

Introduction to Political Philosophy, Fall '23, PSCI 104-1

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Office hours: M, 9:30-10:30 and 4:30-5:30; W, 1-2:00
By appointment, in person and zoom

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Class times: MWF 11:50-12:40

This course is an introduction to some of the major works of political theory in the Western tradition. Although generally written in response to historically specific concerns, political theories are also answers to a series of connected, fairly universal questions about the proper ordering of the political and social world. At the most general level, political theories pose and seek to answer questions about what political and social life is like and how it ought to be structured. For example, they answer questions about the sorts of challenges we as a community face (is the challenge to protect ourselves against outsiders? To make sure everyone lives a saintly life? To ensure everyone is happy?) or the proper distribution of political power (should priests rule? The aristocracy? Everyone?). Political theories answer these questions on the basis of a handful of doctrines. These doctrines are the basic constituents of a political theory. First, a political theory offers an account of the human good. This tells us what humans are like (are they rational, sinful, needy?) and what the basic values of human life are, such as whether life ought to be spent in preparation for salvation, whether it is a competition for glory, whether it is about spending our time helping others. Without such a doctrine, there is no reason to order our collective affairs in one way rather than another; if nothing in life is important it doesn't matter what the rules for collective living are. Second, political theories give an account of the nature of social and political life. For example, Plato argues that people are generally ignorant of their true good and, as a consequence, spend their lives trying to fulfill various unworthy desires. The consequence is that they lead terrible lives and that their societies and political systems are vipers' nests of mutual harm. Locke, in contrast, will argue that most people are reasonably intelligent about how they live their own lives and willing to abide by the rules necessary for a decent common life. However, Locke also thinks that reasonable people often disagree about what the rules of social life require in any given case. Moreover, he thinks that some people are not reasonable and are, consequently, willing to prey on others. Third, political theories offer some sort of diagnosis of what it would take to achieve the human good given what people and social and political life are like. To return to the Plato example, that people, when left to themselves, mistake their own interests and harm others suggests that someone needs to rule them and that it ought to be those who know the true interests of people. He argues, therefore, that those who know the good, philosophers, ought to rule society. Locke, alternately, believes that most people, because they are reasonably intelligent, ought to be free to live their lives as they see fit. But he also thinks that they will often disagree about what the rules of social life require in any given case and that not everyone is willing to abide by those rules. Consequently, he argues, people need a government to settle disputes and to protect against those willing to harm them. One of his puzzles is how to reconcile a government, which is a body of people that enforces its will through violence, with the good of individual freedom.

In this class, we are going to examine and compare the different accounts these canonical authors give of the human good, the nature of social and political life, and the political tasks facing us. This will require identifying and interpreting central passages in the texts we will be reading. Once, we have done this, we will think about whether the claims these authors make are reasonable or not. Last, we will discuss whether their theories as a whole are coherent and whether they help us make sense of the world in which we live. The point of this course, besides gaining insight into important areas of human concern (what could be more important than understanding what the human good is?), is to develop your ability to read and think critically. I hope that most of our sessions will consist of discussions, although, at times, I will lecture. I am looking forward to an enlightening and fun semester!

Readings:

I expect students to come to class, to have read the material assigned for that day, and to be ready to discuss it. Most of what you will get out of this, or any course, depends on this. I will supply all of the readings for this class. They will all be posted on a social e-reader called Perusall. There is a link to Perusall at the bottom of the course

homepage on Blackboard. Once in Perusall, you will see a list of the reading assignments for the course. Most of the work for this course will involve reading the assignments, reflecting upon them, and discussing them with your classmates (on Perusall and in class). I've given more details about how Perusall works below.

Grades are based on:

Two three-page papers, 10% each
Midterm (take-home), 10%
Final (in class), 30%
Perusall, 30% (I'll explain what this is in class)
Participation, 10%

Some points about your papers:

1. Establish a focus. A good paper has a thesis, a central idea or claim that it is making, and it presents an argument supporting that thesis. You should be able to make an outline of your paper, which will at the same time be the skeleton of the argument you are making. It is often helpful to write out the outline – in sentence form, not simply as a list of topics – before writing the paper or, at least, the final draft. A good way to think about your paper is to ask yourself, “What do I want my readers to believe after they have read my paper? What reasons can I offer them to think that?” If you can answer these questions succinctly, you're off to an excellent start.
2. Title. The title should express the main idea or focus of your paper, preparing your reader to see immediately what you're going to say, and why it's interesting.
3. Structure and organization. The paper should have a clear structure, with an introduction presenting the central question or problem you are addressing, a body that sets out a logical development of the reasons and evidence you are offering, and a conclusion that ties the paper together. In the longer paper it is often useful to provide section headings. The introduction should generally state your main thesis, and provide an overview of the structure of the argument, to make it easier for your reader to follow it.
4. Style. I expect your papers to be well-written. Your sentences should be simple and clear. You should avoid obvious errors; use spell check. You should write more than one draft. And you should proofread them before handing them in.
5. Guides. There are a number of excellent guides for good writing. Strunk and White *The Elements of Style* is a classic, especially for grammar and word usage; it also offers a useful set of “principles of composition.” I especially recommend Joseph Williams, *Style: Toward Grace and Clarity*. His work is particularly helpful in offering examples of how awkward passages can be rewritten, using rules or principles that are fairly concrete and address specific issues such as clarity, cohesion, emphasis, etc. (these are all chapter headings in his book). Anthony Weston, *A Rulebook for Arguments*, offers a helpful discussion of how to develop (and express) an argument in a tight, logical way.
6. Grading. “B” papers will fulfill the foregoing criteria adequately. “A” papers will do more. They will not only be clearly and forcefully written, but they will show evidence of deep engagement with the issues. They will argue something interesting, and thought-provoking.

How Perusall Works

I have not placed any book orders with the bookstore. I will be supplying the books for this course (with a few exceptions – in some courses, there will be one or two books you need to buy) through an online reading software package called “Perusall.” All of the reading assignments for the semester must be completed through this online software package, which you can access by clicking on the Perusall link on the bottom of the course's Blackboard homepage.

Reasons I am doing this: *Perusall* helps you master readings faster, understand the material better, and get more out of the class. To achieve this goal, you will be collaboratively annotating the readings with others in the class. The help you'll get and provide your classmates (even if you don't know anyone personally) will get you past confusions quickly and will make the process more fun. While you read, you'll receive rapid answers

to your questions, help others resolve their questions (which also helps you learn), and advise me, the instructor, how to make class time most productive. You can start a new annotation thread in *Perusall* by highlighting text, asking a question, or posting a comment; you can also add a reply or comment to an existing thread. Each thread is like a chat with one or more members of your class, and it happens in real time. Your **goals** in annotating each reading assignment are 1. to stimulate discussion by posting good questions or comments, 2. to help others by answering their questions, and 3. to identify and evaluate the main claims in the piece.

Rubric: Research shows that by annotating thoughtfully, you'll learn more and get better grades, so here's what "annotating thoughtfully" means: Effective annotations *deeply engage points/arguments in the readings, stimulate discussion, offer informative questions or comments, and help others by addressing their questions or confusions*. To help you connect with classmates, you can "mention" a classmate in a comment or question to have them notified by email (they'll also see a notification immediately if online), and you'll also be notified when your classmates respond to your questions. For each assignment I will evaluate the annotations you submit on time (see below). Based on the overall body of your annotations, you will receive a score for each assignment as follows

10 = demonstrates **exceptionally thoughtful and thorough reading of the entire** assignment; student has engaged with others, asked questions others want answered, answers questions, and made important insights.

7-9 = **demonstrates thoughtful and thorough reading of the entire assignment**; occasionally engages with others, asks questions, and so forth. Some comments state the obvious or are the equivalent of saying "amen" or just free associating, as when someone says, "based off of what he said, I think" and then goes on to talk about something only tangentially related to the question or issue at hand.

4-6 = demonstrates superficial reading of the entire assignment Or thoughtful reading of only part of the assignment; comments state the obvious, are trivial, often irrelevant.

<4 = demonstrates superficial reading of only part of the assignment; comments state the obvious, are trivial, often irrelevant.

How many annotations do I need to enter?

When I look at your annotations I want them to reflect the effort you put in your study of the text. It is unlikely that that effort will be reflected by just a few thoughtful annotations per assignment. At the other extreme, 30 per assignment is too many, unless a number of them are superficial or short comments or questions (which is fine, because it is OK to engage in chat with your peers). Somewhere in between these two extremes is about right and, thoughtful questions or comments that stimulate discussion or thoughtful and helpful answers to other students' questions will earn you a higher score for the assignment. Note, also, that to lay the foundation for understanding the in-class activities, you must familiarize yourself with each assignment *in its entirety*. Failing to read and annotate across the entire assignment will result in a lower score.

What does "on time" mean?

The work done in class depends on you having done the reading in advance, so it is necessary to complete the reading and post your annotations before the deadline to receive credit. I allow a late annotation period of two days during which the credit for your annotations linearly decreases from 100% at the deadline to 0% at the end of the late annotation period. Similarly, to encourage you to talk to each other, there is a reply window after each deadline during which you can continue to reply, for full credit, to questions posted by others. However, the number of additional points you can earn after the deadline is capped at the credit you receive for annotations made on that assignment before the deadline.

Aug 30	Introduction
Sept 1	Plato, <i>Republic</i> , Book I, especially 343b-345e, 351e-354b
Sept 6	Plato, <i>Republic</i> , Book II, especially 358-68, 370a-b, 374b-d
Sept 8	Plato, <i>Republic</i> , 412b-417, 419a-421c, 427a-445, 449a-457c,
Sept 11	Plato, <i>Republic</i> , 471c-480, 484-490, 499a-521b
Sept 13	Plato, <i>Republic</i> , 543a-545b, 557-592
Sept 15	Machiavelli, <i>The Prince</i> , pp. 8-34
Sept 18	Machiavelli, <i>The Prince</i> , pp. 35-67
Sept 20	Machiavelli, <i>The Prince</i> , finish
Sept 22	Hobbes, <i>Leviathan</i> , skim introduction and read chs. 1-5
Sept 25	Hobbes, <i>Leviathan</i> , chs. 6-9
Sept 27	Hobbes, <i>Leviathan</i> , chs. 10-16
Sept 29	Hobbes, <i>Leviathan</i> , chs. 17-21 (especially 17, 18, and 21)
Oct 2	Hobbes, <i>Leviathan</i> , chs. 24-30 (especially 26, 29, and 30)
Oct 4	Hobbes conclusion
Oct 5	First paper due!
Oct 6	Locke, <i>Second Treatise on Government</i> , pp. 267-85, especially chs. 1-2
Oct 9	Locke, <i>Second Treatise on Government</i> , pp. 285-318, esp. chs. 5 and 6
Oct 11	Locke, <i>Second Treatise on Government</i> , pp. 318-53, esp. chs. 8 and 9
Oct 13	Locke, <i>Second Treatise on Government</i> , pp. 354-84, esp. chs. 11, 13, and 15
	Fall break!
Oct 17	Take-home midterm due
Oct 18	Locke, <i>Second Treatise on Government</i> , pp. 384-428, esp. chs. 18 and 19
Oct 20	Rousseau, <i>Discourse on the Origin and the Foundations of the Inequality among Men</i> , Part 1(excluding Preface and Exordium) – Make sure to read the footnotes! They are essential to understanding the text.
Oct 23	Rousseau, <i>Discourse on the Origin and the Foundations of the Inequality among Men</i> , Part 2
Oct 25	Rousseau, <i>Of the Social Contract</i> , Bks 1-2

- Oct 27 Rousseau, *Of the Social Contract*, Bk 3
- Oct 30 Rousseau, Bk 4, chs. 1-3, 7-9
- Nov 1 Marx, “Estranged Labor” and “Private Property and Communism,” from *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*, pp. 70-93, in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 2nd edition.
- Nov 3 Marx, “The Meaning of Human Requirements” and “The Power of Money in Bourgeois Society,” from *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*, pp. 93-105, in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 2nd edition.
- Nov 6 Marx, “On the Jewish Question,” pp. 26-52, in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 2nd edition.
- Nov 8 G. A. Cohen, chs. 1-2, *Why Not Socialism?*
- Nov 10 G. A. Cohen, chs. 3-5, *Why Not Socialism?*
- Nov 13 Marx, “Manifesto of the Communist Party 469-91
- Nov 15 Marx, “Manifesto of the Communist Party,” pp. 491-500
- Nov 17 Mill, chs. 1-2, *On Liberty*.
- Nov 20 Mill, ch. 3, *On Liberty*.
- Nov 22 **Second paper due!**
- Happy Thanksgiving!**
- Nov 27 Mill, chs. 4-5, *On Liberty*.
- Nov 29 Mill, chs. 1-2, *On the Subjection of Women*.
- Dec 1 Mill, ch. 3 *On the Subjection of Women*.
- Dec 4 Mill, ch. 4, *On the Subjection of Women*.
- Dec 6 Nietzsche, Preface and Essays 1, in *On the Genealogy of Morality*. You can skim secs. 3, 5, and 8 of Essay 1.
- Dec 8 Nietzsche, Essay 2, in *On the Genealogy of Morality*.
- Dec 11 Nietzsche, Essay 3, esp. secs. 11-15, 28, in *On the Genealogy of Morality*
- Dec 13 Nietzsche, “The Greek State” and “Homer’s Contest”