still left with questions about the material that we will review – and that is entirely reasonable – the effort to work through these ideas for yourself first will be invaluable in pushing your own conceptual limits.

In order to help you structure your reading habits, you must submit before each seminar marked with an asterisk (\*) a 300 word reading response that engages one or more questions from the text. I will distribute these questions beforehand. Students who do not submit these reading responses will receive an automatic null grade, not only for that response, but also for the participation component of that class.

Second, the class is designed to help you learn how to formulate a good argument, structure your thoughts well and write a clear, persuasive and insightful essay. You have two essays due over the course of the semester, both of which will be drawn from the readings covered in class. Each essay must be between 1000 and 1500 words and will be judged based on the criteria above. You may, if you wish, send me beforehand an outline of your paper, or your opening paragraph for my review and feedback. However, you must submit this feedback no later than one week before the due date. You may also consult with me during my office hours. Note that late assignments will not be accepted. It also goes without saying that plagiarism is unacceptable. Any student caught plagiarising material will automatically fail the class – not the assignment, the class. So don't plagiarise.

Generally, the class will be divided into two parts. The first will consist of a lecture, in which I will outline or elaborate upon the basic ideas of that week's theme. Everything discussed in the lecture is material you will need to know for your final exam. The second part will engage the reading, asking specific and critical questions of the text and inviting you to reflect upon the author's point. The way you engage the text – and each other – is fundamental and will form the basis for your participation grade.

Finally, attendance is obviously critical for the class. Do not come late, do not come unprepared, do not come feeling the effects of the night before. University policy dictates that if you miss more than 30% of the class you will receive an automatic fail. Since the final exam is the last double session of the class, this means in practical terms that if you miss more than four seminars you cannot pass the class. Beyond university policy, missing class will also sorely diminish your ability to follow and engage the course material and will weigh down your participation score. So come to class.

In sum, the learning objectives are:

- 1) To provide you with basic concepts central to political theory and become acquainted with foundational texts of political thought.
- 2) To place ideas and ideologies in their historical context.
- 3) To articulate and observe how ideas evolve and develop over time.
- 4) To learn how to engage these ideas in an informed and critical manner.

## **2.2 OUTCOMES**

- 1) Use of and sensitivity towards primary texts.
- 2) The analysis and critical assessment of arguments and theories.
- 3) Develop an understanding of historical perspective.
- 4) The ability to formulate and express a persuasive argument or position in written work.
- 5) The ability to intervene effectively in discussion.

### 3. CONTENT

*Seminars marked with an asterisk (\*) require a core concept statement.*

#### SEMINAR 1 THE FOUNDATIONS OF POLITICS: ANCIENT GREECE

##### Description

In this class, we will gain an overview of the basic themes of the class and ask what we mean when we talk about political philosophy. Second, we will consider the history and culture of Ancient Greece, the birthplace of political thought. Why did Greece give rise to the core theories that informed the next two millennia of political thinking?

#### SEMINAR 2 THE SOCRATIC CITIZEN\*

##### Description

We look at the concept of citizenship, justice, law and freedom of expression through Plato's celebrated text containing Socrates' defense against charges of impiety and moral corruption in Athens.

#### SEMINAR 3 THE REPUBLIC

##### Description

An introduction to the Republic, including its intent, meaning and legacy, and an examination of several core themes found in the first three books of the work.

#### SEMINAR 4 THE PHILOSOPHER KING\*

##### Description

Who should rule over a society, what are the ideals of government and what purpose does it serve? We continue with Plato's famous work, *The Republic* and ask if it represents a Utopia.

#### SEMINARS 5 & 6 ARISTOTLE. THE POLITICS\*

##### Description

Aristotle's immensely influential text on politics serves as a philosophical blueprint for understanding political society. In these sessions, we explore Aristotle's world and philosophical system, to understand how he saw the political nature of man, and what this means for the way society is ordered and how it develops.

## SEMINAR 7 THE ROMAN IMPERIUM

### Description

What happened to Greek political ideas after Greek culture was eclipsed by Roman power? We look at political ideas in the Roman world in several ways. First, how did they synthesize the idealism of Greek political thinking? And second, how was Roman government perceived by later writers (especially in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century) and what does this tell us about 19<sup>th</sup> century understandings of the Greco-Roman political culture and the agenda these reveal.

## ESSAY 1 DUE

## SEMINAR 8 THE MEDIEVAL POLITICAL MIND

### Description

Medieval thinkers understood, as a matter of course, that all human endeavour, including politics, was subordinated to divine will. Yet political thought remained a vigorous field of enquiry, and medieval thinkers spent a great deal of effort to find a framework to explain the relationship between temporal power and the spiritual mandate of Christianity. We will look at some of the key ideas and consider one of the core medieval political texts that exerted a profound influence in shaping conceptions of political power.

## SEMINAR 9 MACHIAVELLI AND A NEW POLITICAL ORDER\*

### Description

Machiavelli's most celebrated text, *the Prince*, advocated a new way of understanding political authority and the exercise of political power. What was his vision of political society and what was its influence?

## SEMINARS 10 & 11 HOBBES, THE SOVEREIGN STATE & THE SOCIAL CONTRACT\*

### Description

Thomas Hobbes' *Leviathan*, written in the shadow of the English civil war, articulated both a reactionary and revolutionary vision of the state, political authority, and the citizen. In these two sessions we will consider the context, content and influence of his famous work *Leviathan*.

## SEMINAR 12 & 13 LOCKE AND THE RIGHTS OF THE CITIZEN\*

### Description

Locke's famous treatises on government established a basis for understanding individual rights and the obligations of the state that persist to the present day. We will examine what Locke saw as the basis for state authority and how he redefined the social contract to make a compelling and nuanced case for the limits of that authority.

## Reading

### **ESSAY 2 DUE**

#### SEMINAR 14 ROUSSEAU ON THE EVE OF THE FRENCH REVOLUTION\*

##### Description

With the Enlightenment, European thinkers undertook a profound, in some cases, shocking reworking of first political principles. Among the most radical was Jean Jacques Rousseau, whose work the *Social Contract*, envisioned a radical reordering of political authority. In our last class, we will look at his ideas, including the general will, the social contract and the meaning of sovereignty.

#### SEMINAR 15 FINAL EXAM

### **4. METHODOLOGY AND ECTS WEIGHTING**

The course consists of a blend of discussion and lecture, based on material presented in class as well as engagement with the assignments.

Interactivity and engagement is critical to the learning process and students will be encouraged to share their thoughts and ideas about the core themes of the class.

Course material of 6 credits ECTS (6 x 25 h/credit = 150 h. of course work/student)						
Activities	Sessions	Classroom hours	Factor	Individual Study	Total Hours	ECTS
Theoretical Classes	30	45	1,5	93,5	138,5	5,54
Practical Classes	0	0	1,5	0	0	0
Seminars		0	0	0	0	0
Miscellaneous Activities		0	0	0	0	0
Group Tutorials		0	0	0	0	0
Individual Tutorials		8,5	0	0	8,5	0,3
Exams		3,0	0	0	3,0	0,16
<b>Total</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>56,5</b>		<b>101,25</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>6</b>

## 5. EVALUATION SYSTEM

### 5.1. GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

Students must fulfill the following requirements as part of the course:

- 1) Complete over the course of the semester all the required written assignments (see below) and write the final exam.
- 2) Engage and be prepared to discuss in class the core ideas and readings of the course. This requires that students complete all reading ahead of class and be attentive to the vocabulary, critical concepts and other ideas that are contained in all the course material.

### 5.2. EVALUATION AND WEIGHTING CRITERIA

□ The breakdown of the final grade is as follows.

Short essays	30%
Final exam	30%
Core Concepts	30%
Participation	10%

#### Essays

You are required to write two short essays over the course of the semester. Instructions and topics assignments will be provided after the course has commenced.

#### Core Concepts

You are required to provide a statement of core concepts regarding each reading in sessions marked in the syllabus bibliography with an asterisk (\*) based on questions I will distribute beforehand. Statements are due before the start of each class.

### 5.3. EXAMINATION POLICY

- 1) Students have up to 4 examination sessions per course over two consecutive academic years.
- 2) IE University has a mandatory Class Attendance Policy that calls for students to attend a minimum of 70% of class sessions in a course. An absence, for any reason, counts towards the maximum of 30% allowed absences. Failure to comply with any of these requirements will result in students being ineligible to sit for the exam in both the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> examination sessions. These students will be required to sit for the exam in the 3<sup>rd</sup> session.
- 3) Grading for make-up exams will be subject to the following rules:
  - ✓ Students who failed the course in the first round of exams will be eligible to re-sit in the 2<sup>nd</sup> examination session. *Warning:* students who do not comply with the attendance policy requirements will be required to sit for the exam in the 3<sup>rd</sup> examination session.
  - ✓ The highest grade that a student may earn in the 2<sup>nd</sup> examination session is 8.

### 5.4. EXTRAORDINARY EVALUATION

In the event that you do not satisfy the requirements to pass the class, you will have the option to take an extraordinary supplemental exam.

This extraordinary exam may be complemented and/or replaced by additional supplemental assignments as part of your overall evaluation.

Dispensation for the inclusion of additional evaluation criteria in the event of an unsatisfactory grade will be made solely at the discretion of your professor. In accordance with university policy, extraordinary exams must without exception be taken in Segovia during the extraordinary exam period.