

GVPT 105S

Fall, 2014

Dr. Glass

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Off hrs. M 3:-4:30 or by app't

INTRODUCTION TO POLITICAL ETHICS

GVPT 105S is a course specifically designed for College Park Scholars/International Studies students. It is an introduction to basic principles of politics and political life. We study a number of different concepts that are critical in understanding the nature of what is 'political', the structure of power, the foundations of authority, legitimacy, citizenship, action, violence, and revolution. It is a course designed to acquaint students with both the historical and conceptual underpinnings of modern political life, to equip students with the necessary conceptual tools to be conversant in the discourse of politics, and finally, to provide perspectives for understanding the shifting nature of political values and ethics. Politics is a complicated subject matter; it is not only institutions and political mechanics; rather the study of politics involves a complex interplay between the nature of values and the institutional forms necessary to create a stable political order, political governance and political leadership. The concept of politics and political life, and both are quite different, is rooted in an historical understanding of the political tradition. And we will pay some attention to that tradition and its contribution to the development of political ideas. We will not cover the entire historical tradition, but central statements in that tradition that are vital for looking at forms of modern political development. We will always be moving back and forth, from the classical concepts, to their modern forms; from the foundational theories of political life, to ways in which those theories appear in contemporary political contexts. We will also pay close attention to the dynamic between political institutions and the creation of political values. Where do our political values arise from; what are their origins? What is the relationship between the development of political ideas and concepts of human nature? What is the psychological role in the development of political ideas; and how important is psychology in understanding what happens in the political and public realm of human experience? These and other questions will concern us during the course of the semester.

Format:

There will be two lectures a week and a discussion section; attendance at discussion section is mandatory and any absences must be for very good reasons. If you cannot attend discussion section let your discussion leader know the reasons why. You may have one unexcused absence from discussion; any additional absences have to be supported in writing. I do not take attendance at lectures, although it is advisable to attend lectures since the connections between the readings and the broader concepts that I draw from the readings will be presented in the lectures as will material that may pertain to the four spot quizzes. During lecture, all cell phones must of course be turned off; I do not allow laptop computers during lectures and discussion sections (where accommodations are approved, exceptions are made.) Lectures are also not social occasions; so it is critical, out of respect for students who want to learn, that proper decorum be maintained, which means no talking

to friends NO TEXTING AND NO CELL PHONE USE. This applies to discussion section as well. Also it is very important that everyone be in lecture exactly on the hour.

Exams:

There will be two midterm essays and a take home final essay; the midterms will not be cumulative. All exams will be essays, generally you will be asked to respond to one or two questions. Nor will the final be cumulative; it will cover only the material subsequent to the second midterm. The grading percentages are as follows: midterm exams 25% each; final exam 30%; spot quizzes 20%. (Of the two spot quizzes you may discard the lowest score.) Discussion is central to understanding the ideas covered in this course; so students are certainly encouraged to speak up in discussion group. Participation can help your grade if you are on the cusp between two grades. That is, it can bump you up a notch. Nonattendance in discussion sections will lower your grade; silence is o.k. No one will be penalized for not talking. But persistent unexcused absences from discussion section will have a detrimental effect on your grade. Students must familiarize themselves with the University regulations on plagiarism. You may if you choose, submit a draft of your essays to your teaching assistant and receive feedback before submitting your final draft.

Required Readings:

Plato, The Last Days of Socrates
Machiavelli, The Prince
De Tocqueville, Democracy in America
Rousseau, Discourse on the Origins of Inequality
Marx, The Communist Manifesto
Mill, On Liberty
Lifton, The Nazi Doctors
Donnelly, Universal Human Rights
O'Brien, the Things They Carried

Schedule of Lectures

The Foundations:

1. Critical Reason and Political Vengeance

Reading: Plato, The Apology and Crito

- the Platonic notion of public space
- reason versus ignorance
- political embarrassment and retaliation
- Socrates death and the argument of the laws

2. Politics as Action: The Beginnings of Modernity

Reading: Machiavelli: The Prince

- Action and transformation
- the nature of ethics
- the economy of violence
- the establishment of legitimacy

3. Human Nature and Political Life: The Tendency Towards Isolation from Public Spaces

Reading: Tocqueville, Democracy in America

- what governs political life
- the rise of self interest
- the relationship between morality and self interest
- absorption of morality into self interest and desire

4. Radical Rejection of the Status Quo: The Beginnings of the Revolutionary Voice

Reading: Rousseau: Discourse on the Origins of Inequality

- revolutionary state of mind
- call to action and rejection
- the evolution of morals and their significance
- the Rousseauian vision

MIDTERM 1 [date to be announced]

5. The Marxian Intervention: Violence Transforming Self

Reading: Marx, The Communist Manifesto

- Marx as revolutionary
- oppression and history
- the history of the proletariat and the evils of capital
- the future society and the transformation of human nature

6. The Individual and Tolerance: Liberty as the Fundamental Social End

Reading: Mill, On Liberty

- the nature of individualism and tolerance
- the individual versus society
- liberty and a political end
- conformity and social evils

Modern Dilemmas In the Formulation of Ethics

7. Human Rights and the Argument of Liberalism

Reading: Donnelly, Universal Human Rights (selections)

- the role of culture and society in political life
- cultural setting and the understanding of rights
- individuality and judgment
- intervention and protection of human rights

MIDTERM 2 [date to be announced]

8. Ethics and War: The Transformations of Self

Reading: O'Brien: The Things They Carried

- limits and violence
- the transformation of self and extreme situations
- reason, hate and human rights
- narratives and stories as essential to political life

9: Modernity, Science and the Technological Mind: Their Place in the Genocidal Mentality

Reading: Lifton, The Nazi Doctors (selections)

- medicine and the path to genocide
- the relation of political leadership to scientific leadership
- culture and the myths of medicine
- culture wide mobilization for mass murder

FINAL TAKE HOME ESSAY