

**POLI 2060: Introduction to Political Theory**  
**M W F 10:30 – 11:20**  
**Coates Hall: 130**  
**Fall 2021**

**Instructor:** Thomas Cloud  
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**Office Hours:** Monday and Friday 11:30 – 12:30, and by appointment.

**Introduction:**

Welcome to Intro to Political Theory. I am very excited to teach you. I was once told by a professor that he envied my reading Aristotle for the first time. I understand now why he said that. I hope you will understand by the end of the semester. There are many things as beautiful as sunsets just waiting to be seen.

This course could just as easily be called “Intro to Critical Reading.” Critical reading is a skill like any other. It requires dedication and good practice. I say “good” practice because you need to practice the right way in order to master it. I will coach you in this. Practicing right is important. Like any other skill, it will be awkward or difficult in the beginning. Do not let that discourage you. Whenever you hear someone say something is “second nature” to them, remember that it is “second” nature and that they were not born with that skill. At the end of the semester, you will have a new skill you can continue to hone and to use for the rest of your life.

Specific to our course, it is important to know that authors at the highest level choose every word with utmost care. Very important information can be “hidden” in plain sight or buried in a footnote. Most of the authors we will read lived before free speech was a normal legal protection and had to fear being punished for what they wrote. Even those who wrote when free speech became common still wrote with care (and still write with care today).

**Purpose:**

The purpose of this course is to explore what politics is in order to gain more clarity on what politics should aim at. Great minds have wrestled with these questions for thousands of years. It is no wonder why. Even if we struggle to answer these questions we have to act as if we have answers. How we answer these two questions, in our words and our actions, touches every aspect of our own lives and the lives of all who come after us.

Throughout the semester we will meet some fascinating, subtle, and sometimes troubling figures each with their own explanations of what politics is and the way of life it demands. Often these figures will disagree with each other (and you with them!). With every disagreement ask “Why?” because your answer matters.

### **Course requirements:**

- Class participation in class discussion [10%]
- Reading Reflections and Questions [10%]
- Quizzes [20%]
- Two in-class midterms. (October 2, November 6) [40%]
- Final [20%]

### **Class Participation:**

Learning is best when done in community. My hope and goal is to open the world of political theory for your exploration. On the way you will find that part of the joy of exploring is sharing your discoveries and frustrations with your classmates. Perhaps you may discover a shared interest. Perhaps you will disagree and challenge each other's interpretation. Both will help you learn. Politics deals with the greatest moral matters. Every single one of us finds it interesting on some level and has something to say on it.

### **Reading Reflections and Questions:**

Starting with the second day of class (August 25) students are expected to submit questions and reflections on the day's reading prior to every class. I grade questions on a point scale of 0 to 3. Reading reflections are a way for me to keep track of how students are reading a text. They also create a more interesting course and allow every student to have his or her say. I do not need more than a paragraph. Please give the page numbers for any citations or quotes.

These reading reflections are crucial to your success. They are designed to help build your learning scaffold upon which you can hang your knowledge. A musician must practice playing music. A critical reader must practice critical reading.

I will provide some sample reading reflections on Moodle to help clarify my expectations. At the outset though, I want to see effort. Effort is more important than being "right" in your reflections. If I think a student did not make enough effort or clearly did not read the assignment the student will not earn full credit.

The reading reflections and questions are found on Moodle.

### **Quizzes with Cumulative Questions:**

Quizzes start the first week of class and are noted in the calendar. Starting with the second quiz students may expect to see (but may not necessarily get) some questions from previous quizzes. For example, quiz 4 will have new questions and

could have questions from quizzes 1 through 3.

This is based on cognitive research out of Washington University St. Louis<sup>1</sup> but is well supported by other historical accounts, like learning to drive. Students (and anyone else for that matter) often confuse recognition with recall. When we re-read something multiple times, we usually are only recognizing a page instead of recalling it. Recall takes effort and feels uncomfortable but is necessary to truly learn something. Students may paradoxically feel they are retaining less while their tests show they are retaining more.

All that is to say, cumulative quizzes are one tool (among others) designed to prevent the dreaded “but I studied for TWELVE hours” phrase professors sometimes hear after the test. Usually, most of those twelve hours are spent re-recognizing something instead of recalling it. Practicing recall throughout the semester will provide a continuous firming up of foundations so that come test time students can study with greater efficiency and take well-earned and needed breaks to relax and recover.

### **Policy on laptops, iPad, smartphone, etc.:**

Given the odd circumstances of this semester, I will allow electronic devices. These devices must be used for classroom purposes, however. You will use your phones or laptops to take the weekly quizzes.

If you find you have trouble paying attention, I encourage you to place any electronic devices in your bag until needed for a quiz or for flashcards. The trouble with electronic devices is that they are well designed to keep our attention. Dividing our attention between a phone and class is a very hard thing.

### **Required Paper Notebook:**

**A notebook for notetaking is required.** Notes are not required but strongly urged. We will use the notebooks for other in class activities aside from notetaking. I frequently ask the class to take a minute to organize their thoughts by writing them down. This helps reduce learning anxiety.

### **Required Flashcards:**

I will set aside one to two minutes each class for writing a flashcard. We will not use these flashcards in class. These are for your personal use. You must write a flashcard each class. This is one area where I prefer using a smartphone app. My preferred app is Anki.

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<sup>1</sup> One of the researchers, Pooja Agarwal, maintains a website named after the book she co-wrote with Patrice Bain. [Powerful Teaching: Unleash the Science of Learning](#)

Flashcards are one of the greatest learning tools out there. Apps like Anki actually improve upon them. There are a few things to remember about flashcards.

1. It is better to have many short flashcards than a handful of long ones.
2. If you do not remember what is on the back of a flashcard, always struggle a bit to remember before flipping it over. This is akin to doing a pushup. It is a bit like resistance training for your brain. It feels uncomfortable but will improve your memory. This where you move from recognizing information to recalling it.
3. Practice your flashcards every day. This is the advantage of a flashcard app. While you are waiting in line for coffee, you can run through a few flashcards.

I too will make a flashcard. I am also reading new books I wish to master.

### **Midterms:**

I will give two take home midterms (October 4 and November 8). As we get closer, I will decide on the exact format of both, but students can expect an essay portion.

### **Final:**

The final will be a take home final. Students will write an essay between 1400 and 1500 words in length. **The essays will be due on Saturday, December 11th at 9:30 am.** As this is the date set by the registrar it is also the latest possible date the essays can be turned in. The instructor will send out prompts to the students the Monday following Thanksgiving break. Students will receive further guidance at that time about the essays.

### **Grading scale:**

A+ (98%-100%), A (93%-97%), A- (90%-92%)

B+ (88%-90%), B (83%-87%), B- (80%-82%)

C+ (78%-80%), C (73%-77%), C- (70%-72%)

D+ (68%-70%), D (63%-67%), D- (60%-62%)

F (below 60%)

### **University Policies:**

[Attendance](#), [Integrity](#), and [Access](#)

University education is a great privilege, offered to all with the ability and the willingness to learn, without obstacles based on race, sex, or other aspects of personal identity. Students would be foolish to squander their opportunity by unexcused absence from class or by academic dishonesty. Please consult linked LSU policies.

I will emphasize that plagiarism is a serious violation of academic integrity and will not be tolerated. Students should familiarize themselves LSU's plagiarism policies.

### **University Statement on Integrated Learning:**

Integrated learning allows students to make simple connections among ideas and experiences and across disciplines and perspectives. The LSU Integrative Learning Core (ILC) curriculum is designed to develop student abilities to transfer their learning to new situations, and demonstrate a sense of self as a learner. A fundamental goal of the ILC is to foster students' practical and intellectual capacities associated with integrative learning in preparation for high competence and functionality in their post-baccalaureate careers. This course fulfills the BOR Area of *Social/Behavioral Sciences* and provides students experience with the ILC proficiency of *Inquiry and Analysis*.

### **Resources for Students:**

Your health and safety are LSU's top priority. If you are feeling ill or overwhelmed with anxiety, please contact the [LSU Student Health Center](#) for medical advice and mental health support.

I also recommend checking out LSU's Center for Academic success. They can provide more one on one coaching for you. This is a great resource. I particularly recommend using the CAS for improving your writing. [LSU Center for Academic Success](#)

I also have compiled a list of YouTube videos on study strategies. I will only ever send you resources I have personally used and incorporated into my own study habits. My top recommendation remains Barbara Oakley's TED talk on learning how to learn. I do have other recommendations I will gladly send you.

## Required Books:

Students should always bring the text we are discussing to class.

*A Students Guide to Political Philosophy* by Harvey C. Mansfield ISI ISBN:978-1882926435

*The Prince* by Niccolo Machiavelli translated by Harvey C. Mansfield, second edition ISBN: 978-0226500447

*Four Texts on Socrates* translated by Thomas G. West and Grace Starry West ISBN: 978-0801485749

*Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics* Oxford World Classics translated by Sir David Ross & Lesley Brown ISBN: 978-0199213610

*Leviathan* by Thomas Hobbes, Hackett edition ISBN: 978-0872201774

*Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* by Anita Loos Penguin 20th Century Classics ISBN: 978-0141180694

Recommended: *The Federalist Papers*, Signet Classics edited by Charles Kessler ISBN: 978-0451528810

## Readings on Moodle:

Throughout the course (and especially in the second half) I will post readings on Moodle. I encourage students to print them if possible and to bring them to class on the day they are assigned.

Research demonstrates that reading retention is in general higher when reading from paper than from a screen. I encourage students to print the Moodle readings if possible and take notes directly on the printouts.

## Course Calendar:

### Intro to Political Philosophy

Monday August 23 – Course intro. Please read the syllabus in advance.

Wednesday August 25 – *A Student's Guide to Political Philosophy* by Harvey C. Mansfield (pp. 1-54)

Friday August 27 – Quiz 1 Dedicatory Letter and Chapters 1 to 3 of *The Prince* translated by Harvey C. Mansfield second edition.

Monday August 30 – Chapters 4 to 7 of *The Prince*

Wednesday September 1 – Chapters 8 to 11 of *The Prince*

Friday September 3 – Quiz 2 Chapters 12 to 14 of *The Prince*

Monday September 6 – **Labor Day. No Class**

Wednesday September 8 – Chapters 4 to 11 of *The Prince*

Friday September 10 – Quiz 2 Chapters 12 to 14 of *The Prince*

(Weekend makeup lectures via Zoom recording. Chapters 15 to 19 of *The Prince*)

Monday September 13 – Quiz 3 Chapters 20 to 23 of *The Prince*

Wednesday September 15 – Chapters 24 to 26 of *The Prince* and Letter to Vettori

Friday September 17 – Quiz 4 Selections from *Discourses on Livy* (Moodle)

(Weekend makeup lectures via Zoom recording. Tocqueville Letter to Kergolay, Constant “Liberty of the Ancients Compared with that of the Moderns.” Moodle)

### **Return to the Ancients**

Monday September 20 – Leo Strauss “Classical Political Philosophy” Moodle

Wednesday September 22 – *The Clouds* by Aristophanes (Four Texts pp. 115-148)

Friday September 24 – Quiz 5 *The Clouds* (Four Texts pp. 149-176)

Monday September 27 – *Apology of Socrates* (Four Texts pp. 63-78)

Wednesday September 29 – *Apology of Socrates* (Four Texts pp. 79 -97)

Friday October 1 – Quiz 6 *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* by Anita Loos

Monday October 4 – **Midterm 1**

Wednesday October 6 – Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* Book 1

Friday October 8 – Quiz 7 Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* Book 2

Monday October 11 – Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* Book 3

Wednesday October 13 – Ethics Book 4

Friday October 15 – Quiz 8 Ethics Book 5

Monday October 18– Ethics Book 6

Wednesday October 20 – Ethics Book 7

Friday October 22 – **Fall Break**

Monday October 25 – Ethics Book 8

Wednesday October 27 – Ethics Book 9

Friday October 29 – Quiz 9 Ethics Book 10

### **Modernity, America, and Progress**

Monday November 1 – Thomas Hobbes *Leviathan*

- Introduction (pp. 3-5)
- Ch. 1 (pp. 6-7)
- Ch. 2 ¶¶1-2, 7-10 (pp.7-8, 10-11)
- Ch. 6 ¶¶6-7 (pp.28-29)
- Ch. 8 ¶¶14-16 (pp. 40-41)
- Ch. 11 ¶¶1-5, 19-27 (pp. 57-58, 61-63)
- Ch. 13 (pp. 74-78)

Wednesday November 3 – Hobbes

- Ch. 14 ¶¶ 1-8, 18-19 (pp. 79-82, 84-85)
- Ch. 15 ¶¶ 1-8, 21-22 (pp. 89-93, 96-97)
- Ch. 17 (pp. 106-110)
- Ch. 18 ¶¶ 1-9, 20 (pp. 110-14, 117-118)
- Ch. 19 ¶¶1-12 (pp. 118-24)

Friday November 5 – Quiz 10 Hobbes

- Ch. 20 ¶¶ 1-2, 10-11, 18-19 (pp. 127-28, 130-31, 135)
- Ch. 21 (pp. 136-145)



- Ch. 26 ¶¶ 1-9, 13, 23-24 (pp.172-175, 177, 181-182)
- Ch. 27 ¶¶ 1-8 (pp.190-192)
- Ch. 29 ¶¶ 6-16 (212-217)

Monday November 8 – **Midterm 2**

Wednesday November 10 – G.K. Chesterton “What is America?” Moodle

Friday November 12 – Quiz 11 Declaration of Independence, John Jay “Letter on Manumission of Slaves.” Moodle

Monday November 15 – Selections from the Federalists Moodle

Wednesday November 17 – Selections from Calhoun and Lincoln Moodle

Friday November 19 – Quiz 12 “The Study of Administration” by Woodrow Wilson. Moodle

Monday November 22 – Condorcet “Progress” Moodle

**Wednesday November 24 – Thanksgiving Break.**

**Friday November 26 – No Class**

Monday November 29 – “Idea for a Universal History” by Immanuel Kant, Moodle

Wednesday December 1 – “Transcendence and Political Philosophy” by James V. Schall, Moodle

Friday December 3 – Quiz 13 and “Learning in Wartime” by C.S. Lewis, Moodle

**Saturday December 11 – Take home essay due at 9:30 am.**

**(The syllabus may change slightly throughout the semester due to unforeseen circumstances. I may also change a few of the Moodle readings near the end of the course.)**