

## GVPT 441, Ancient Political Theory, Spring, 2017

Professor Alford, 1151 Tydings. Office Hrs, Tu., Thur, 5-6 and by appointment. Call x54169 and leave a message. Email works even better: calford@umd.edu. **Note: please make an appointment if you can, even during regular office hours.** Sometimes these are the only hours I can schedule appointments with graduate students, hold conferences, etc.. Of course, I will see you any time during my office hours when I am free. With an appointment (!), I can often arrange to see you before class. Come visit; too few students do.

E-mail me with comments, questions, suggestions, and gripes. During the semester I read and respond to my e-mail 4-5 days per week. I'd love to hear from you.

I will set up a course guide on Canvas for this course, but it is the class interaction in the large seminar format that is central.

This is a course in ancient political theory. We read the ancients not because they are just like us, but because they are different. Maybe smarter. Science and technology progress, but some things remain the same, or even go backwards. We are, I think, distracted by scientific and technological progress, convinced that it can solve basic problems of human nature faced by the ancients. It can't.

Political theory is the study the best possible way for humans to live, given humans as they truly are. Thus, political theory is intensely concerned with human nature, and has been for over 2,500 years. Once people believed in human nature. Today few academics do. But that doesn't mean human nature doesn't exist. Partly it depends on how we define the term.

With ancient texts we read slowly and carefully. To make sure you do that, I will give you several **pop quizzes**. They are not difficult, but they require careful reading. Please be aware of this policy, including how heavily the pop-quizzes are weighted (see below for details). There is nothing more important in this class than reading the books carefully. Please bring your text to class every day. I won't give quizzes on official religious holidays. If you celebrate other religious holidays, I will work hard to make an arrangement with you, but this must be done well in advance. Don't come to me for the first time after you miss the quiz.

**I do not want or expect you to come to class sick.** There will be opportunities to make up quizzes if you are ill. It is a pattern of unexplained absences of the course of a semester that I will be most concerned with. It will take me a while, but eventually I will learn each of your names, and know who is in class (and who is not) every class session.

**Class policy on laptop computers:** Since this class will be conducted largely in seminar style, with some lecturing, I ask that you not use laptop computers. Talk with me if you must use one, and please use it only to take notes for this class. **You may not use a laptop computer without talking with me about it first. I also want to know if you are reading your text on a smart phone.** Texting is not allowed; I should not have to put this in the syllabus, but evidently I do. It is considered texting to sit at your desk and scroll through Facebook or whatever on your Android or Iphone.

**Class policy on panel discussion and debates:** each student is expected to participate in at least one panel discussion or debate. There are enough opportunities for each student to participate, some more than once.

**Note on class schedule:** I will tell you every day where you should be in the readings, and over exactly what you are responsible should you have a quiz. I do it this way in order to let the class discussion set the pace. I have given you the exact dates the two class papers are due.

**Weeks 1-4: Thucydides, History of the Peloponnesian War** [Woodruff, On Justice, Power and Human Nature, is the abridged version used in this course]

**Class activity (25 points):**

Mytilene Debate—2 students on each side

Melian Dialogue—2 students on each side

Decision to Invade Sicily-2 students on each side

Lessons of the War for Today-3 students in panel discussion

[Note on the class activity: please do not use "power point" or other electronic aids without consulting me; you are leading a class discussion in seminar style]

**Weeks 5 and 6: Oedipus the King, 3 class sessions** (video clips will be shown)

**Class activity (25 points):**

Was it character or fate that led to Oedipus' doom? –Debate, 2 students on each side

**Week 7: Euripides, Alcestis**

**Class activity (25 points):**

Oedipus and Alcestis seem such different plays, the tone is so different. Yet, I think the lessons overlap. What are they? What difference does the tone make? Discussion, 2 students.

**Week 8: Epictetus, The Handbook (note that he is not a Greek but a Roman)**

**Class activity (25 points):**

Does Epictetus set out a good guideline for living your life? —panel, 2 students

**First class paper due at this point:** What have you learned about life, including your own, from reading Thucydides, Oedipus, Euripides, and Epictetus? What seems most right in the books you read, what seems most wrong? Include at least three of these authors in your answer. (25 points) **The class paper is due on March 27 at 11:59pm on ELMS/Canvas. Note: this is the Monday after Spring Break. It should be about 5 pages long.**

**Week 9, Aristotle, The Ethics, books 1 and 2. Class discussion only.**

**Week 10: Plato, The Last Days of Socrates: Apology, Phaedo** (note: students will present in this section only as needed. You will be informed well in advance):

The Apology (or Defense) of Socrates

The Phaedo, which concerns life after death

**Weeks 11-13: Plato, The Republic**

Widely regarded as the second most influential book in the history of Western thought, one of your tasks is to figure out why. The Republic asks a simple question: why be ethical?

Class discussion only.

**Week 14:** So what have you learned from the works of these wise men? Do you think these founders of Western civilization are so wise after all? Are they still relevant? We will take this question author by author if you like.

**Class activity (25 points):** Two students lead this discussion, serving primarily as moderators, while having questions to ask when the discussion lags.

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The second class paper is due on Saturday, May 13, at 11:59pm on ELMS/Canvas. I will give you the question well in advance. Note: this is a class paper, no more or less important than the first. It is not comprehensive, covering only Plato and Aristotle. It should be about 5 pages long.

### Course requirements and standards

I will give 5 **pop-quizzes** (that is, surprised, unannounced quizzes) throughout the course of the semester. I will record the best 4. You may miss one quiz with impunity. Each quiz is worth 5% of your final grade, for a total of 20%. The pop quizzes are to see if you have read the material carefully. They are about what happened, what did the author say, and so forth. They do not require much interpretation. “How does Oedipus the King end?” would be a good pop-quiz question. I will tell you every class day what reading you will be responsible for should you have a pop quiz the next class. Each pop quiz will take about 15-20 minutes of class time.

The first class paper is worth 25% of your final grade. The second class paper is worth 25% of your final grade. Total = 50%. Each paper should be about 5 pages long.

The class activity is worth 25% of your final grade.

Since the course is limited to about 28 students, I will be able to learn your names (it will take a while), and evaluate your participation in class discussion. I will not grade you on attendance. I will, however, grade you on class participation, which includes attentive listening. You can't participate if you are not present. Informed participation is worth 5% of your final grade.

You are not expected to attend class if you are ill. As stated previously, it is a continued pattern of absences and missed quizzes that will harm your final grade.

Thus, your assignments will count as follows:

Class activity 25 maximum. pts

Quizzes 20 maximum pts (total of 4)

First class paper 25 maximum pts

Second class paper 25 maximum pts

Participation 5 maximum pts

There is no final exam.

The grading structure of this class is designed to persuade you to come participate regularly and read thoroughly. If you do this, you should do well.

My grade computing formula is simple: an “A” on a quiz is worth 5 points toward your final grade; a “B” is worth 4 points, a “C” 3 points, a “D” 2 points. F = 0. The same goes for your attendance/participation grade.

An “A” on your class activity, or paper, is worth 25-23 points (depending upon

whether it is an A+, A, or A-), A “B” is worth 22-20 points, and so forth, A C is worth 19.5-17 pts, etc. To get your final grade, convert letters into numbers and add them up. An “F” receives no credit, and no points.

Regarding the class activity: In general, I will grade it more generously than your paper or final. However, outside work with your group is expected, and I will look for evidence that you have worked together as a group for several hours.

#### Required books

Thucydides, *On Justice, Power and Human Nature*, ed. Woodruff (Hackett)

Sophocles, *Oedipus the King* (Oxford)

Plato, *The Last Days of Socrates: read Apology, Phaedo* (Penguin)

Plato, *The Republic*, ed. Lee (Penguin)

Epictetus, *The Handbook* (Hackett)

Euripides, *Alcestis* (Oxford)

Aristotle, *Ethics [The Nicomachean Ethics]* (Penguin)

If you have a learning disability or other problem that needs my attention, let me know and I will make every effort to accommodate you.

The Student Honor Council has asked that I place the following statement on this syllabus. I think that it’s a good idea.

The University of Maryland, College Park has a nationally recognized Code of Academic Integrity, administered by the Student Honor Council. This Code sets standards for academic integrity at Maryland for all undergraduate and graduate students. As a student you are responsible for upholding these standards for this course. It is very important for you to be aware of the consequences of cheating, fabrication, facilitation, and plagiarism. For more information on the Code of Academic Integrity or the Student Honor Council, please visit: <http://www.shc.umd.edu>.

Also, see the Office of Undergraduate Studies website on course related policies.

<http://www.ugst.umd.edu/courserelatedpolicies.html>