COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course focuses on political philosophy, a method of thinking about politics and political activity that centers on perennial normative questions, such as the tension between individual freedom and social order, justice, and which forms of government and representation are best. You will encounter some of the most fundamental concepts in the study of politics and examine how they have been developed by different theorists in different times and circumstances.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

The primary objectives of the course are for students to:

- Appreciate the nature and value of normative thinking
- Demonstrate knowledge of key political thinkers and concepts
- Develop the skill of comparing thinkers with respect to key concepts and questions
- Develop the skill of analyzing and explaining texts in political philosophy
- Appreciate the relevance of political philosophy to contemporary politics
- Demonstrate the ability to apply texts and key concepts to new issues and situations.

CONDUCT OF THE COURSE

The course will be organized around four basic questions:

- What is possible through politics?
- What fundamental characteristics define humans? What are the implications for organizing political life?
- What is the relationship between individual rights, property, and human freedom?
- What is justice?

In each of the four sections we will use class discussions, small group discussions, presentations by the instructor, and “explain and comment” assignments to develop an understanding of key readings and concepts. Each section will conclude with an in-class examination to test content knowledge and understanding and then an application paper and discussion that applies key concepts and to a contemporary issue or controversy.

REQUIRED READING


All other readings listed in this syllabus are available on OAKS. Readings for Application Papers will be added in advance of those assignments. Additions may be made to existing reading assignments but these will be relatively infrequent and generally consist of shorter newspaper or magazine articles. In addition, I strongly recommend that you read a daily newspaper, preferably the *New York Times*. Student rates offer a discount and the *Times* is available on the web at [www.nytimes.com](http://www.nytimes.com).
METHOD OF EVALUATION

Examination #1 (9/6)  .................. 15%
Examination #2 (9/27) ................. 15%
Examination #3 (10/18) ............... 15%
Examination #4 (11/20) ................ 15%
Explain and Comment Papers (4) ...... 10%
Application Papers #1, #2, #3 ............. 25%
Attendance/Preparation/Participation ... 5%

Each section of the course will include text analysis papers, application papers, and an examination.

Examinations will consist of short essay questions, discussion questions, terms and other more narrowly focused questions. No one will be permitted to take an exam if they arrive more than 30 minutes late. Make-up exams will only be given if the student notifies me of the difficulty at least an hour before class, agrees to take a make-up not later than three days after the regularly scheduled exam, and presents a written, bonafide excuse.

Explain and Comment Papers (4) are papers (approximately one half page) that require you to choose an excerpt listed in the syllabus and explain its meaning. Explain what is being said and why it matters to the theorist. This will require understanding the larger text from which the passage is drawn. Once you have explained the passage, comment on it. You can do this in several different ways—offering a contemporary example, or raising a key question about the statement, or commenting on the significance of the statement, or presenting an alternative perspective to the point being made in the passage. You must complete one text analysis paper in each section of the course and papers will not be accepted after 12 noon on the day that the papers are due. Your assigned passages and additional guidance is provided later in the syllabus.

Application Papers (3) are papers (between 4 and 6 pages, doublespaced) that use the theorists and ideas developed in that section of the course to analyze a current controversy or issue. There is one controversy or issue for each of the last three sections of the course. At the end of the first section of the course we will use a controversy as a way to demonstrate the expectations for the application papers and how you might approach completing them.

Class attendance, preparation, and participation will be extremely important to success in this course. Some of the material we will cover is likely to be unfamiliar to you, many of the writers developed their perspectives in different times and cultural contexts, and you will be expected to grapple with ideas that cannot usually be understood after a quick read. Reading and interpreting original works by political philosophers, using texts and other commentaries on political ideas and theorists, participating in class discussion, listening carefully to class presentations, taking good notes on assigned readings and class presentations, and completing written work are all necessary to meet the objectives of the course. Please be sure to turn off cell phones and any other devices that might be disruptive.

Grading Scale/Special Needs: 92 and above =A, 90-92=A minus, 88-89=B plus, 83-87=B, 80-82=B minus, 78-79=C plus, 73-77=C, 70-72=C minus, 68-69=D plus, 63-67=D, 60-62=D minus, 59 and below=F. If you are in the SNAPS program or have other special needs please let me know during the first week of class. Deadlines and expectations are subject to change but adequate notice of such changes will be given.

Writing Lab I encourage you to take advantage of the Writing Lab in the Center for Student Learning (Addlestone Library, first floor). Trained writing consultants can help with writing for all courses; they offer one-to-one consultations that address everything from brainstorming and developing ideas to crafting strong sentences and documenting sources. For more information, please call 843.953.5635 or visit http://csl.cofc.edu/labs/writing-lab/.
**Honor Code and Academic Integrity**

Lying, cheating, attempted cheating, and plagiarism are violations of our Honor Code that, when identified, are investigated. Cases of suspected academic dishonesty will be reported directly to the Dean of Students. A student found responsible for academic dishonesty will receive an XF for the course, indicating failure due to academic dishonesty. Unauthorized collaboration is a form of cheating and research conducted and/or papers written for other classes cannot be used in whole or part for any assignment without obtaining prior permission from the professor. Plagiarism includes the verbatim repetition, without acknowledgement, of another's work, borrowing without acknowledging a source, paraphrasing without acknowledgement, and allowing any other person or organization to prepare work which one then submits as his or her own. For to complete Honor Code see http://www.cofc.edu/studentaffairs/general_infor/studenthandbook.html

### COURSE OUTLINE AND READING ASSIGNMENTS

**8/20: An Overview**

1. **What can politics accomplish?**
   *Aristotle (384-322 BC) and Niccolo Machiavelli (1469-1527)*

**8/22: Aristotle**


**8/27 NO CLASS**

**8/29: Aristotle**

*Aristotle, The Politics*, Bk Three, ch. 3, 4 (Porter 137-138)  
*Aristotle, The Politics*, Bk. Five, ch. 1, 8 (151-162)

> “If it was correctly said in the [discourses on] ethics that the happy life is one in accordance with virtue and unimpeded, and that virtue is a mean, then the middling sort of life is best—the mean that is capable of being attained by each sort of individual. These same defining principles must also define virtue and vice in the case of a city or regime.” *The Politics*, p. 151.

> “The defining principles to which the wishes of tyrants (for their subjects) may be reduced are—that they not trust one another, that they not be capable, that they have modest thought.” *The Politics*, p. 162.

**9/3: Machiavelli**

*N. Machiavelli, The Prince*, Ch. 5-8 (J. Porter, pp. 225-235)

> “Anyone who becomes lord of a city used to living in liberty and does not destroy it may be expect to be destroyed by it.” *The Prince*, p. 227.

> “In taking a state its conqueror should weigh all the harmful things he must do and do them all at once so as not to have to repeat them everyday.” *The Prince*, p. 235.
9/5 Machiavelli


“A prince must know how to make good use of the nature of the beast….the lion cannot defend itself from traps and the fox cannot protect itself from wolves.” *The Prince*, p. 253.

“I judge it to be true that fortune is the arbiter of one half of our actions but that she still leaves the control of the other half, or almost that, to us. And I compare her to one of those ruinous rivers that, when they become enraged, flood the plains, tear down the trees and buildings, taking up earth from one spot and placing it upon another; everyone flees from them, everyone yields to their onslaught, unable to oppose them in any way.” *The Prince*, p. 258

*Study Guide for Exam Out and Compare and Apply Demonstration Readings Posted*

9/10 EXAMINATION 1 (Knowledge of Concepts and Thinkers)

9/12 Compare and Apply to New Issues: Demonstration: The Case of Egypt

What are the hallmarks of a stable and just political regime? When are unjust regimes nonetheless better than instability and the risk of chaos?

2. What fundamental characteristics define humans? What are the implications for organizing political life?

*Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) and J.J. Rousseau (1712-1778)*

9/17 Hobbes: The State of War


“From equality proceeds diffidence.” *The Leviathan*, p. 286.

“The passions that incline men to peace, are fear of death; desire of such things as are necessary to commodious living; and a hope by their industry to obtain them.” *The Leviathan*, p. 289.

9/19 Hobbes: The Social Contract


“Fear and liberty are consistent; as when a man throweth his goods into the sea for fear the ship would sink, he doth it nevertheless very willingly, and may refuse to do it if he will: it is therefore the action of one that was free.” *Leviathan*, p. 310.

9/24 Rousseau: Human Nature


“Although it may behoove Socrates and minds of his stamp to acquire virtue through reason, the human race would have perished long ago if its preservation had depended only on the reasonings of its members.” *Second Discourse*, p. 388.

“The first person who, having fenced off a plot of ground, took it into his head to say this is mine and found people simple enough to believe him, was the true founder of civil society.” *Second Discourse*, p. 394.
9/26 Rousseau: Politics

*Jonathan Wolff, An Introduction to Political Philosophy, pp. 77-90.
*James Madison, Federalist Paper #10 (4)

“The latent causes of faction are thus sown in the nature of man; and we see them everywhere brought to different degrees of activity, according to the different circumstances of civil society.” James Madison, Federalist Paper #10, p. 99.

*Study Guide Out and Application Paper Readings Posted

10/1 EXAMINATION 2 (Knowledge of Concepts and Thinkers)

10/3: Compare and Apply to New Issues: Application Paper #1: Climate Change
Is Collective Action to Halt or Reverse Climate Change Possible?

Application Paper Due in OAKS drop box by 9 am 10/3

3. What is the Relationship Between Individual Rights, Property, and Human Freedom?
John Locke (1632-1704) and Karl Marx (1818-1883)

10/8 Locke: Natural Rights


“The grass my horse has bit; the turfs my servant has cut; and the ore I have dug in any place where I have a right to them in common with others, become my property, without the assignation or consent of anybody.” Second Treatise, p. 339.

Because no political society can be, nor subsist without having in itself the power to preserve the property, and in order thereunto punish the offences of all those of that society; there, and there only is political society where every one of its members has quitted this natural power, resigned it up into the hands of the community...” Second Treatise p. 350.

10/10 Locke: Consent and the Social Contract

*Locke, Second Treatise. (J. Porter, pp. 352-58)

“It is evident that absolute monarch, which by some men is counted the only government in the world, is indeed inconsistent with civil society, and so can be no form of civil government at all,” Second Treatise, p. 352.

10/15 NO CLASS: FALL BREAK
10/17 Marx: Human Nature and Freedom

*Karl Marx’s *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, excerpts (J. Porter, pp. 547-557).
*Karl Marx, “On The Jewish Question,” excerpts (5).

“The worker…feels himself at home only during his leisure time, whereas at work he feels homeless. His work is not voluntary but imposed, forced labour.” *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, p. 551

**Study Guide Out and Application Paper Readings Posted**

10/22 Marx: On Property and Power


“The distinguishing feature of communism is not the abolition of property generally, but the abolition of bourgeois property.” *The Communist Manifesto*, p. 579.

10/24: EXAMINATION 3 (Knowledge of Concepts and Thinkers)

10/29: Compare and Apply to New Issues: Application Paper #2: Guns and Gun Violence

Are increased protections of second amendment rights and the proliferation of self defense laws vital to protect our freedom or evidence that we are unfree?

*Application Paper #2 Due (in OAKS drop box by 9 am 10/29)*

*10/29 LAST DAY TO DROP WITH A “W”*

11/5: Nozick’s Libertarian View


“Almost every suggested principle of distributive justice is patterned: to each according to the moral merit, or needs, or marginal product, or how hard he tries, or the weighted sum of the forgoing, and so on. The principle of entitlement we have sketched is not patterned,” p. 239.

11/7 John Rawls: Justice as Fairness


“The original position is not, of course, thought of as an actual historical state of affairs, much less as a primitive condition of culture. It is understood as a purely hypothetical situation characterized so as to lead to a certain conception of justice.” *A Theory of Justice*, p. 12.

11/12 Michael Sandel: Justice, Virtue, and the Common Good


“Despite its appeal, the liberal vision of freedom lacks the civic resources to sustain self-government. *America’s Search for a Public Philosophy*, p. 58.

11/14 Plato: A Broader Conception of Justice

*Plato, The Republic, Bk 4 (44-50 in Porter); Bk. 2 (18-31 in Porter)*

*Study Guide Out and Application Paper Readings Posted*

11/19: Plato: Just and Unjust Societies

*Plato, The Republic, Bk. 8 (73-89 in Porter).

11/21 EXAMINATION 4 (Knowledge of Concepts and Thinkers)*

11/26 Compare and Apply to New Issues #3: Inequality in America

When is inequality unjust?

*Application Paper #3 Due in OAKS drop box by 9 am 11/26

11/27 NO CLASS THANKSGIVING BREAK

Explain and Comment Papers: Expectations

**Explain and Comment Papers (4)** are one page papers (or half page if single spaced) that require you to choose an excerpt listed in the syllabus and explain its meaning. Explain what is being said and why it matters to the theorist. This will require understanding the larger text from which the passage is drawn. Once you have explained the passage comment on it. You can do this in several different ways—offering a contemporary example, or raising a key question about the statement, or commenting on the significance of the statement, or presenting an alternative perspective to the point being made in the passage. You must complete *one text analysis paper in each section of the course*.

Here are two examples, drawn from our first reading assignment.

**Explain and Comment Illustration 1**

“The study of politics cannot be an exact science” *Nichomaecon Ethics*, p. 103.

**Explanation (what is being said and why it matters to the theorist):**

Aristotle makes several analogies to explain his meaning. He says that “we should not seek the same degree of exactness in all sorts of arguments alike, any more than in the products of different crafts” (p. 103). This analogy to a craft, like woodworking, communicates that Aristotle sees political argument as a process that results in different outcomes, just as there is variation in making a table or chair. Just as we will not always agree on what is the best chair we cannot expect certainty on what is the best political argument. The topic of studying political science, he says, is “what is fine and what is just” (p. 103). He makes another analogy when he observes that different subjects allow for different levels of exactness or certainty. He says that we expect exactness from a mathematician but not a rhetorician (one who seeks to persuade us).

**Comment/Question:** This view of politics is very different from current views in the U.S. Lots of people are trying to persuade us with their arguments but many times they are seeking only the good for themselves, whereas Aristotle seems to think that political arguments must seek “what is fine and just.” Aristotle believes that with enough education and experience we can
tell the difference between good arguments that make political claims that should be accepted, and bad arguments such as those that merely advance the self-interest of the speaker.

OR

Comment/Significance: Even though Aristotle believes politics is not an exact science, he definitely doesn’t think it is just a matter of opinion. He says that we should use our reason rather than feelings, to judge political arguments. In fact, he says that young people are not always the best judges of such arguments because they rely on feelings. He doesn’t just mean those who are young in age but also means immature people generally.

Explain and Comment: Illustration 2

“External things, like any instrument, have a limit: everything useful belongs among those things an excess of which must necessarily be either harmful or not beneficial to those who have them. In the case of each of the things connected with the soul, however, the more it is in excess, the more useful it must necessarily be. *The Politics*, p. 164.

NOTE: This is a passage where the meaning is a little bit more difficult, in order to explain the meaning of this you need to use the text from which it is drawn to make sure you understand what he means by “external things” and what he means by “goods of the soul.” Then you need to understand why he is making this point—what is the logic that underlies the quotation? You could use an example to illustrate the point or raise an alternative perspective. If you do that, here is what an answer might look like:

Explanation (what is being said and why it matters to the theorist):
This passage occurs during a discussion of “the most choiceworthy way of life” (p. 163). At the beginning of Book 7 Aristotle says that in order to identify the best political regime, we must first discuss that the most choiceworthy way of life is (p. 163). He identifies three different kinds of good things that we might seek: external things, those of the body, and those of the soul. He says that all of these are important but that we often differ when it comes to deciding which are the most important. He admits that men often seek external goods—like wealth, goods, power and reputation—to excess without limit but he argues that “goods of the soul”—he talks about virtues like courage and a sense of justice—are more important. He believes that external goods like wealth and power come to people who have these goods of the soul, but having wealth and power do not necessarily produce these virtues. In this passage he points out that you can have an excess of external goods, that can be harmful or not beneficial, but you can never have too much of virtues of the soul like courage and a sense of justice.

Comment/Question: Aristotle assumes that external goods come to those who are virtuous and have good character. That doesn’t seem to be the case. Many times those who are selfish and under-handed become wealthy and powerful. On the other hand, he may have a point since those who are honest and trustworthy often get more customers and beneficial business deals than those who have a reputation for lying.

Comment/Significance: Once Aristotle establishes that the goods of the soul have a greater priority for individuals, he argues that it is only logical that this should be the priority for the state. Then he goes on to describe, in Chapter 2, the best and most choiceworthy way of life for the state (he sometimes calls it “the city” or “the regime”).

NOTE: as we move through the semester there will be more opportunities for comments that present alternative perspectives of other theorists we study. So, for example, when we get to passages from Machiavelli, you could contrast his view with Aristotle’s.

Explain and Comment Papers: Assignments

Locate your name on the pages that follow to determine when you have an explain and comment paper due. If there is more than one passage listed on that day you may do whichever you prefer. Papers are due in the OAKS drop box by 12 noon the day of class.

Students in Group A may switch one of their assignments to 11/7 John Rawls: Justice as Fairness (indicate at the top of the assignment which assignment you are switching from).

Section 1 What is possible through politics?
8/29: Aristotle

*Aristotle, *The Politics*, Bk. Five, ch. 1, 8 (151-162)

“If it was correctly said in the [discourses on] ethics that the happy life is one in accordance with virtue and unimpeded, and that virtue is a mean, then the middling sort of life is best—the mean that is capable of being attained by each sort of individual. These same defining principles must also define virtue and vice in the case of a city or regime.” *The Politics*, p. 151.

“The defining principles to which the wishes of tyrants (for their subjects) may be reduced are—that they not trust one another, that they not be capable, that they have modest thought.” *The Politics*, p. 162.

Section 2 What fundamental characteristics define human nature?
9/19 Hobbes: The Social Contract


“Fear and liberty are consistent; as when a man throweth his goods into the sea for fear the ship would sink, he doth it nevertheless very willingly, and may refuse to do it if he will: it is therefore the action of one that was free.” *Leviathan*, p. 310.

Section 3 Relationship between rights, property, and freedom
10/8 Locke: Natural Rights


“The grass my horse has bit; the turfs my servant has cut; and the ore I have dug in any place where I have a right to them in common with others, become my property, without the assignation or consent of anybody.” *Second Treatise*, p. 339.

Because no political society can be, nor subsist without having in itself the power to preserve the property, and in order thereunto punish the offences of all those of that society; there, and there only is political society where every one of its members has quitted this natural power, resigned it up into the hands of the community….” *Second Treatise* p. 350.

Section 4 What is justice?
11/12 Michael Sandel: Justice, Virtue, and the Common Good


“Despite its appeal, the liberal vision of freedom lacks the civic resources to sustain self-government. *America’s Search for a Public Philosophy*, p. 58
Students in Group B may switch one of their assignments to 11/12 Michael Sandel: Justice, Virtue, and the Common Good (indicate at the top of the assignment which assignment you are switching from).

Section 1 What is possible through politics?
9/3: Machiavelli

*N. Machiavelli, The Prince, Ch. 5-8 (J. Porter, pp. 225-235)

“Anyone who becomes lord of a city used to living in liberty and does not destroy it may be expect to be destroyed by it.” The Prince, p. 227.

“In taking a state its conqueror should weigh all the harmful things he must do and do them all at once so as not to have to repeat them everyday.” The Prince, p. 235.

Section 2 What fundamental characteristics define human nature?
10/10 Locke: Consent and the Social Contract

*Locke, Second Treatise. (J. Porter, pp. 352-58)

“It is evident that absolute monarch, which by some men is counted the only government in the world, is indeed inconsistent with civil society, and so can be no form of civil government at all,” Second Treatise, p. 352.

Section 3 Relationship between rights, property, and freedom
10/22 Marx: Human Nature and Freedom

*Karl Marx’s Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts, excerpts (J. Porter, pp. 547-557).

None of the so-called rights of men goes beyond the egoistic man, the man withdrawn unto himself, his private interest and his private choice, and separated from the community as a member of civil society.” p. 1161 On the Jewish Question.

Section 4 What is justice?
11/7 John Rawls: Justice as Fairness


“The original position is not, of course, thought of as an actual historical state of affairs, much less as a primitive condition of culture. It is understood as a purely hypothetical situation characterized so as to lead to a certain conception of justice.” A Theory of Justice, p. 12.
**Explain and Comment Paper Assignments for Group C:** Sarah Saunders, Alston Slay, Caitlin Stone, Hannah Suglia, Odies Turner, Tyreece Washington, William Weaks, Hannah Wood, Gabrielle Wright, Michael Baseline.

Students in Group C may switch one of their assignments to 10/22 Marx: On Property and Power (indicate at the top of the assignment which assignment you are switching from).

**Section 1 What is possible through politics?**
9/5 Machiavelli


“A prince must know how to make good use of the nature of the beast….the lion cannot defend itself from traps and the fox cannot protect itself from wolves.” *The Prince*, p. 253.

“I judge it to be true that fortune is the arbiter of one half of our actions but that she still leaves the control of the other half, or almost that, to us. And I compare her to one of those ruinous rivers that, when they become enraged, flood the plains, tear down the trees and buildings, taking up earth from one spot and placing it upon another; everyone flees from them, everyone yields to their onslaught, unable to oppose them in any way.” *The Prince*, p. 258

**Section 2 What fundamental characteristics define human nature?**
9/24 Rousseau: Human Nature


“Although it may behoove Socrates and minds of his stamp to acquire virtue through reason, the human race would have perished long ago it its preservation had depended only on the reasonings of its members.” *Second Discourse*, p. 388.

“The first person who, having fenced off a plot of ground, took it into his head to say this is mine and found people simple enough to believe him, was the true founder of civil society.” *Second Discourse*, p. 394.

**Section 3 Relationship between rights, property, and freedom**
10/17 Marx: Human Nature and Freedom

*Karl Marx’s *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, excerpts (J. Porter, pp. 547-557).


“The worker….feels himself at home only during his leisure time, whereas at work he feels homeless. His work is not voluntary but imposed, forced labour.” *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, p. 551

**Section 4 What is justice?**
11/5: Nozick’s Libertarian View


“Almost every suggested principle of distributive justice is patterned: to each according to the moral merit, or needs, or marginal product, or how hard he tries, or the weighted sum of the forgoing, and so on. The principle of entitlement we have sketched is not patterned,” p. 239.