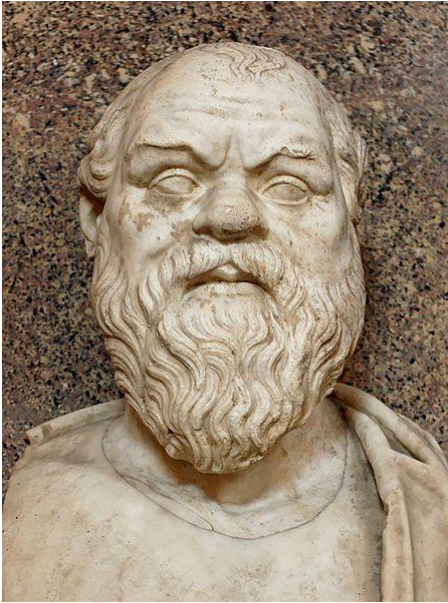


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# Course Overview for Western Political Thought

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## Background

For countless generations, humans have wrestled with the fundamental questions of existence. Why are we here? What is virtue? What is the proper form of government? How important are ideas? Is there a God? How should he/she/it/they be worshipped? Is there natural law? What relationship should the individual have with the state?

## Methods

In order to answer these questions, we will be grappling with primary sources—the writings of the Western tradition's greatest philosophical minds. Their arguments are both a statement of their beliefs as well as an invitation to argue and debate. How will we do this?

- 1) **Reading.** Every night, there will be a reading assignment. I know that you are all overstretched, so I will try not to make the assignment too long, but I do insist that you do it. The reading constitutes the heart of the class, so it is vital that you complete it.
- 2) **Questions.** After each reading, you will go to a specially designed Google Form and submit three questions. These should be questions are your chance to engage in a dialogue with the writer as well as the class; try to think deeply before you submit them. They also are your chance to demonstrate to me how well you have done the reading.
- 3) **Discussion.** In class, we will talk about what we have read and your questions will be how we are directed. That being said, I will occasionally hijack class time to lecture if I happen to have some specialized knowledge. I might also take time to introduce each thinker for a bit. Please note that DISCUSSION IS THE ESSENCE OF THIS COURSE! You MUST talk. See me if you think this will be a problem.
- 4) **Reflection.** After we finish a thinker, I will ask you to write a short reaction essay. Here you will have a chance to give your feelings about the thinker as well as an opportunity to celebrate or attack his ideas.
- 5) **Composition.** Throughout the term, I will ask you to demonstrate your knowledge by writing a more formal paper comparing some aspect of one or more thinkers that we have read.

## **Materials**

Almost without exception, we will be reading the primary sources (though we obviously have to make do with translations). I will very rarely give you information from a secondary source, but we will largely be looking at original works!

## **Tentative Reading List**

1. Excerpts from Thucydides
2. Various Presocratics
3. Socrates: Meno, Apology and Crito
4. Plato: Republic
5. Aristotle: Politics
6. Various Stoics
7. Augustine: Excerpts from City of God
8. Aquinas: Excerpts from Summa Theologica
9. Machiavelli: The Prince

This term, we will be purchasing Republic, Politics, and Prince from Barnes & Nobles. The total cost is expected to be about \$35. Please see me if you have financial concerns.

## **Grading Rubric**

Homework: 20%

Class Participation: 40%

Thought Papers: 40%

## **Sleep Policy**

I understand that Stuyvesant students work way too hard and take on far too many responsibilities. A lot of this is beyond your control as the college process becomes steadily more insane. As a result, you may occasionally fall asleep. If you do fall asleep, I will not be mad at you! But I will wake you up immediately—otherwise I will soon be presiding over a dormitory. The cure for this problem is getting more sleep at night—only sleep deprived people will fall asleep when they don't want to.

## **Laptop Policy**

Unless you have a special accommodation, I do not allow laptops to be used in my class. They place a screen-as-wall in between you and the rest of the class and also are portals to distraction and web-browsing. I will allow you to take notes on a tablet as long as it's flat on the desk and I can see what you are typing.

## **Also**

I will try to augment the material with articles or other interesting tidbits that I pick up. This is my eighth year teaching this course, but your input will be essential and will help me shape the course in years to come. My website, where all work and assignments can be found is at [polazzo.com](http://polazzo.com). If you want to contact me, DO NOT use my DOE address. The only address I will respond to is [mpolazzo@gmail.com](mailto:mpolazzo@gmail.com).

I hope that this course proves to be fun as well as enlightening!