

## POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY GOV-610

Regent University  
Robertson School of Government  
Fall 2006  
Public syllabus

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*When evening comes, I return home and enter my study; on the threshold I take off my workaday clothes, covered with mud and dirt, and put on the garments of court and palace. Fitted out appropriately, I step inside the venerable courts of the ancients, where, solicitously received by them, I nourish myself on that food that alone is mine and for which I was born; where I am unashamed to converse with them and to question them about the motives for their actions, and they, out of their human kindness, answer me.*

-- Niccolo Machiavelli, 1513

### **COURSE SUMMARY:**

Political Philosophy GOV-610 is a survey of seminal works of Western political philosophy from the ancient to the modern eras. It is designed to ensure that students have an acquaintance with the major thinkers and schools of thought that have influenced the forms and practices of government throughout history. This acquaintance is achieved through reading, reflecting on, and discussing abridgements of primary texts.

### **COURSE DESCRIPTION:**

Political philosophy (often called “political theory”) is one distinct sub-field in the academic discipline of government. Political philosophy asks the most basic questions related to public policy and government: What is justice? What is the relationship of the individual to the political community? What is the best regime? What separates a statesman from a mere political leader? What are the grounds of human rights? What is the proper relation of church to state? What is the proper relation of Christianity to philosophy? Is an authentically Christian political theory even possible? These are philosophical, moral, and perhaps even theological questions that should be asked before any government action is taken. So, through reading and discussing classic texts, the perennially relevant questions that any consideration of good governance raises will be engaged in this course. Students who have taken (or are taking) GOV-611 will recall that in his classic American Government text, James Q. Wilson examines the first of the two fundamental questions of politics: Who governs? He ends his text by asking (but not answering) the other fundamental question: To what ends? This course examines the second question through the study of great thinkers in the western tradition, from the ancient Greek era

to the present.

### **CONNECTION TO THE PROGRAM OF STUDY:**

This course currently is the first in a series of core courses in the M.A. in Government program in the School of Government. It is foundational in the sense that it is designed to give students a theoretical base upon which to build in their further studies in government and public policy. Key concepts (e.g. justice, the public good, etc.) which will recur throughout the course of study will be raised, and key thinkers in political philosophy who have shaped the discourse of government in the West will be studied.

### **PERSONAL NOTE FROM THE PROFESSOR:**

This course is a survey in the history of political philosophy, and so will consist of selections from some of the most influential books from more than two millennia. Since this is a survey, we cannot go into great depth with any of our authors, who will serve as our absentee teachers during the semester: Plato, Aristotle, St. Augustine, St. Thomas Aquinas, Machiavelli, Martin Luther and John Calvin, Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, Adam Smith, Karl Marx, John Rawls, and others. Yet, by the end of the semester you should have more than a passing acquaintance with their works and systems. Familiarity with these works and thinkers will stand you in good stead no matter what your vocational goals, and such familiarity is a mark of a well-educated person. Public policy is ultimately based on a view of the world and political society; it is no mere truism that armies march to ideas, and so we will examine the underpinnings of policy as expressed in the tradition of western political thought.

### **INSTRUCTION:**

This course is a traditional seminar course that will meet once per week for three hours of lecture and discussion, Wednesdays 6:00-9:00pm. Student participation is welcomed and expected. Guest lecturers may be brought in from time to time.

**Distance education students** will complete all assigned readings and papers, and will participate in a virtual classroom via the on-line Blackboard medium, in weekly Discussion Board postings. These postings will consist of responses to professor-initiated discussion questions as well as responses to postings by other students.

### **TEXTS:**

Ebenstein, William and Alan Ebenstein. Great Political Thinkers: Plato to the Present. 6th ed. Wadsworth, 1999. ISBN 0155078895.

The Bible [any commonly used version].

Sheldon, Garrett Ward. The History of Political Theory: Ancient Greece to Modern America. 2d ed. Peter Lang, 1993. ISBN 0820423009.

**GRADING:**

Your grade will be determined by the quality of your written work and your discussion. Written work will include at least two papers spaced evenly throughout the semester. The quality of your discussion comments and a brief in-class presentation will account for roughly a quarter of your grade; three quarters will be determined by your written work.

**Distance education** students will fulfill their discussion requirement through on-line postings in Blackboard, to include responses to questions posted by the professor. A short written profile of a political philosopher not covered in class, assigned by the professor, will fulfill the presentation requirement.

The approximate grade calculus will be as follows:

75% Papers  
25% Discussion, dialogues and presentation  
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100%