Introduction to Political Philosophy

|  |
| --- |
| **Credit level:** 5  |
| **Length:** semester 1 |
| **ECTS credit value:** 8 |
| **College and School:** Lazarski University in Warsaw, Faculty of Economics and Management  |
| **Module Leader:** Prof. Christopher Lazarski |
| **Host Course:** BA in International in Relations |
| **Pre-requisites:** Western Civilization I and II |
| **Co-requisites:**N/A |
| **Special features:**N/A |
| **Access restrictions:**N/A |
| **Summary of module content:** This module introduces students to fundamentals of political thought through reading and discussing books on politics and state, written by some of the greatest minds in European tradition. It aims to acquaint the students with main political ideas and concepts relating the best theoretical order, which preoccupied the ancient and mediaeval philosophers, and with the best practical order which modern thinkers have been and are still interested in. The second, equally important aim of the module focuses on various methods and standards of critical thinking and on the evaluation of information sources, thus on developing the ability to analyse evidence and build arguments. |

**Assessment Methods**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Rank | Assessment type | Assessment name | Weighting | Qualifying set (where the minimum mark required applies across multiple assessments) |
| 1 |  Portfolio | Portfolio | 60% |  |
| 2 | Closed Book Exam | Final exam | 40% |

**Synoptic assessment**

N/A

**Learning outcomes**

By the end of the module the successful student will be able to:

1. Characterize main ideas and concepts of political philosophy in Western tradition and their evolution in time, focusing on how these ideas shaped the modern intellectual tradition.
2. Identify principal concerns of pre-modern thought and modern theories (political philosophy vs. political science), as well as to describe main differences between them.
3. Analyse key ideas of thinkers discussed, evaluated their impact and compare their differing attitudes, values, and perspectives, seeing them as part of an ongoing dialogue among the greatest minds in history
4. To construct a coherent critical argument applying the rules of formal logic, engaging with different intellectual traditions in a structured and reasoned manner.
5. Apply the principles of critical thinking to writing with and without the use of outside sources, demonstrating clear and rigorous analysis in written work.
6. Develop a more balanced view of modern intellectual tradition (especially in relation to currently dominant liberal thought) and to apply it to other areas of study.

**Course outcomes the module contributes to:**

* L5.2 An awareness of the key traditions in international political theory and an ability to differentiate between specific thinkers and debates within the various traditions of International Relations.
* L5.5 An understanding of the varieties of approaches to understanding, constructing and interpreting the international system, especially through concepts and theories derived from the social sciences.
* L5.6 An understanding of the role of social science methodologies and political research skills in the research process, including the ability to use communication and information technology for the retrieval and presentation of information.
* L5.7 An understanding of the responsibilities of global citizenship, especially as it relates to conceptions of civic responsibility and global engagement through cross-cultural and cross- national perspectives.

**Indicative syllabus content**

Classical and Medieval Thought (all original texts read in excerpts)

* Fundamental questions, philosophy, and political philosophy.
* First Greek thinkers; Socrates and the Sophists.
* Plato’s *The Republic* vs Aristotle’s *Politics* and *Nichomachean Ethics*. Polybius*, Histories (*the Roman Constitution); Sun Tzu, *Art of War*
* The Bible, St. Augustine*, City of God* and St. Thomas on Law (question 90-97 of *Summa Theologic*a); Marsilius of Padua, *The Defender of Peace.*

Modern Theory

* Breaking with the classical tradition: Descartes; Machiavelli, *The Prince* and excerpts of *Discourses on Livy.*
* Hobbes. *Leviathan*; Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*; Montesquieu, *The Spirit of Laws*; Rousseau, *The Origins Inequality*; excerpts, *On the Social Contract*; Condorcet, *The Sketch.*
* Burke, *Reflections on the French Revolution*; Tocqueville, *On Democracy in America;* Mill, *On Liberty;* Kant’s ethics and politics; Marx-Engels, *Communist Manifesto*.
* Lord Acton’s another liberalism; Nietzsche; post-modernism.

Critical Thinking

* Introduction to formal logic and the theory of knowledge
* Fallacies and arguments
* Toulmin’s model of reasoning

**Teaching and learning methods**

Teaching combines weekly discussion seminar (module leader) and workshops. The seminar reviews the reading of original texts, usually excerpts (with longer texts divided among groups) and engaging students in discussions about historical ideas and their relevance today. The class occasionally changes into lectures to provide general background for the discussed reading or to introduce extra texts that are not required for students to read. The workshops, led by another lecturer, focus on rhetorical methods, building critical arguments in both speech and writing. Additionally, they provide a more in-depth reading and critical evaluation of selected classical texts from the history of political thought.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Activity type | Category | Student learning and teaching hours\* |
| Lecture | Scheduled |  |
| Seminar | Scheduled | 45 |
| Tutorial | Scheduled |  |
| Project supervisor | Scheduled |  |
| Demonstration | Scheduled |  |
| Practical classes and workshops | Scheduled | 45 |
| Supervised time in studio/workshop | Scheduled |  |
| Fieldwork | Scheduled |  |
| External visits | Scheduled |  |
| Work based learning | Scheduled |  |
| Scheduled online learning | Scheduled |  |
| Other learning | Scheduled |  |
| Total scheduled |  | 90 |
| Placement | Placement |  |
| Independent study | Independent | 110 |
| Total student learning and teaching hours |  | 200 |

\*hours per activity type are indicative and subject to change.

**Assessment rationale: why has this assessment been used for this module?**

**The portfolio** (worth 60% of the final mark) ensures that students complete weekly source reading and are prepared to engage critically with the material. It comprises ten reactive notes (each 500 words), each addressing a specific source text..  Notes will be followed by feedback to help students improve their analytical and writing skills. These assessments are designed to track progress, reinforce regular learning, and distribute the workload evenly throughout the semester. They also provide opportunities to formulate arguments, demonstrate critical thinking and research skills, and communicate ideas effectively. LOs 1,2 3, and 5.

The reactive notes are submitted collectively as a single portfolio assessment, which constitutes 60% of the total module grade. Students are required to complete these notes regularly, following the schedule provided by the instructor at the beginning of the semester. This ongoing process enables students to receive continuous feedback and remain actively engaged throughout the module. Each individual note carries equal weight within the overall portfolio mark.

Students will be informed about the ethical considerations of AI usage in writing reactive notes and may use it only for improving language and writing style, fact-checking and cross-referencing.

**The written exam** (worth 40% of the final mark, 90 minutes). While the portfolio ensures that students read specific source texts for class discussions, the final exam is designed to verify their overall understanding of the module content. It consists of broad, essay-type questions that test students' knowledge and understanding of theories, concepts, and historical processes relevant to the study of political thought. LOs 4, 5 and 6.

**Assessment criteria: what criteria will be used to assess my work on this module?**

**Portfolio** primarily serve to ensure that students complete their homework regularly and come prepared for in-class discussions. The evaluation criteria, each carrying equal weight, are as follows: (1) Accuracy and understanding; (2) Relevance; (3) Background knowledge; (4) Clarity and coherence; (5) Quality of analysis.

**The final exam** features much broader and more challenging questions; therefore, its assessment is based on the following criteria: (1) Relevance and precision, i.,e., if the answer address exam questions with relevant, concise, well-structured responses: (2) Analytical depth and critical thinking; (3) Background knowledge and the ability to compare and contrast (4) Clarity and coherence, ensuring logical structure, readability, and effective communication. While writing quality is also considered, it holds less weight in the overall assessment.

The assessments will examine to what extent the student has demonstrated ability to:

* understand the fundamental ideas of ancient Greek and Roman political thought
* analyze the impact of Christianity (Judeo-Christian tradition) on late Roman and medieval political principles
* understanding of the fundamental changes in early modern thought, particularly the shift in political philosophy starting with Hobbes and continuing through to Kant
* construct logical, deductive arguments, ensuring that arguments are clear, coherent, and free from fallacies
* understand the birth and development of liberal thought, ensuring that students can critically engage with liberal ideas and demonstrate how these ideas have influenced modern political philosophy
* demonstrate a balanced understanding of liberal thought’s development and its consequences for contemporary political discourse

**Sources**

**Essential Reading**

* G.H. Sabine, G.H. (1973). *A History of Political Theory*. 4th ed. Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace College Publishers. Appropriate chapters for each class (textbook)
* Harvey Mansfield (2020), *A Student’s Guide to Political Philosophy*; (student resources)
* S. Toulmin, R. Rieke, A. Janik, 1979, *An Introduction to Reasoning*: McMillan.
* Weston, A., 2000. *A Rulebook for Arguments*. 3rd ed. Indianapolis: Hacket Publishing.

**Recommended Reading**

* Aristotle, *Politics,* book, 1-5, 7
* St. Augustine, *City of God*, books 11-14
* *Bible*, Genesis 1-9; 12: 1-5; Jeremiah, I: 4-5; Exodus, 19: 3-8; 20: 1-17; Deuteronomy, 5-6; 7: 7-16; Isaiah, 2; 10: 1-4, 11: 1-9; 44: 1-8; Mathew, 5; 22: 16-22; Mark 12: 13-17, (student resources)
* Condorcet, *Political Writings*, trans. S. Lukes
* Epictetus, *Enchiridion*, trans. By T. W. Higginson
* J. Kucharzewski (1948), *The Origins of Modern Russia*, introduction (student resources)
* Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*
* Machiavelli, *Prince,*  *Discourses on Livy*
* J. de Maistre, “On the Pope” in Ch. O. Blum, ed. (2020), *Critics of the Enlightenment* (student resources)
* Marsilius of Padua, *The Defender of Peace*, (student resources)
* K. Marx, *The Potable Marx*, (student resources)
* J. S. Mill *On Liberty*
* Polybius, *On Roman Imperialism*, trans. E. Shuckburgh (student resources)
* Plato, *Euthyphro. Apology. Crito. Phaedo. Phaedrus*, trans. H. N. Fowler, *The* *Republic,* trans. by A. Bloom
* Rousseau, *On the Social Contract*, reading part I-III
* Sun Tzu *Art of War* (any edition)
* Tocqueville, *On Democracy in America*; trans. H. Mansfield, *The Old Régime,* trans. G. Bevan
* E. Voegelin (1987), *New Science of Politics,* chap. I and VI (student resources)