

CONTEMPORARY POLITICAL THEORY

This course is specifically designed to introduce students to the work and works of contemporary political theorists. The emphasis is on political theory as it is practiced in the Anglo-American tradition. Contemporary political theory emerges as a series of restatements, illuminations, and critical perspectives on the classical liberalism that has characterized political philosophy for the last five centuries. Classical liberalism, articulated in thinkers like Hobbes, Locke, Kant, and Mill emphasizes the rational, rights-bearing individual as the norm to be aspired to and realized and the political structures devised by human reason for the protection and realization of that rational, rights-bearing individual. Classical liberalism assumes a relationship between property and freedom, gives voice to a preference for rule by the governed (now, “democracy”), and suggests a liberation of human possibilities that it has had difficulty accommodating. In this course, we will see how some of the best contemporary political theorists have articulated these issues and how they have addressed the questions raised by these assumptions. As is always the case with any form of theory or philosophy, the questions here are more enduring and interesting than the answers that derive from asking them.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES: Students will learn how to read philosophical works critically. Through reading assignments, discussion, and written assignments the student will become familiar with various approaches to problems in modern political theory and how those attitudes shape our own. The format of the class is lecture and discussion. All discussion and written work in the class is intended to develop students' critical thinking, reading and writing skills. As you do the classwork, as you read, write essays, study, and prepare for examinations, you should keep in mind that the assigned work in this class is intended to help you develop your skills in the following ways:

1) Recognizing IDEAS/FACTS, that is, develop the ability to recognize key ideas and facts.
 --key *terms* and their *meanings* (including how those meanings differ across periods and thinkers)
 --*who* wrote *what*
 --what it *says*

2) Making CONNECTIONS, that is, develop the ability to see connections between and among ideas and the ability to see *how* an author says what s/he says:
 --recognition of the *structure* of the author's discussion (what steps are involved in the way s/he tries to explain his or her position or persuade the reader?)
 --recognition of the *assumptions* that inform the development of ideas
 --recognition of the relative *weight* of ideas (e.g., what is the main *idea*? what are the supporting *ideas*?)

3) Using EXTENSIONS, that is, develop the ability to extend the ideas beyond their context, that is, to make use of them in your own thought without distorting them or violating their meaning.
 --what are the implications of the author's position and the way s/he makes the argument?
 --what did the author leave out?
 --what value may we derive from the author's discussion?

The development of a critical voice means attending to each of these—IN ORDER. You cannot critique an argument unless and until you can make and defend it on its own terms. A concerted effort at understanding is the minimum requirement of a student of political theory and the mere baseline of what you will be asked to do in this course.

TEXTBOOK: The edition of this text was carefully chosen and is required for the course. Students choosing to use a different or earlier edition are solely responsible for any reconciliation of differences.

--Bailey, et.al., editors, *The Broadview Anthology of Social and Political Thought, Volume Two: The Twentieth Century and Beyond* (Broadview Press, 2008)

CANVAS: All written and graded assignments will appear on Canvas. Assignments can be found under the “Syllabus,” “Assignments,” and “Modules” tabs on the Course page. All written and graded work will be submitted via Canvas. Students will also find supplementary handouts and readings on Canvas. All modules, essays, and attendance/participation grades are weighted as part of your final grade.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS: Grading is done on a 10-point scale: A = 90-100; B = 80-89; C = 70-79, etc. The formal requirements of the course and their relative impact on your final grade are as follows:

1) Class Attendance/Participation/Group Reflections

6%

Political theory necessarily involves discussion, and, in that vein, discussion involves taking cues from gestures, tone of voice, etc. To serve this end, you are expected to attend our class meetings regularly and to participate in our class discussions, including periodic group work. Bring your text, your understanding of the readings, your questions, your answers, and your insights to class meetings and be ready to articulate and discuss them.

(2) Modules: Readings and Assignment Worksheets

4 Modules (4 x 11% each) = 44%

The course is divided into 4 units or modules. You can find the modules under the “Modules” tab on the course’s Canvas page. Each module consists of several reading assignments (listed below in the syllabus). Each module is also divided into worksheet assignments. Each worksheet assignment refers to specific readings and includes an *Assignment Worksheet* that must be completed in the week that it is assigned. *These assignments cannot be made up.*

The Assignment Worksheets consist of three (3) Analytical Questions about the readings. You will be asked to read the assigned texts and answer the accompanying questions. USING ONLY THE TEXTS WE READ and in your own words, respond to each question in a coherent, comprehensive paragraph (no lists!) of neither more nor less 100 words each. Be clear, comprehensive, and don’t waste words). *Missed worksheets cannot be made up.*

(3) Semester Essay and (20%) and Final Essay (30%)

50%

Students will be asked to write analytical essays on some aspect of the class material using specific works we have read. These WILL NOT be research papers. Students are expected to limit themselves to the material we have read and discussed and to demonstrate their own substantial analytical abilities. The semester essay will be 2 full pages in length, uploaded to Canvas as a Word doc (double-spaced, 12-point font, Times New Roman, etc.), and the final essay will be comprehensive and 3 full pages in length (Word doc, double-spaced, 12-point font, Times New Roman) uploaded to Canvas. See the assignments for further instructions. Below are some guidelines for writing your essays:

WARNING: IGNORE THE FOLLOWING PAPER GUIDELINES AT YOUR PERIL:

(1) DO NOT try to avoid addressing the issues by talking about the author’s writing style, difficulty, etc. In this class, as in all of your classes in political science, *you are considered a professional willing to work to understand difficult material.* You can always ask the teacher for help, too, but do it BEFORE the day you turn in your paper.

(2) Write in reasoned, professional terms. Use your best English: there is no excuse for misspellings; make sure all of your sentences have subjects, verbs, and objects; make sure they match in number; do not use contractions; write in paragraphs (change to a new *but related* thought = new paragraph) above all, do not write the way you speak! Write like a professional.

(3) Focus on one or two ideas or issues that are common to all the readings. Do not simply rehearse the argument of the author—in the space allotted, you do not have the time! Your task is to discuss the readings in terms of the one or two most important ideas or issues that you have identified. As a start, consider the issues raised in our discussions in class and where this author/idea fits. *Add your own insights where appropriate. Raise questions and critical issues—do not rant.*

(4) These are NOT research papers. Limit yourself to the texts before you. The assignment is designed to get you to read closely, carefully, and analytically. Resist the urge to run to the internet. Force yourself to deal with the text, come to some understanding of the issues raised, and craft your own argument.

SYLLABUS/READING SCHEDULE

READINGS: *Students are expected to come to class having read the reading assigned for that day's class. STUDENTS ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR ALL MATERIAL IN THE READINGS—WHETHER THERE IS EXPRESS DISCUSSION OF IT IN CLASS OR NOT—AND THE LECTURES/DISCUSSIONS.*

Questions about all material are always welcome and should form the lion's share of our experience in this course.

GRADED ASSIGNMENTS: *Students are responsible for turning in assignments on-time. All assignments may be found on Canvas and may be accessed through either the "Modules" link, the "Assignments" link, or the "Syllabus" link. Work for each module will be turned in on Canvas. PAY CAREFUL ATTENTION TO DUE DATES AND TIMES. Most Worksheets are due by the end of the week (Sunday at 11:59pm) they are assigned. Assignments will be closed thereafter. Students are strongly encouraged to read ahead and to turn in their Worksheet Assignments before the Sunday deadline.*

16 Jan T *General Introduction and Contemporary Political Philosophy*

Module 1: Power--Self/Other/Community

18 Jan Th *John Rawls and Contemporary Political Philosophy*
Read: Rawls, selections from *A Theory of Justice* (pp. 265-273; 278-81; 287-96)

23 Jan T *John Rawls*
Read: Rawls, selections from *A Theory of Justice* (pp. 265-273; 278-81; 287-96)

25 Jan Th *John Rawls*
Read: Rawls, selections from *A Theory of Justice* (pp. 265-273; 278-81; 287-96)

30 Jan T *Michael Sandel*
Read: Sandel, "The Procedural Republic and the Unencumbered Self" (pp. 384-391)

01 Feb Th *Michael Sandel*
Read: Sandel, "The Procedural Republic and the Unencumbered Self" (pp. 384-391)

06 Feb T *John Rawls*
Read: Rawls, "The Idea of an Overlapping Consensus" (pp. 296-311)

08 Feb Th *John Rawls*
Read: Rawls, "The Idea of an Overlapping Consensus" (pp. 296-311)

→Worksheet Due, Sunday 11 February @ 11:59pm

Module 2: Expanding Notions of the Political Self and Its Spaces

13 Feb T *Susan Moller Okin*
Read: Okin, "Justice as Fairness for Whom?" (pp. 489-501)

15 Feb Th *Susan Moller Okin*
Read: Okin, "Justice as Fairness for Whom?" (pp. 489-501)

20 Feb T *Susan Moller Okin*
Read: Okin, "Justice as Fairness for Whom?" (pp. 489-501)

22 Feb Th *Iris Marion Young*
Read: Young, "Impartiality and the Civic Public" (pp. 202-216)

→**Semester Essay Due, Sunday 25 February @ 11:59pm**

27 Feb T *Iris Marion Young*
Read: Young, "Impartiality and the Civic Public" (pp. 202-216)

29 Feb Th *Young and Nussbaum*
Read: Young, "Impartiality and the Civic Public" (pp. 202-216)
Read: Nussbaum, "Human Capabilities, Female Human Beings" (pp. 453-474)

05 Mar T *Martha Nussbaum*
Read: Nussbaum, "Human Capabilities, Female Human Beings" (pp. 453-474)

07 Mar Th *Martha Nussbaum*
Read: Nussbaum, "Human Capabilities, Female Human Beings" (pp. 453-474)

→**Worksheet Due, FRIDAY 08 March @ 11:59pm**

11-15 Mar SPRING BREAK—no class meetings

Module 3: Reconfiguring Political Power

19 Mar T *Max Weber*
Read: Weber, "Politics as a Vocation" (pp. 52-61)

21 Mar Th *Carl Schmitt*
Read: Schmitt, from *The Concept of the Political* (pp. 62-69)

26 Mar T *Frantz Fanon*
Read: Fanon, from *The Wretched of the Earth* (pp. 190-201)

28 Mar Th **[NO CLASS MEETING: LeBLANC at WPSA]** *Hannah Arendt*
Read: Arendt, from *The Human Condition*, Ch. 28, Power and the Space of Appearance. (pp. 86-90)

→**Worksheet Due, Sunday 31 March @ 11:59pm**

02 Apr T *Hannah Arendt*
Read: Arendt, from *The Human Condition*, Ch. 28, Power and the Space of Appearance. (pp. 86-90)

04 Apr Th *Hannah Arendt*
Read: Arendt, from *The Human Condition*, Ch. 28, Power and the Space of Appearance. (pp. 86-90)

09 Apr T *Hannah Arendt*
Read: Arendt, "On the Nature of Totalitarianism: An Essay in Understanding" (pp. 90-106)

11 Apr Th *Hannah Arendt*
Read: Arendt, "On the Nature of Totalitarianism: An Essay in Understanding" (pp. 90-106)

Module 4: Power as Discipline and Diffusion

16 Apr T *Michel Foucault*
Read: Foucault, Lecture Two: "14 January 1976" (pp. 132-139)

18 Apr Th *Michel Foucault*
Read: Foucault, Lecture Two: "14 January 1976" (pp. 132-139)

→Worksheet Due, SUNDAY 21 April @ 11:59pm

23 Apr T *Michel Foucault*
Read: Foucault, Lecture Two: "14 January 1976" (pp. 132-139)

25 Apr Th *Conclusion and Review*

30 Apr T FINAL ESSAY DUE on Canvas @ 11:00am

IMPORTANT: This syllabus reflects the minimum requirements of our professional relationship over the course of this semester. By staying in this class, you signify that you understand the contents of this syllabus and you agree to the terms and conditions stated herein.

Notes on Classroom Etiquette or THE RULES

--Class starts promptly. Be here on time. After the first week or so of the semester, you WILL be denied entry if you arrive more than 5 minutes late. Late arrival is disruptive to the classroom experience of your classmates and, perhaps even your professor. In any case, it works against the mission of the classroom. To this end, I suggest you not drive from class to class—gas is too expensive, and we could all use the exercise.

--The format of the class is lecture and conversation. The classroom is a safe place to ask questions. But they should be questions that derive from work with and in the material and NOT because you did not do the assignment.

--You will not read newspapers, textbooks, or study for other classes while in this class. If you do so, you will be asked to leave—and in no uncertain terms.

--Turn all cellphones and other electronic devices off (or set to vibrate) for the duration of class. You are not to accept calls or engage in text messaging during class. If you do so, I will confiscate your device. If you are awaiting a call or message of extreme importance, I suggest you skip class and accept the consequences.

--You may use a laptop, but only for the purpose of taking notes. If I catch you surfing the web, playing games, or engaged in some other activity not related to the work of the class, you will lose your laptop privileges.

--You are responsible for material missed due to absence. I suggest you exchange notes with other responsible students in any case, but particularly if you have to miss. I am happy to answer questions about this material but will not rehearse my lectures or our class discussions.

--Some semesters, life gets in the way. Should you have one of these semesters, I am more than happy to talk to you about what to do. But if the trauma is too great, I strongly suggest you drop one or all your courses. Your education is vitally important, but there are things that outrank even education sometimes—and *you must make that call when it is necessary*. I cannot grade you on how well or poorly you deal with your life at given moments. Your grades reflect your performance in class—not how well you are dealing with other things. I wish all of us a semester in which these things aren't issues.