

POLI 1001  
Fundamentals of Politics  
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MWF 10:30-11:20



*“Wilkommen, Bienvenue, Welcome  
Fremde, Etrager, Stranger  
Glücklich zu sehen; Je suis enchanté, Happy to see you  
Bleibe, reste, stay  
Wilkommen, Bienvenue, Welcome  
zu Cabaret, au Cabaret, to Cabaret”  
-The Master of Ceremonies, Cabaret*

## Overview

Fundamentals of Politics is an introductory class to the social scientific study of politics. However, that which we call “politics,” the study of group behavior and common life, involves a number of vastly different elements that require explanation and application. For instance, questions of mythology, religion, philosophy, and history all inform how humans live together – and how these orders can collapse or decline into tyranny. Thus, we endeavor to parse these concepts out as a class in order to gain a greater shared understanding of that which constitutes “politics” before you begin to apply these ideas in narrower ways as you develop in your collegiate life.

In this course, I want to help you all learn to encounter texts not merely as receptacles of information or data, but reflections of human endeavor. Nearly all peoples rely upon society, its laws, and its distribution of resources in some capacity. However, we often do not agree upon how these resources should be shared, how these laws should be interpreted, and even if the concept of civilization itself is a desirable one. Politics is the field whereby these questions are answered collectively, even if done so imprecisely or temporarily. Therefore, I intend to foster a learning environment that encourages collective engagement and discussion, such that we can see the connection between our ideals and our shared reality as a skill, not an abstraction.

## Evaluation

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: 10%
- Second Test :20%
- Third Test : 25%
- Final: 30%

## Topics and Readings

I only require the purchase of three books that we will read at various points in the semester; however, the rest may be found on Moodle or elsewhere online. As implied by this heading, many of the topics we will engage do not even require one to “read,” but to watch, listen, or explore.

Books recommended for Purchase:

- Edith Hamilton, *Mythology*
- Robert Heilbroner, *The Worldly Philosophers*
- Manfred Steger & Ravi K. Roy's, *Neoliberalism: A Very Short Introduction*

All three of these texts, especially the first two, can be found very cheaply and commonly. All other texts are available on Moodle.

## Topic One - The State

What is the state? What can it do? What should it do? Does it “do?” We will consider some preliminary topics as a class that can spark the political imagination.

Watch & Listen: Scenes from Bob Fosse's *Cabaret*

Watch: Raul Hilberg's interview with Claude Lanzmann about Nazi bureaucracy.

Read: Mancur Olson's article: “Dictatorship, Democracy, and Development”

Read: Chapter II of Robert Heilbroner's *The Worldly Philosophers*, “The Economic Revolution.”

## Topic Two - Myth and Tragedy

Some of the earliest depictions of the state and its activity are also the most poetic and important. The Ancient Greeks placed a great emphasis on political life in the city (*polis*) and its associated culture and norms (*Nomos*). These descriptions and works evoke the deep difficulty of maintaining political order in the midst of nature and history's radical uncertainty.

Watch: George Weidman on Greek mythology and the video game, *Hades*.

Read: Edith Hamilton's *Mythology*. Especially the sections on Pandora's Box, Prometheus, Achilles, and Odysseus.

Read: Sophocles's *Antigone*

Read: Euripides's *Hecuba*

**TEST ONE FOLLOWS TOPIC THREE**

## Topic Three - World Religions

While today's age and its obsession with technological and scientific progress appears secular, vast swaths of the world in America and beyond still adhere to different religious beliefs with wildly divergent implications for political life. Three of the most influential religious traditions are Christianity, practiced in the Americas, as well as Europe and much of the Middle East and Africa; Islam, practiced primarily in the Middle East, Africa, and Asia; and Confucianism, whose adherents mostly live in China. However, as we will see later in this course, the globalized nature of the world's economy brings these three traditions into contact - and indeed, conflict - with one another.

### Christianity:

Listen/Read: Dr. Cole reads from *Genesis* 1.

Read: *The Gospel according to St. Matthew*, Ch. 25; *Romans* Chs. 6, 13; Nicene Creed

Read: St. Augustine of Hippo, Parable of the Pirate and Emperor, *City of God*, Book IV

### Islam:

Listen: Yusuf Islam's *A is for Allah*

Explore: BBC's description of the Five Pillars of Islam

Watch: A scene from Spike Lee's *Malcolm X*, depicting X's conversion to Sunni Islam and adoption of the name "El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz."

### Confucianism:

Watch: The School of Life's overview of Confucius and Confucianism.

Read: The Stanford Encyclopedia's Entry on Confucius.

## Topic Four – A Brief Introduction to Philosophy and Political Economy

Philosophy, which develops out of the collapse of Classical Greek society at the end of the Peloponnesian War through the teachings of Socrates, seeks to provide a rational account of reality. Part of philosophy's scope is what Aristotle calls "the political." In a word, philosophy prior to the late eighteenth century considered the moral life as inseparable from the political life. And, that the nature of the good life can be ascertained through reason. However, upheavals in politics, technology, and commerce fundamentally change this formula, separating questions of economics from purely philosophical ones. Here, we will briefly investigate some of the most essential readings of Western political philosophy and political economy.

Read: Plato's *Phaedo*, *Gorgias*

Read: Aristotle's *Politics*, Books I, III, IV, V

Read: Ch. III of Heilbroner's *The Worldly Philosophers*, "The Wonderful World of Adam Smith"

Read: Ch. VI of Heilbroner's *The Worldly Philosophers*, "The Inexorable System of Karl Marx"

Read: "What the Germans Lack" from Nietzsche's *Twilight of the Idols*

### TEST TWO FOLLOWS SECTION FOUR

## Topic Five – America, an Unfinished Project

Among the most ambitious endeavors in human political history is the American Republic. Striving to preserve English notions of freedom and rule of law while certain jettisoning English political structures, primarily monarchy and titled aristocracy, the American Founders promised "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" for its citizens. However, the persistence of chattel slavery haunted this young nation, leading to a re-realization of its ideals during its Civil War. We will discuss how American ideals evolve over the span of the past two and a half centuries, with special attention given to Civil Rights leaders in the 1960s.

Read: The Federalist Papers, 10, 51, 84

Read/Listen: Lincoln's Gettysburg Address

Read: Martin Luther King, Jr.'s Letter from Birmingham Jail

Listen: Malcolm X's The Ballot or the Bullet

### TEST THREE FOLLOWS SECTION FIVE

## Topic Six - Neoliberalism

The past forty years of American political and economic development has been defined overwhelmingly by a fixation on free trade, welfare austerity, and free markets. However, a substantial number of philosophers, economists, and political activists argue that this focus on the economic organization of society undermines its social welfare and overall flourishing, reducing the state to its mere police and military functions. This part of the course evaluates the ideas of neoliberalism and its critics.

Watch: Ravi Roy introduce his book, *Neoliberalism: A Very Short Introduction*

Listen: David Harvey describe his book, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*

Read: Steger and Roy's *Neoliberalism: A Very Short Introduction* Chs. 1-3, 6

Explore: The West-Coates Debate

**FINAL ON DESIGNATED DATE (Fri., April 30, 10:00am - NOON)**

### Rules and Stipulations

I would like to begin by applauding each of you. 2020 was a very difficult year for most people and 2021 appears to follow in suit, to a lesser degree. To pursue a liberal education in light of these very drastic and uncertain times is laudable, noble even. But, more importantly, it shows me that you all possess what Friedrich Nietzsche calls the most admirable thing about a person - that one endures. Therefore, I know you are all capable of the collegiate quality work that I expect as you many of you transition away from Secondary education into higher learning.

This expectation of competence comes with an expectation of responsibility, however. Namely, that you can do the work and reading that is expected of you throughout this course. Yet, the uncertainty of our age remains: there will come times when you feel overwhelmed, face familial difficulties, and other exigencies that will make college a secondary concern. I understand these difficulties but would like you to be upfront with me about these issues. When such difficulties emerge, **email me** and we can arrange alternate due dates for certain assignments, discuss the class material and readings outside of class, etc. I would prefer these issues be handled **prior to** the due date.

However, I sometimes see a tendency among students to **overshare**. While understandable, I would like to maintain certain emotional and professional boundaries necessary to maintaining a collegiate teaching environment. Therefore, **use common sense and propriety** when contacting me. Manners and protocol protect you as much as they protect me.

Furthermore, if we agree to a certain alternative due date for an assignment or quiz, **please honor that arrangement**. Failure to do so will result in a **drastic reduction of credit** especially towards the end.

The study of politics is dear to me and I have greatly enjoyed teaching parts of this course in the past as a graduate student with other professors. I want to show each of you how deep this rabbit hole goes and how wonderful and frightening the cabaret can be. But only your continued participation and respect can ensure a productive and interesting semester. However, I have no doubt that each of you can attain that level of participation.

-ADC

## **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**

This is an integrative learning course in which student understanding and disposition build “across the curriculum and co-curriculum, from making simple connections among ideas and experiences to synthesizing and transferring learning to new, complex situations within and beyond the campus.” This course fulfills the Board of Regents area of social science/behavioral sciences and provides students experience with the ILC primary proficiency of inquiry and analysis and secondary proficiencies of ethical reasoning and civic engagement. Inquiry is a systematic process of exploring issues, objects or works through the collection and analysis of evidence that results in informed conclusions or judgments. Analysis is the process of breaking complex topics or issues into parts to gain a better understanding of them.