



## Bachelor's courses Faculty of Social Sciences

VU University Amsterdam - Student- & Onderwijszaken - Exchange programme Vrije Universiteit - 2019-2020



# History of Political Thought

<b>Course code</b>	S_HPT ()
<b>Period</b>	Period 4
<b>Credits</b>	6.0
<b>Language of tuition</b>	English
<b>Faculty</b>	Faculty of Social Sciences
<b>Coordinator</b>	dr. P. Overeem
<b>Examinator</b>	dr. P. Overeem
<b>Teaching staff</b>	dr. P. Overeem
<b>Teaching method(s)</b>	Lecture,
<b>Level</b>	200

## Course objective

Knowledge and understanding – The student has acquired knowledge and understanding of:

- (1) the main theories of selected philosophers in the history of Western political thought;
- (2) the meaning of core political concepts (e.g., justice, state, sovereignty, liberty, democracy) and the ways in which they have been understood in the past and present.

Application – The student has acquired the competences to:

- (3) apply the skills of close reading and textual analysis to study the texts of selected and indeed non-selected political philosophers;
- (4) apply ideas and theories from the history of political thought to understand and analyze current political issues.

Making judgements – The student is able to:

- (5) provide well-argued critical reflections on the texts of selected political philosophers and on the normative questions they raise.

Communication – The student has acquired the skills to:

- (6) constructively engage in academic discussions on political philosophy texts and normative political questions;
- (7) write a short academic essay engaging with the ideas of political philosophers and developing an argument of its own.

## Course content

Political science is rooted in a tradition of normative reflection on the biggest political questions: How should we as human beings live and how should we live together? How should we rule or be ruled and how can we be free? Which form of government (if any) allows us best to achieve our personal and common goals? Such questions do not allow for easy answers, but they underlie the way in which politics in the Western world has been shaped (and studied) throughout history well into in our own time. Hence, a course on the history of political thought is a crucial part of any Political Science undergraduate program. It introduces students to a range of classical texts (from Plato up until the twentieth century) that offer highly influential answers to the questions mentioned. These texts can be called classical because they have been widely considered worthwhile for advancing political reflection and because the ideas expressed in them have shaped the principles and practices of politics as we know it. Studying them can ultimately help us to better understand rivaling political convictions,

including our own.

### **Form of tuition**

Interactive lectures (2 per week)

Note: attendance and active participation is highly recommended and will be rewarded. To make fruitful discussions possible, students who come to class must (!) have read the assigned text in advance. Students who are ill-prepared may be expelled from class. (This is also the case for the very first class of the course.)

### **Type of assessment**

Two exams with closed and open (essay) questions (both 50%)

Note: instructions for the exams and the possibilities for retakes will be detailed in the course guide.

### **Course reading**

Steven Cahn (2015), Political Philosophy: The Essential Texts. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Third edition or later. (An earlier edition will not suffice.) ISBN 978-0-19-020108-1.

Note: the book is available at the VU book store.

### **Target group**

1st year bachelor students in Political Science.

Also open as an elective course for Exchange Students.

### **Remarks**

This course is primarily devoted to the reading, interpretation, and discussion of important texts. Therefore, students should always bring the textbook with them when they come to class.