What is Politics?
HUM 2300-001
Thomas W. Smith, Ph.D.

Office Hours: It is best to contact my secretary for an appointment. (x96165 or Marie.Kelley@Villanova.edu)
Office: 304 Saint Augustine Center
Phone: (610) 519-7300
E-Mail: Thomas.W.Smith@Villanova.edu

Course Description
Many of us are turned off by political life. It is easy to understand why. People involved in politics have a reputation for being self-important, too ambitious and attracted to power, in the pockets of the wealthy and influential. Our system, some think, is increasingly unable to wrestle profitably with the great moral questions of our age. Yet, politics is a fundamentally important human activity. In fact, many of the authors we will read over the course of the semester argue that engaging politics in a healthy way is an important aspect of human flourishing.

This courses poses some basic questions about political life. What is politics? What can we hope to accomplish through it? What is justice? What is the common good? What sorts of human qualities do we need to cultivate in order to bring these about?

Texts
Available in Bookstore:
Augustine, City of God
Aquinas, Political Writings
Holzer (ed.), The Lincoln-Douglas Debates
Lowi, The End of the Republican Era
Maritain, The Person and the Common Good
Simon, A General Theory of Authority

Other texts will be available electronically through WEBCT

Course Requirements
Class Participation 35% of final grade
Since this is a seminar course, I expect a high level of preparation and participation in class. You cannot succeed in this course without thoroughly preparing the material in advance. You'll need (1) to read the material, (2) to be able to summarize what it says, (3) to explore potential holes and flaws in the arguments presented, (4) to present evidence that warrants your critical points, (5) to relate all of the above points to the questions at hand.
**Reaction Papers**  
30% of final grade  
Each week, each student will write a 1 to 2 page paper on the assigned reading. The paper should be in Times New Roman and double spaced.  
You must answer two questions in each short paper you write. First, what is the most important point the author is trying to make? Second, do you agree with the point – why or why not?  

**Research Paper**  
35% of final grade  
Each student will write a 5-7 page research paper articulating the way a particular policy problem or question would appear differently in light of the common good. Research topics have to be approved after meeting in person with the instructor.  

**Course Outline:**

I. **Introduction and Organization**  
   Wednesday August 23: Introduction and Organization  

II. **Politics in America: A (Very) Brief Overview**  
   Monday August 28: Lowi, *The End of the Republican Era*, Chapter 1  
   Wednesday August 30, Lowi, Chapter 2  

   Monday September 4: Labor Day No Classes  
   Wednesday September 6: Lowi, Chapter 3  
   Monday September 11: Lowi, Chapter 4  

III. **Is a Value-Neutral Polity Possible?**  
   Wednesday September 13: “Speech of Abraham Lincoln, Springfield, Illinois, June 16th, 1858” and Speech of Stephen A. Douglas, Chicago, July 9, 1858”.  
   Monday September 25: Plato’s *Republic*  
   Monday October 2: Same, and Aquinas, *Political Writings*, pp. 76-101  
   Wednesday October 4: Aquinas, *Political Writings*, pp. 114-126; 137-142; 149-152  

IV. **Is a Common Good Possible?**  
   Monday October 9 – Friday October 13: Fall Break  
   Monday October 16: Maritain, Chapters 3 and 4  
   Wednesday October 18: Berry, “Sex, Economy, Freedom, and Community.”
V. What is Needed for a Common Good?

A. A Spirituality of Political Life?

Monday October 23: Augustine, *City of God*, I.1, 8; II.20, 21; III.1; V: preface, and Chapters 1, 12-21, 24-26

Wednesday October 25: Augustine, *City of God*, X.1-3; 6; 14; XV.1; 4; XIX.first paragraph of chapter 1; 6-8; 11; 14-17; 21; 24-27

Monday October 30: same

B. Practical Reason and Authority?

Wednesday November 1: MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, Chapters 1, 2, and 12

Monday November 6: MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals*, Chapter 9

Wednesday November 8: MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals*, Chapters 10 and 11


Wednesday November 15: Simon, *General Theory of Authority* Chapter 3

Monday November 20: Simon, *General Theory of Authority*, Chapter 4

Wednesday November 22 – Friday November 24: Thanksgiving Recess

VI. Diversity, Identity, and Difference in Democracy

Monday November 27: Charles Taylor, “Multiculturalism”

Wednesday November 29: Seyla Benhabib, ed., *Democracy and Difference*, selections

Monday December 4: same

VII. Conclusion

Wednesday December 6

Monday December 11: Humanities Reading Day

Tuesday December 12: Reading Day