Political Science 150: Introduction to Political Thought

Spring 2019
Maybank Hall 207
MWF, 8:00-8:50 am

Instructor: Dr. Briana L. McGinnis
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Office Hours: Monday 11 a.m.-1 p.m., additional hours available on Wednesday or Friday 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%)
  * A note on the final exam: The final exam will be an open-book essay exam centered on Antigone. We will discuss Antigone in class, but be certain to have familiarized yourself well with the text prior to the final.
Short writing assignment 100 (10%)
Applying the ideas: Story analysis 150 (15%)
Participation 100 (15%)
  *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.

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:

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 two required texts:

All other readings will be posted in PDF form on OAKS.

COURSE SCHEDULE

I. What is Justice? What is Injustice?
Week 1
01/09 Introduction to Class
01/11 Defining Justice I: Justice as a virtue; as a set of practices
   Reading: Plato, Republic, Book I. BASPT, 37-53

Week 2
01/13 Defining Justice II: Justice as a relation or structure
   Reading:
   - Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics, V.3-11. Available free of charge:
     http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/nicomachaean.5.v.html
   - Aristotle, Politics, Book III: Part I, Parts IV- VIII. Available free of charge:
     http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/politics.3.three.html

01/16 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)

01/18 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

01/21 Political Concerns and the Will of the Strongest

01/23 Morality and Power I
  Reading: Nietzsche, excerpts from Beyond Good and Evil. BASPT 1057-1074

01/25 Morality and Power II
  Reading: Nietzsche, excerpts from On the Genealogy of Morals. BASPT 1075-1096

Week 4
01/28 Realpolitik
  Reading: Machiavelli, from The Prince, BASPT 343-362

01/30 Realpolitik II
  Reading: Machiavelli, from The Prince, BASPT 362-375

02/01 Discussion of Morality, power, and realpolitik
Prepare to discuss a passage from the reading

Week 5
III. Justice as the Rule of Law
02/04 Keeping Order I
  Reading: Hobbes, Leviathan BASPT, 419-438
  *** Short Writing Assignment Due by Beginning of Class ***

02/06 Keeping Order II
  Reading: Locke, from The Second Treatise. BASPT, 530-542; 548-55

02/08 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
02/11 Making Compacts
  Reading: Hobbes, Leviathan BASPT, 475-490
02/13 The Social Contract I: Locke
   Reading: Locke, from Second Treatise. BASPT, 496-510, 517-530; 551-561

02/15 **MIDTERM I**

Week 7
02/18 The Social Contract II: Rousseau
   Reading: Jean-Jacques Rousseau, The Social Contract BASPT 611-615, 664-718

02/20 Justice as a Social Construct: Human nature, norms, and habits
   Reading: David Hume, A Treatise of Human Nature BASPT 586-602

02/22 Discussion: Contracts and Constructs
   Prepare to discuss a passage from the reading
   ***Review Instructions for Short Story Critical Reflection, Available on OAKS***

*02/24 (Sunday) Storm Day Makeup

Week 8
V. Justice as Paying Debts and Giving Each What They are Owed
02/25 Desert
   Reading: Reading: David Schmidtz, Elements of Justice, 31-75 (OAKS)

02/27 Reciprocity
   Reading: David Schmidtz, Elements of Justice, 75-103 (OAKS)

03/01 The Limits of Obligation
   Reading: George Kateb, “The Liberal Contract: Individualism, War, and the Constitution” (OAKS)

Week 9
03/04 Discussion: Obligation, reciprocity, and the idea of debt
   ***Discussion: “The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas”***
   Prepare to discuss a passage from the reading

VI. Justice as the Good of the Many vs. the Good of the Individual
03/06 Utilitarianism: Bentham and Mill
   Reading: BAPST 876-881, 895-900; 931-941, 916-27

03/08 Individualism and Association I
   Reading, Alexis de Tocqueville, 966-974; Henry David Thoreau, from Civil Disobedience, BAPST 974-980
Week 10
03/11 Discussion: Individualism and Association
Prepare to discuss a passage from the reading
*** SHORT STORY REFLECTION DUE BY BEGINNING OF CLASS***

VII. Justice as Equality
03/13 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; Mary Wollstonecraft, from A Vindication of the Rights of Woman, BAPST 786-827

03/15 Foundations of Women’s Equality II
Reading: Harriet (Hardy) Taylor Mill, BASPT 955-962, Sojourner Truth, BAPST 963-965

Week 11
03/18 Spring Break (no class)
Reminder: The final exam will focus on Antigone. You may wish to read it over break.

03/20 Spring Break (no class)

03/22 Spring Break (no class)

Week 12
03/25 Discussion: Equality and Gender
Prepare to discuss a passage from the reading

03/27 Review Session for Midterm II; Preview Lecture: Oppression
Reading: None

03/29 *** MIDTERM II ***

Week 13
04/01 Oppression I
Reading: Iris Marion Young, “Five Faces of Oppression” (OAKS)

04/03 Oppression II
Reading: Iris Marion Young: “Five Faces of Oppression;” supplemental passages (OAKS)

04/05 Discussion: Structural Oppression
Prepare to discuss a passage from the reading

Week 14
04/08 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)

04/10 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).

04/12 Discussion: Oppression, Equality, and Race
Prepare to discuss a passage from the reading

Week 15
VII. Concluding Thoughts: The Elusiveness of Justice and the Purpose of Political Theory
04/15 Ways of Thinking about Justice: Distributive Justice
Reading: Skim: Selections by John Rawls, (OAKS)

04/17 Ways of Thinking about Justice: Political Theory Realism
Reading: Skim: Jacob T. Levy, “There is No Such Thing as Ideal Theory” (OAKS)

04/19 Antigone I: Lecture and basics
Reading: Antigone
Bring Antigone text

Week 16
04/22 Antigone II: Group Interpretive Exercises
Reading: Antigone
Bring Antigone text

04/23 Discussion of Antigone, Review Session, and Conclusion of class
Bring Antigone text

05/01 *** FINAL EXAM: 8:00AM-11:00AM ***

Bring Antigone text for use during the exam.