

POLI 150.03: Introduction to Political Thought

Spring 2017

Maybank 316, 10-10:50

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This course will introduce you to thinking about the idea of politics and political activity conceptually, analytically and historically. This course focuses on political philosophy: a method of thinking about politics that centers on *normative* questions (e.g. how *should* we live together?). We will explore the meaning of some basic theoretical concepts related to politics and we will trace how those concepts have been understood in other contexts. We will examine in detail Plato's *Republic*, which sets out both a definition of justice and an outline for an ideal city with ideal rulers. Using Plato as our initial foundation we will examine contrasting arguments about some of Plato's basic conclusions. In addition to Plato we will read a number of political philosophers, from a variety of time periods who themselves present arguments concerning the key issues that Plato addresses. In a somewhat different context we will also read a selection of stories from Octavia Butler's collection of short fiction *Bloodchild*. We will use these stories as settings within which theoretical ideas come to life. At the end of the semester you will have a variety of answers to some of the following questions: What is justice? Is freedom desirable? What are the origins of the State? What makes an ideal ruler? Which form of government is best? What role should women play in politics? What makes a good citizen? What kind of education is needed for citizenship? What stories do we tell to improve citizenship? How can we change the world?

Course Objectives

This course focuses on the explication, analysis and comparison of political philosophy texts. We read works from figures ancient, modern and contemporary. Students will acquire skills in **explication**: the explanation of what a text is saying; **analysis**: the interpretation of what a text means, both in its own context and for us; and **comparison**: the ways in which arguments about equality or freedom (for example) relate to one another. In class discussion, papers and exams students will learn to examine, interpret and relate texts and arguments.

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 story responses, papers, exam essays)
- **evaluate interpretations** of concepts (papers and exam essays)

- **explain** the nature and value of normative thinking (papers and exam essays)

Required Books:

Plato	<i>Republic</i>
Octavia Butler	<i>Bloodchild</i> (Second edition)
Course Packet	Available at SASE Ink (219 Calhoun St).

Assignments:

Two papers	10 % each
Two midterm exams:	10 % each
Short story responses (5)	15%
Final exam:	15%
Participation Posts: (5 before and 5 after Spring Break):	10% each
In class participation:	5%
Lecture/event response papers (3)	5%

The class participation grade includes attendance, participation in class and completion of all 10 participation posts; missing (excused or unexcused) more than 5 classes will result in a one letter grade drop in your final grade.

You are assigned two papers, two midterm exams, five short story responses, three event/lecture responses and one final. I also expect regular participation based on your reading of the course material. **Students will come to class ready to discuss the material assigned for that class.** If you do not understand the argument(s) being made in the reading then you should come to class with questions based on the reading. Participation posts will assist with your daily participation and comprehension.

You will notice 4 paper due dates for the two papers in the syllabus (1/30, 3/3, 3/29, 4/17). This gives you some flexibility in deciding when to write your papers. You must write papers for two (2) of these due dates. Additionally, one paper must be handed in on one of the first two due dates. Furthermore, only papers handed in for the first three due dates may be rewritten.

Exams may only be made up if students a) contact me at least an hour before the exam (e-mail is fine); b) schedule a make-up within 3 days of the assigned exam; c) present a documented, written excuse explaining the extraordinary circumstances that led to an inability to take an exam in the scheduled time (not being prepared is not an extraordinary circumstance, breaking your leg is).

More information about exams, papers, participation posts and the short story responses is at the end of the syllabus.

Accommodations: Any students who have special learning needs or concerns are urged to speak with me during the first week of the semester if accommodations are needed. The Center for

Disability Services provides a comprehensive list of accessibility resources available at the College on the following website: <http://disabilityservices.cofc.edu/>

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)

Schedule of Readings

How should we think about justice? Is justice relative or absolute? Do we obey the law because it is the law or because it is just?

W, 1/11: Introduction
F, 1/13: Leo Strauss “What is Political Philosophy” (on OAKS)

M, 1/16: No Class, Martin Luther King Jr. Day
W, 1/18: Octavia Butler, “Amnesty” in *Bloodchild*, (response due)
F, 1/20: Plato, *Republic*, Book I, ll. 327a-336a10

M, 1/23: Plato, *Republic*, Book I, ll.336b-354c
W, 1/25: Plato, “Crito” (Course Packet -- CP)
F, 1/27: Martin Luther King, “Letter from a Birmingham Jail” (CP)

Why do we live together rather than apart? What motivates us to come together to live? What can we legitimately expect from living together in a polity?

M, 1/30: Plato, *Republic* Bk II, ll.357a-376d
Paper Due Date

W, 2/1 : Plato, *Republic* Bk II, ll.357a-376d
F, 2/3: Hobbes *Leviathan* CP, pp 27-35

M, 2/6: Hobbes *Leviathan* CP, pp 27-35
W, 2/8: Locke *Second Treatise*, CP, pp. 35-42
F, 2/10: Locke *Second Treatise*, CP, pp. 35-42

M, 2/13: Rousseau *On the Social Contract*, CP, pp. 43-53
W, 2/15: Rousseau *On the Social Contract*, CP, pp. 43-53
F, 2/17: Butler, “Speech Sounds” in *Bloodchild* (response due)

M, 2/20: **Exam 1**

What is justice? What does justice do for a polity? How should we justly distribute the goods and services of the polity? How should we justly distribute rights?

W, 2/22: John Rawls "Justice as Fairness" (on OAKS)
F, 2/24: John Rawls "Justice as Fairness" (on OAKS)

M, 2/27: Republic Bk IV, ll. 419a-445e
W, 3/1: Republic Bk IV, ll. 419a-445e

Paper Due Date

F, 3/3: Republic Bks II-III, ll. 376d-417b

M, 3/6: Spring Break
W, 3/8: Spring Break
F, 3/10: Spring Break

M, 3/13: Republic Bks II-III, ll. 376d-417b
W, 3/15: Mill "On Liberty" CP 53-85
F, 3/17: Mill "On Liberty" CP 53-85

M, 3/20: Flex day
W, 3/22: Butler "The Evening and the Morning and the Night" in *Bloodchild*
(response due)
F, 3/24: **Exam 2**

Should gender or wealth play a role in just distribution of goods and services in a polity?

M, 3/27: Republic, Bk V, ll. 449a-473c5
W, 3/29: Republic, Bk V, ll. 449a-473c5
Paper Due Date
F, 3/31: Marx, *The Communist Manifesto* CP, pp. 85-99

M, 4/3: Marx, *The Communist Manifesto* CP, pp. 85-99
W, 4/5: Thomas Picketty (OAKS)
F, 4/7: Butler "Bloodchild" in *Bloodchild* (response due)

Are there standards that can guide an ideal method for living together justly?

M, 4/10: Republic Bks V-VI, ll. 473d-507a
W, 4/12: Republic Bks VI-VII, ll. 507b-541b
F, 4/14: Republic Bks VIII, ll. 543a-562a

How do polities collapse?

M, 4/17: Republic Bks VIII-IX, ll. 562a5-592b5
Paper Due Date

W, 4/19: Brennan, "Against Democracy" and Crain on Brennan (OAKS)
F, 4/21: Republic, Bk X, ll. 595a-621c5

M, 4/24: "The Book of Martha" in *Bloodchild* (response due)
W, 4/26: Review

Final Exam, Monday, May 1 8am (in this classroom)

Writing assignments

Short story responses

You will write responses to each of the five short stories that we read from Octavia Butler's collection *Bloodchild*. Check the syllabus for those due dates. The responses are due in the OAKS dropbox **before** class on the day the story is being discussed. The OAKS dropbox will not accept your submission after class has started on the day the response is due. There will be no late responses accepted. Responses **MUST** be submitted via the dropbox. **I will accept no submissions in hardcopy.**

Responses can take one of two forms:

- 1) Focus on a passage/quote from the story that you found particularly interesting/insightful/important. Include the passage (no more than 5 sentences is enough for a good passage) and analyze **what the passage is saying** and **why you think the passage matters** either to the story or to the theme that the story is addressing.
- 2) Focus on a theme from our class discussions and other readings and **explain (with examples) how the story connects to that theme.**

Response papers will be at least one page, double spaced (and should not be more than two pages, double-spaced). You should give a focused and detailed, but brief, explanation of either the passage you chose or the theme you are addressing. **Do not summarize the story.** I would suggest reading the story and then taking notes on what captured your imagination. Then look back over the class notes for the preceding classes and see where there might be connections. Be sure that your responses show an **engagement** with the story and a use of details to explain your interest in the story. The highest grade one can earn on a response paper is a 10.

Participation Posts:

To improve your comprehension of the material assigned and facilitate your understanding of the ways in which passages are used to support arguments, you are asked to complete 10 participation posts. You may not submit more than one post per class time. There are ten participation post boxes on OAKS. In order to earn an A grade for the participation posts you must have completed **all** of the posts. Each participation post will include **one passage** from that day's reading (and posts must be submitted prior to class time). Choose a passage that you think is important for understanding some portion of that day's reading: it is fine if you do not entirely understand the passage! Write out the passage (no passage should be more than four sentences long) and explain (in four to five sentences) what idea the passage is communicating and why

you think it is important to that day's reading. Your post will be no more than one page and I expect you to write no more than two short paragraphs: the first paragraph takes a stab at explaining the main idea of the passage; the second paragraph takes a stab at indicating why that idea matters. Full credit will be given for posts that have these three parts:

1. Passage
2. Explanation the main idea of the passage
3. Explanation for why that main idea matters

Wrestling with the ideas is more important than accuracy.

There are ten participation post boxes on OAKS, divided into two categories: pre and post Spring Break. Each box is for one day's post. The post must be for that class reading and posted prior to class.

No participation posts are accepted for short story discussion days. Each of those days has its own response (see above).

Exams:

All exams will include both an in class portion and a take home essay. These take home essay topics will be handed out in class in the week prior to the scheduled exam. If you miss the class when that essay topic is handed out **it is your responsibility to get the take home topic from me**. All essays are due in class at the time and the day of the exam. The exams will also include in class short answer and passage explication (we will discuss these closer to the first exam).

Lecture/event responses:

Students are required to attend three lectures/events outside of class and to submit a one page response to EACH event/lecture linking the topic of the event/lecture to a class reading/discussion. The lectures/events will be announced in class, posted on the syllabus or found in the weekly e-mails from Kristin Wichmann (for declared POLI majors). Students will upload responses to the lecture/event dropbox on OAKS.

Papers:

There will be paper topics for each of the proposed paper due dates. Topics are particular to due dates. The papers that you write for this class will involve explication of arguments that you have read for class and analysis of those arguments based on your own view or perspective. This means that you are expected to

- 1) **Explain** the argument of your chosen text
- 2) **Present** an argument about that text based upon your own interpretation
- 3) **Defend** your argument using evidence from the text

You **must** use quotations from the texts in question in order to provide evidence for both your explication and your analysis. You will be graded on the clarity of your analysis (this is more important than whether I agree with your particular argument). You may choose to rewrite any

paper handed in during the first three paper due dates (but you must speak to me first about the rewrite deadline). Papers handed in for the last due date may not be rewritten.

Papers and take home exam essays **must** be properly cited. All citations should be made in accordance with the guidelines set out in the Political Science Department's referencing guide (available online at Political Science Department webpage: <http://polisci.cofc.edu/documents/12policitationguide.pdf>).

Any failure to cite materials used for papers in this class is considered plagiarism. **Plagiarism is pretending as if the words and ideas of another are in fact yours. This includes a failure to use quotations, a failure to indicate when you are paraphrasing and the failure to give credit to the author whose ideas you are using. Plagiarism is a violation of the Honor Code and will be treated as such.**

- 1) All papers will be typed, double-spaced and stapled
- 2) Attach the paper worksheet to all papers (2 copies in syllabus)
- 3) All papers will be handed in hard copy, no papers sent via e-mail will be accepted
- 4) All citations will be in accordance with the departmental referencing guide.
<http://polisci.cofc.edu/documents/12policitationguide.pdf>
- 5) Extensions will be approved 24 hours before the paper is due
- 6) Students will retain a copy of the paper, either on your computer or in hard copy
- 7) Plagiarism will be prosecuted by the honor board and **students who plagiarize will fail this class. Further information about the Honor Code and Academic Integrity can be found at: <http://studentaffairs.cofc.edu/honor-system/studenthandbook/index.php>**

Papers that do not meet these guidelines will not be accepted

Paper Worksheet – to be attached to your paper

Please check off the appropriate boxes and sign below:

My paper is:

Yes

No

Proofread
Spellchecked
Double-Spaced
Stapled

My paper includes:

A Thesis
An argument to support my thesis
Quotations to support my argument
Proper citation format

My thesis is:

In writing the paper I consulted the following sources for background/inspiration (anything that appears here should also be cited in your bibliography):

Please sign and date: _____

Paper Worksheet – to be attached to your paper

Please check off the appropriate boxes and sign below:

My paper is:

Yes

No

Proofread
Spellchecked
Double-Spaced
Stapled

My paper includes:

A Thesis
An argument to support my thesis
Quotations to support my argument
Proper citation format

My thesis is:

In writing the paper I consulted the following sources for background/inspiration (anything that appears here should also be cited in a bibliography):

Please sign and date: _____