

POLI 2060, Fall 2020, MWF – 10:30 – 11:20; 12:30-1:20 via Zoom

Alex Donovan Cole
Stubbs 231
acole42@lsu.edu
Virtual Office Hours by Appointment

Course Summary

POLI 2060 is a General Ed course designed to introduce students to the main thinkers and themes of Western political thought. This course involves history, philosophy, and literature, but is not a history, philosophy, or literature course. Political Theory's essence resides in *thinking*. Not only thinking like the great minds of the tradition of political philosophy, but as citizens engaged with topics of vast public importance: justice, order, speech, reality itself.

However, I would like to emphasize the notion that political thinking does not merely reside in “intellectual arguments” or “logic,” but in literary and mythic renderings of the world. The great German novelist, Günter Grass, calls myth “the Enlightenment’s wayward child,” but suggests that its content is “quite rational.” We will take this idea seriously throughout this course and visit some cinematic depictions of the political. The goal is not to merely regurgitate the teachings of some of the most important political thinkers, but to understand and apply their ideas to “non-political” media and concepts.

Evaluation & Attendance

Because of the online synchronous nature of this course, “attendance” cannot be regularly taken, but a graded equivalent can be given. **Each week, I will post a short, five question quiz from that week’s readings and lectures. These quizzes will constitute 15% of your final grade, so one ought to take them seriously.** Exceptions include weeks with tests and when assignments are due. Further, many of the multiple choice responses on tests will be derived from these earlier quizzes. So, it would be very prudent to regularly communicate with me via email or other means. Test dates TBD, but will follow the structure of the syllabus.

Grading breakdown follows:

- Weekly quizzes: 15%
- First Test (Multiple Choice): 10%
- Second Test (Multiple Choice) :20%
- Third Test (Multiple Choice & Short Answer): 25%
- Final (See below): 30%

Readings

All readings are available on Moodle.

Part One: Thinking and Politics – A substantial amount of political thought revolves around the incompatibility of thought with action. That is, those who refuse to conform to the standards and norms of conventional society are often met with violent resistance from society’s functionaries, or even from themselves. This section looks into some dramatic examples of how society’s wisdom conflicts with the wisdom of philosophy, or the individual.

Scenes from Paul Schrader’s *Mishima: A Life in Four Chapters*

Sophocles, *Antigone*

Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, Sections 1-12

Plato, *Apology*

Part Two: The Classical Experience: Plato and Aristotle - Histories of Political Philosophy typically begin with Classical Philosophy. That is, Socratic philosophy. This section concerns itself with the thought of those influenced by Socrates, namely, Plato and Aristotle. The “split” between these two thinkers informs the course philosophy will take in the West regarding questions of justice, virtue, and the soul. However, we are less concerned with this history *per se*, but with how it informs the way we live and think about politics.

Plato, *Republic* Books I-III, IV, VI, VII, IX, X

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* Books I-III, V, VI, X

Aristotle, *Politics*, Books I-V, VII

TEST ONE FOLLOWS THIS SECTION

Part Three: The State, a Fiction? - What makes the state separate from the realm of nature? Is the state “natural?” Here, Machiavelli and Hobbes invoke an extremely complex understanding of “technique” and “artifice” respectively. We will consider the development of what is called “realism” by historians of political thought here.

Scenes from Werner Herzog’s *Grizzly Man*

Machiavelli, *The Prince* Chs. 1-9; 14-19

Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Part One: i, ii, iv, v, vi & xiv; Part Two: xviii, xxi, xxii, xxvi

Part Four: The Social Contract, America, and the Black Experience - Jean-Jacques Rousseau wrote in *The Social Contract* that “Man was born free yet is everywhere in chains.” In his age, political despotism reigned: Europe was dominated by monarchies, these monarchies established colonies, and these colonies were worked by slaves. The American experiment with its declaration that “all men are created equal” attempted to do away with this condition. Still, they did not disestablish chattel slavery – prolonging its horrors for generations. This part seeks to discuss liberalism and its relationship to human freedom, especially the freedom of slaves and their descendants.

Rousseau, *The Social Contract* Books I, II, IV

Jefferson, *The Declaration of Independence*

DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folks*, “Of Our Spiritual Strivings,” “On Mr. Washington and the Others,” “The Sorrow Songs”

Scenes from Spike Lee’s *Malcolm X*

TEST TWO FOLLOWS THIS SECTION

Part Five: Action and Politics - Liberalism’s dominance in the 19th century saw to a wealthy and incredibly powerful society. However, this wealth was not equally distributed throughout society. Arguably, this period of rapid economic expansion led to the breakdown of traditional morality and the consolidation of power by wealthy elites and capitalists. Voices of the 19th century and beyond oppose liberalism on various grounds, but here we consider voices that seek *active resistance to liberalism on the grounds of action.*

Marx, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, “Preface,” “Alienated Labor,” “Private Property and Communism.”

Marx, *The Communist Manifesto*

Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, Books 3, 5

Scenes from Slavoj Žižek’s *The Pervert’s Guide to Ideology*

TEST THREE FOLLOWS THIS SECTION

Part Six: The End of Modernity? – Marx’s revolution never came to America or Europe and Nietzsche’s critique of morality did not necessarily create a greater “race” of free spirits. Still, the institutions of liberalism are, arguably, under duress and the idea of modern morality as rationally justifiable appears in doubt. We will briefly look at some contemporary questions regarding liberalism on the question of morality, race, and class that are of incredible interest.

Scenes from Volker Schlöndorff’s *The Tin Drum*

MacIntyre, “Nietzsche or Aristotle”

Cohen, *Why Not Socialism?*

Notes on the Coates-West Debate

Final Assignment

Using one of the texts we have analyzed this semester, provide an interpretive essay of **no longer than three pages** on one of the following films:

Films:

-*Parasite* (2019) by Bong Joon-Hoo

-*Akira* (1988) by Katsuhiro Otomo

-*Sorry to Bother You* (2018) by Boots Riley

All three films are available to stream on Hulu and for purchase/rental on Amazon video. If you are unable to locate a copy of these films, please contact me.

I **do not** expect a “review” or a “report.” I expect an analytical discussion of the film’s themes and storytelling in relation to a text analyzed in this course. The goal is to create something new through writing, not to regurgitate existing knowledge of these films or the texts as an “assignment.”

Citations should follow the Chicago Style Guide.

Do note, some of these films are very explicit. All three are rated “R” by the MPAA. Do exercise caution when selecting a film. That is to say, do some research and pick a film you feel comfortable watching, perhaps multiple times, and that you find interesting or evocative.

Due: December 5th

ADA Compliance

The University is committed to making reasonable efforts to assist individuals with disabilities in their efforts to avail themselves of services and programs offered by the University. To this end, Louisiana State University will provide reasonable accommodations for persons with documented qualifying disabilities. If you have a disability and feel you need accommodations in this course, you must present a letter to me from Disability Services in 115 Johnston Hall, indicating the existence of a disability and the suggested accommodations.

LSU Integrative Curriculum Statement

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.