Political Science 150.03: Introduction to Political Thought

Fall 2019
Maybank Hall 207
T/R, 8:00-9:15 am

Instructor: Dr. Briana L. McGinnis
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Office Hours: Tuesdays 2pm-5pm, additional hours available by appointment.
Office Location: 26 Coming Street, Room 101

Prerequisites: None

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Objectives: This course offers you an opportunity to familiarize yourself with important texts and foundational concepts in the history of political thought. In addition to becoming conversant with “the canon,” loosely (but thoughtfully) interpreted, you will be expected to engage these concepts critically, with an eye to both what they meant in their own historical contexts and to what insights they can continue to offer us today.

The guiding concept in this class is the idea of “justice,” and specifically political justice. Questions to consider include:

- Does political justice differ from moral goodness? If so, how?
- Why do we engage in politics? Why should we participate politically?
- What are rights, and on what basis should we claim or recognize them?
- What makes a good regime?
- What should constitute “the political,” and what relationship should that have to everyday life?
- What is a good citizen? Does being a good citizen conflict with being a good person?
- What is the proper relationship between the individual and society?

This course will introduce you to political theory, or the normative branch of the study of politics. “Normative” refers to questions rooted in matters of “ought.” Political theory evaluates political practices, institutions, and principles. In this class, we will explore the ideas underlying politics, both historically and in the present.

Learning Outcomes:

Upon successful completion of this course, students will be able to:
• **Demonstrate knowledge** of key thinkers and concepts over time (exams and papers)
• **Compare thinkers** on similar concepts (papers and exam essays)
• **Use concepts** to analyze new situations (short writing assignments, papers, exam essays)
• **Evaluate interpretations** of concepts (papers and exam essays)
• **Explain** the nature and value of normative thinking (papers and exam essays)

**POLICIES**

**Academic integrity**
Note that written assignments in this course will be screened by plagiarism-detecting software. Please review the College of Charleston’s academic honor code, available here: [http://studentaffairs.cofc.edu/honor-system/studenthandbook/index.php](http://studentaffairs.cofc.edu/honor-system/studenthandbook/index.php)

Please note that it is not permissible to turn in work for this class that was produced for another class without prior approval.

**Technology usage**
- Devices must be set to “silent” during class
- During exams, phones must be **powered off**.
- The usage of computers and tablets is permitted with instructor permission. Computers and tablets may be used on days with readings posted on OAKS, but this policy will change if they prove to be distracting.
- I encourage you to take notes by hand for this course – we will be interacting closely with the readings and you should be making notations on the text as you read and discuss.

**Attendance**
Attendance will be recorded. You cannot participate actively in this class if you are not present. You may miss no more than three class meetings – any additional absences will affect your grade.

Everything in the class – including the content of class discussions – may appear on exams, so be certain to be in class for those discussions and to be engaged.

Designated meetings will be used for class discussion of that week’s readings and themes. Everything in the class – including the content of class discussions – may appear on exams, so be certain to be in class for those discussions and be engaged. On Discussion days, come prepared with a passage from that week’s readings that you would like to discuss. I will choose students at random to read their passage aloud to the class and explain briefly why they believe it to be significant.
I reserve the right to introduce unscheduled ("pop") reading quizzes if it becomes apparent that the class is not completing assigned readings. Those grades will be calculated as part of your participation grade.

**Syllabus**
This syllabus is a guide and it contains vital information about the class. Please read it carefully. This syllabus is subject to change.

**GRADING AND EVALUATION**

**Grading scale**
A (93-100)
A- (90-92)
B+ (87-89)
B (84-86)
B- (80-83)
C+ (77-79)
C (74-76)
C- (70-73)
D+ (67-69)
D (64-66)
D- (60-63)
F (0-59)

**ASSIGNMENTS**
There are 1000 points to be earned in this course. The distribution of the points is listed below.

- **Midterm I** 150 (15%)
- **Midterm II** 200 (20%)
- **Final exam** 250 (25%)
- **Short writing assignment** 100 (10%)
- **Applying the ideas: Story analysis** 150 (15%)
- **Participation** 150 (15%)
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  Your participation grade will depend, in large part, on your being prepared with a passage when called upon in discussion meetings. Preparing a passage for each discussion class is required.

**Extra Credit**
Extra credit is available. You may attend any Political Science Department event at the College of Charleston (talk, etc.) and write a 300-500 word response to it. Each response is worth 10 points. You may turn in a maximum of five extra credit assignments over the course of the semester. Please turn them in to the Extra Credit Dropbox folder on OAKS. Talks in other departments (sociology, anthropology, history, African American Studies, Latin American and Caribbean Studies, etc.) may also qualify. Please request authorization for talks outside of the Political Science Department.

ACCOMMODATIONS

Religious Holidays
Every effort will be made to avoid conflicts between assignments and religious holidays. If, however, you encounter such a conflict, please notify your me as soon as possible (and certainly within the first two weeks of class to allow time for accommodations to be made). Please review the College of Charleston’s statement here: http://academicaffairs.cofc.edu/documents/procedures-and-practices/statement-of-accommodation.pdf

Disability accommodations
The College will make reasonable accommodations for persons with documented disabilities. Students should apply at the Center for Disability Services/SNAP, located on the first floor of the Lightsey Center, Suite 104. Students approved for accommodations are responsibility for notifying me as soon as possible and for contacting me one week before accommodation is needed. Please see me during office hours to discuss accommodations.

REQUIRED TEXTS

This course uses one required text:

All other readings will be posted in PDF form on OAKS or available free of charge online.

COURSE SCHEDULE
I. What is Justice? What is Injustice?
Week 1
08/20 Introduction to Class

08/22 Defining Justice I: Justice as a virtue, as a set of practices, a structure, or a set of relations.
Week 2
08/27 Giving Injustice Its Due
   Reading: Judith Shklar, “Giving Injustice Its Due” from *The Faces of Injustice*, 15-50 available on OAKS. Recommended: Introduction (1-15)

08/29 Discussion of Plato, Aristotle, Shklar and ways of thinking about justice
   Prepare to discuss a passage from the reading.

Week 3
II. Why Care About Justice? The Irrelevance of the Ethical to Politics

09/03 Political Concerns and the Will of the Strongest

09/05 Politics and Power
   Reading: Carl Schmitt, from *The Concept of the Political* (OAKS) on page 1072) Section 257-260

Week 4
09/10 Realpolitik
   Reading: Machiavelli, from *The Prince*, BASPT 343-362; 362-375

09/12 Discussion of Morality, power, and realpolitik
   Prepare to discuss a passage from the reading

Week 5
III. Justice as the Rule of Law
09/17 Keeping Order I

*** Short Writing Assignment Due by Beginning of Class ***

09/19 Discussion of Hobbes and Locke, preview of the Social Contract
   Prepare to discuss a passage from the reading

Week 6
IV. Justice as Keeping Promises
09/24 Making Compacts
   Reading: Hobbes, *Leviathan* BASPT, 475-490; Locke, from *Second Treatise*. BASPT, 496-510, 517-530; 551-561

09/26 *** MIDTERM I ***
Week 7
10/01  The Social Contract II: Rousseau and Hume

10/03 Discussion: Contracts and Constructs
   Prepare to discuss a passage from the reading
   ***Review Instructions for Short Story Critical Reflection, Available on OAKS***

Week 8
V. Justice as Paying Debts and Giving Each What They are Owed
10/08 Desert
   Reading: Reading: David Schmidtz, *Elements of Justice*, 31-103 (OAKS)

10/10 The Limits of Obligation
   Reading: George Kateb, “The Liberal Contract: Individualism, War, and the Constitution” 
   (OAKS)

Week 9
10/15: Fall Break, no class

10/17: Discussion: Obligation, reciprocity, and the idea of debt
   ***Discussion: “The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas”***
   Prepare to discuss a passage from the reading

Week 10
VI. Justice as the Good of the Many vs. the Good of the Individual
10/22 Individualism
   Henry David Thoreau, from Civil Disobedience, BAPST 974-980; Alexis de Tocqueville, 
   966-974
   ***MIDTERM II DUE AT BEGINNING OF CLASS***

10/24 Utilitarianism: Bentham and Mill
   Reading: BAPST 876-881, 895-900; 931-941, 916-27

Week 11
VII. Justice as Equality
10/29 The Foundations of Women’s Equality I
   Reading: Olympe de Gouges, from *Declaration of the Rights of Woman and the Female 
   Citizen*, BAPST 781-785; Angelina Grimke, *Letters on the Equality of Sexes and the 
   Condition of Women*, Letters 1-4 (OAKS).

10/31 Foundations of Women’s Equality II
   Reading: Harriet (Hardy) Taylor Mill, BASPT 955-962, Sojourner Truth, BAPST 963-965
*** SHORT STORY REFLECTION DUE BY BEGINNING OF CLASS***

Week 12
11/05 Discussion: Equality and Gender
   **Prepare to discuss a passage from the reading**

11/07 Oppression I: Structural Oppression
   Reading: Iris Marion Young, “Five Faces of Oppression” (OAKS)

Week 13
11/12 Oppression and Racial Equality I: Epistemic Equality and Tone Policing
   Reading: Selections by Frederick Douglass (OAKS); Martin Luther King, Jr., “Letter from Birmingham Jail” (OAKS)

11/14 Oppression and Racial Equality II: The Experience of Oppression and Its Invisibility
   Reading: Selections by W.E.B. DuBois (OAKS); Angela Y. Davis, “From the Prison of Slavery to the Slavery of Prison: Frederick Douglass and the Convict Lease System” (OAKS).

Week 14
11/19 Discussion: Oppression, Equality, and Race
   **Prepare to discuss a passage from the reading**

VII. Concluding Thoughts: The Elusiveness of Justice and the Purpose of Political Theory
11/21 Ways of Thinking about Justice: Ideal vs. Non-Ideal theory
   Reading: **Skim**: Selections by John Rawls, (OAKS); Jacob T. Levy, “There is No Such Thing as Ideal Theory” (OAKS)

Week 15

11/26 Wrap-Up and Review Session

11/28 Thanksgiving Break, No Class