

## Politics 121A: Ancient and Medieval Political Theory

Whitman College, Fall 2010  
Mon/Weds 1-2:20  
Maxey Hall 207

Professor Kristy King  
Email: kingkm@whitman.edu  
Office: Maxey Hall, Room 132

### Course Description

This course examines classic texts in the history of ancient and medieval political thought from the time of the Greek city-state, through the heights of the Islamic Golden Age, to late medieval Christendom. The diverse political, cultural and religious contexts in which our texts are situated will allow us to analyze the ways that central political concepts have been defined and contested by a range of political thinkers. We will compare various conceptions of the good life and the ideal political community and examine the ways in which these norms influence thinking about human nature, the role of the individual, the nature of justice, freedom and obligation, as well as the relationship between temporal and divine power. We will consider each of our texts within the political, historical and cultural milieu in which it was written, and we will examine the ways each writer responds to the ideas and assumptions of earlier thinkers.

### Required Books

The following books are available for purchase from the Whitman College Bookstore or from a wide variety of online vendors. Because we will be working with the texts together in class, please purchase the editions listed below.

- Alfarabi, *The Political Writings: Selected Aphorisms and Other Texts*, Cornell University Press, 2004
- Aquinas, *On Law, Morality and Politics*, Hackett Publishing Company; (June 2003)
- Aristotle, *Politics* Penguin Classics
- Augustine, *Political Writings*, Hackett 1994
- Cicero, *On Obligations*, Oxford 2008 (if you already own the Cambridge edition of *On Duty*, you may use that instead—just note that the pagination is slightly different).
- Plato, *The Republic*, Hackett, 2004
- Sophocles, *Antigone*, Hackett, 2001

Additional readings will be available for download on the course Cleo website.

### Course Requirements

#### Attendance & Participation 15%

It is essential that all students come to class having read the assigned reading and prepared to participate in class discussions. Your participation grade will be based on your attendance and your participation in class discussions and in-class activities. Your discussion grade will take into account your attendance, your comments during class discussion, the questions you ask, your responses to other students' questions and comments, and your performance on any in-class oral assignments. I expect students to respond thoughtfully to the assigned readings and to questions posed in class, to be willing to play with ideas (i.e., take interpretive risks) and be actively engaged in class discussion; therefore, the quality of your contributions to class discussions will be as important as the sheer quantity of your participation.

## Weekly Journal 20%

You are required to keep an intellectual journal for this course. You will write one journal entry per week for a total of 10 entries. (No entries are necessary on the weeks that you write essays). Journal entries should be somewhere between 250 and 500 words. Please purchase a special folder in which to keep your writing journal. I would like you to bring the journal to class each day and I will collect the journals regularly throughout the semester.

Journal entries are to be your attempt to work through one of the ideas and problems you find in the reading. You might choose a really difficult and complex passage and subject it to close scrutiny; you might choose a theme and grapple with it (i.e., you might try to sort out what exactly Aristotle means with his different definitions of equality, or what Cicero means by duty, or figure out why Augustine spends so much time discussing Roman history.). I might occasionally be directive about the theme or focus of your journaling, but it will ultimately be up to you to find something interesting, troubling and important in the readings. Finding something to write about each week is an important element of the challenge and goal of journaling: learning to identify a problem or theme or question in a text and then begin to address it is a crucial task for this course.

The goal of the journal entries is to make sure that you are working with the reading in a sustained and active way—that is, thinking about what you are reading and attempting to sort out its meanings and complexities for yourselves. It is very important that these journals reflect *your* thinking about the reading and the ideas in the readings. I want you to discuss the texts, but I want to hear *your* voice and ideas in the entries. Because of the importance of the journal to your work in this class, I will have a Zero Tolerance policy for academic dishonesty. Anyone caught plagiarizing a journal entry will be reported to the Dean and will receive an F for the course. This means that you are not allowed to copy words, ideas or sentences from online sources such as Spark Notes or Wikipedia. It also means that you cannot go to another source and ‘change the words’ for your journal entry. The work in these journals must be entirely your own.

### *Criteria for grading:*

I want to see that you have carefully done the assigned reading and have taken a serious stab at working through your ideas and the author’s ideas. A successful journal entry will grapple seriously with a complicated passage or idea and come to some kind of resolution or position. Additionally, I expect to see a strong authorial voice along with respect for and fidelity to the text. Unsuccessful entries will be those which reflect only superficial engagement with the ideas in the texts, which merely summarize the readings, or which reveal a fatal misreading of the text. I would much rather see you tackle a difficult idea and struggle to work it through (unsuccessfully) than for you to give a simplistic or fatuous reading of the text. I want to see evidence of serious intellectual engagement and alertness to complexity and nuance.

I will grade your reading journal entries with a check-plus, check, or check-minus (corresponding to excellent, satisfactory, or unsatisfactory). An entry that receives a check grade shows a solid grasp of the assigned reading, ties to grapple with complex ideas, problems or language within the readings and indicates a willingness to take intellectual risks with the material. An entry that receives a check plus grade will do these things exceptionally well and will show a significantly deeper level of engagement with the readings. Check minuses will be given to those journals which appear haphazard, unengaged or uncritical of the readings. Journal entries which receive a check-minus will not count towards the 10 entries required for the course.

You must complete 10 check-worthy entries in order to receive credit for your journals. If you receive 10 consecutive checks or check pluses on your journals, you will receive an A for the journal assignment. Anyone who earns three or more check-minuses will, in addition to rewriting the failing entries, receive a C or C+ for their final journal grade.

I always prefer to read polished, well-written prose over clumsy, grammatically challenged prose. That said, these journals are intended for you to explore complicated ideas and sometimes messy ideas lead to messy writing. I would rather have complicated (and interesting) messiness than polished banalities. *However*, I always expect you to proofread and edit your work for grammar and style.

Some ideas to get you started:

- Write about what you found particularly interesting or problematic in the reading and why.
- Choose a quote that stands out to you and explain what you think it means and why it is important—either to the subject of the course or to the author's argument or project.
- Identify an idea or theme in the week's reading that you would like to explore in more detail, and explain how you might do so.
- Apply an idea or concept from the reading to another text we have read or to one of the course themes.

Please keep your journal entries in a dedicated folder and submit the entire folder to me each week. Please put your name, the date, the text under discussion and the journal number at the top of each entry!

### Essays 65%

You will write three formal, 4-6 page essays for this course. These essays will be critical and interpretive and will require you to make an argument about the texts. I will distribute essay questions in class before each paper is due and you will be expected to respond thoughtfully and critically to the writing question and to draw heavily on the assigned readings in your responses. These are *not* research papers and I do not want or expect you to consult outside sources. I will give more specific instructions for your written work when I distribute the questions for the first essay assignment.

The first two essays will each be worth 20% of your final grade; the final essay will be worth 25%.

Late papers will be penalized one half grade for each day the paper is late. If you anticipate that you will not be able to submit your paper by the due date, I urge you to speak to me before the paper is due. Failure to discuss an extension with me prior to the due date will result in the abovementioned grade deductions.

### Office Hours

I will hold office hours in Maxey 132 during the following times:

Monday 11-12  
Tuesday 3-4  
Friday 10-11

If you cannot make it to my regularly scheduled office hours, I will be happy to schedule an appointment with you at another time.

### Academic Integrity

Students are expected to familiarize themselves with the Whitman College Academic Dishonesty and Plagiarism policy. The policy can be found in your Student Handbook and online at

[http://www.whitman.edu/content/academic\\_resources/rights-and-responsibilities/academic-dishonesty-and-plagiarism](http://www.whitman.edu/content/academic_resources/rights-and-responsibilities/academic-dishonesty-and-plagiarism). I will report all suspected cases of plagiarism to the Dean of Students and any student found to have plagiarized will automatically fail the course.

### Reading Schedule

Weds 9/1	Course Introduction
Mon 9/6	Sophocles, <i>Antigone</i> (read entire play)
Wed 9/8	Pericles' Funeral Oration (cleo) <i>Antigone</i> cont'd
Mon 9/13	Plato, <i>Republic</i> , Book I
Wed 9/15	Plato, <i>Republic</i> , Books II & III
Mon 9/20	Plato, <i>Republic</i> , Books IV & V <i>Optional Reading</i> : Saxonhouse, "The Philosopher and the Female in the Political Thought of Plato" (cleo)
Wed 9/22	Plato, <i>Republic</i> , Books VI & VII
Mon 9/27	Plato, <i>Republic</i> , Books VIII & IX
Wed 9/29	Plato, <i>Republic</i> , Book X
Mon 10/4	Aristotle, <i>Politics</i> , Book I, Book II.i-v (pp 53-119 )
Wed 10/6	Aristotle, <i>Politics</i> , Books III (pp. 167-232)
Fri 10/8	<i>First Essay Due</i>
Mon 10/11	Columbus Day/Fall Break – No Classes
Wed 10/13	Aristotle, <i>Politics</i> , Book IV i-ix, xi-xii (pp. 235-263, 264-273)
Mon 10/18	Aristotle, <i>Politics</i> , V.i-ii, v-ix, VI.i-v, (pp. 296-332, 359-375)
Wed 10/20	Aristotle, <i>Politics</i> , VII, i-iv, viii-ix, xiii-xvii and VIII (389-406, 411-417, 426-448, 451-477)
Mon 10/25	Cicero, <i>On the Commonwealth</i> , excerpt (cleo) Cicero, <i>First Oration Against Catiline</i> (cleo)
Wed 10/27	Cicero, <i>On Obligations</i> , Book I s1-91 (pp. 3-32)
Mon 11/1	Cicero, <i>On Obligations</i> , Book I, Book II (pp. 33-85)
Wed 11/3	Seneca, <i>On the Private Life</i> , letter 90 (cleo)
Mon 11/8	Augustine, <i>Political Writings</i> , Books I-V (pp. 3-47)
Wed 11/10	Augustine, <i>Political Writings</i> , Books XII, XIV, XIX, and 'War' (pp. 83-91, 95-109, 140-63, 218-229)
Fri 11/12	<i>Second Essay Due</i>
Mon 11/15	Alfarabi, <i>Selected Aphorisms</i> , 11-67
Wed 11/17	Alfarabi, <i>Enumeration of the Sciences</i> , 71-84

Alfarabi, *Book of Religion* 93-113

11/20 – 11/28 Thanksgiving Break

Mon 11/29 Aquinas, *On Law*, Questions 90-95 (pp. 10-59)

Wed 12/1 Aquinas, *On Law*, Questions 96, 97, 57, 58, 66 (59-75, 97-123, 130-143).

Mon 12/6 Aquinas, *On Law*, Questions 40, 64, 104, 42, 47, 50, *On Kingship* (164-184, 188-9, 197-210)

Wed 12/8 Last Class: Conclusions, Festivities, etc.

Fri 12/10 *Final Essay Due*