

POLI 150.02: Introduction to Political Thought (no pre-requisites)

Claire P. Curtis

Spring 2022, Maybank 316

MWF 12:00-12:50 PM

Office: JC Long (9 Liberty St.), # 222

Office Hours: Mondays and Wednesdays 3:30-5 on Zoom (link on OAKS) or by appointment

e-mail: curtisc@cofc.edu

Masks are required in accordance with College policy

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 be reading a variety of political philosophers, ancient, modern and contemporary. The semester is divided in five units. These units help separate the semester into a series of questions and issues. Each class notes the reading, discussion questions to help guide your class preparation and any submissions required for that day. Additionally, 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 makes a good citizen? 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 (edited by Reeve)

Andrew Bailey and others, Eds.

Octavia Butler

Republic

Broadview Anthology of Social and Political Thought, Essential Readings (SPT)

Bloodchild (Second edition)

Assignments:

Papers (4)	32 %
Final exam:	18 %
Short story responses (4)	12%
Quizzes (4)	20%
Participation (including reflections and in class engagement)	10%
Lecture/event responses	8%

All work for this class will be submitted on OAKS. More information about exams, papers, quizzes and the short story responses is at the end of the syllabus. Attendance is not required, but participation is important! If you get sick, please contact me.

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)

Questions?

Any questions about the syllabus or about class scheduling and management during the semester, go to the OAKS question thread if you have questions – I am sure others will appreciate your asking!

Schedule of Readings:

UNIT ONE: Talking about justice, politics and law

- 1/10: Introduction,
Discuss: What is political thought? Why study it?
- 1/12: **Read:** Leo Strauss, “What is Political Philosophy?” and Michael Oakeshott on politics (OAKS)
Discuss: what are the implications of Strauss’ understanding of political philosophy?
- 1/14: **Read:** Octavia Butler, “Amnesty”
Submit: First short story response on “Amnesty” due on OAKS by noon (description of these responses can be found later in the syllabus)
Discuss: Is this story political (and think about what you might mean by the term “political” given your answer). Is there justice or injustice in the story? Is the story hopeful?
- 1/17: Martin Luther King Day, co class
- 1/19: **Read:** Plato, Crito, pp. 23-29, *SPT*
Discuss: List the reasons that Crito gives for why Socrates should escape from prison. How does Socrates argue against Crito?
- 1/21: **Read:** Plato, Crito, pp. 23-29, *SPT* and Plato, *Republic*, Book I, ll. 327a-354c

Discuss: What are the conditions put on the obedience of Socrates and other citizens of Athens by the Laws? They say Socrates must obey as long as.....? How would Polemarchus understand the requirement to obey the law?

1/24: **Read:** Plato, *Republic*, Book I, ll. 327a-354c

Discuss: How would Thrasymachus understand the requirement to obey the law? How is the law connected to the idea of justice?

1/26: **Read:** Martin Luther King, Jr., Letter from a Birmingham Jail, pp. 850-858, *SPT*

Discuss: How does King explain the difference between just and unjust laws? How can we apply that distinction to the situation Socrates faces?

1/28: **Quiz and paper due (on OAKS)**

UNIT TWO: Living together and the social contract

1/31: **Read:** Plato, *Republic* Bk II, ll.357a-376d

Discuss: Why does it matter that Plato says the city and the individual person are analogous to one another?

2/2: **Read:** Plato, *Republic* Bk II, ll.357a-376d

Discuss: How does Plato understand what is necessary to start a city/polity? What is missing?

2/4: **Read:** Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Ch. 13-14, pp. 258-266, *SPT*

Discuss: How does Hobbes understand human motivation? How does this impact his understanding of the state of nature?

2/7: **Read:** Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Ch. 17-18, pp. 276-283, *SPT*

Discuss: Why would we enter the social contract?

2/9: **Read:** Locke, *Second Treatise of Civil Government*, Chs 1-4, pp. 331-338, *SPT*

Discuss: How does Locke understand human motivation?

2/11: **Read:** Locke, *Second Treatise of Civil Government*, Chs 5, pp. 338-345, *SPT*

Discuss: How does owning property impact his description of the state of nature?

2/14: **Read:** Rousseau, *Discourse on the Origin and Foundation of Inequality among Men*, part two, pp. 441-445, *SPT*

Discuss: How does Rousseau understand human motivation?

2/16: **Read:** *On the Social Contract*, Book I, pp. 466-474, *SPT*

Discuss: How does Rousseau understand freedom?

2/18: **Read:** Butler "Speech Sounds"

Submit: short story response due on OAKS by noon

Discuss: Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau through the lens of Butler's story

2/21: Social Contract thinkers discussion and catch up

2/23: **Quiz and paper due (on OAKS)**

UNIT THREE: Individual freedom and development

2/25: **Read:** *Republic* Bks II-III, ll. 376d-417b

Discuss: How does Plato use stories to educate the children of the Kallipolis?

2/28: **Read:** J.S Mill, *On Liberty*, pp. 627-640, *SPT*

Discuss: When does Mill think that free expression can be limited?

3/2: **Read:** J.S Mill, *On Liberty*, pp. 627-640, *SPT*

Discuss: How can we apply Mill's theory to controversies over speech today

3/4: **Read:** Butler "The Evening and the Morning and the Night"

Submit: Short story response due on OAKS by noon

Spring Break

3/14: **Read:** W.E.B Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, pp. 778-781

Discuss: How might DuBois respond to Mill's understanding of free expression?

3/16: **Read:** W.E.B Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, pp. 778-781

Discuss: How does DuBois understand his position in society?

3/18: **Quiz and paper due (on OAKS)**

UNIT FOUR: Justice and the social contract reconsidered

3/21: **Read:** *Republic* Bk IV, ll. 419a-445e

Discuss: What is potentially missing from Plato's four virtues?

3/23: **Read:** *Republic* Bk IV, ll. 419a-445e

Discuss: How does Plato's definition of justice solve other issues of justice that we have discussed?

3/25: **Read:** John Rawls, *Theory of Justice*, 862-870, *SPT*

Discuss: How does Rawls understand justice?

3/28: **Read:** Rawls, pp. 872-883, 890-895 and 903-905, *SPT*

- Discuss:** How does Rawls explain his system of justice as being fair?
- 3/30: **Read:** Iris Marion Young, “Justice and the Politics of Difference,” pp. 977-992, *SPT*
Discuss: How does Young critique the idea of distributive justice?
- 4/1: **Discuss:** Rawls, Young and the idea of the social contract
- 4/4: **Quiz and paper due (on OAKS)**

UNIT FIVE: Radical change

- 4/6: **Read:** Republic, Bk V, ll. 449a-473c5
Discuss: How does Plato’s definition of justice fit with his conception of gender?
- 4/8: No Class, Moore Conference (opportunity for le response!)
- 4/11: **Read:** Karl Marx, *The Communist Manifesto*, pp. 717-733, *SPT*
Discuss: Why make class identity the most important identity?
- 4/13: **Read:** Karl Marx, *The Communist Manifesto*, pp. 717-733, *SPT*
Discuss: How do we understand Marx’s principles of communism today?
- 4/15: **Read:** Franz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, pp. 825-836, *SPT*
Discuss: What role does violence play in being a free person?
- 4/18: **Read:** Butler “Bloodchild”
Discuss: What does Butler mean when she says that this is a story about paying the rent?
Submit: Short story response due on OAKS by noon
- 4/20: **Read:** Republic Bks V-VII, ll. 473d-541b
Discuss: How does the allegory of the cave illustrate Plato’s larger argument?
- 4/22: **Read:** Republic Bks VIII-IX, ll. 543a-592b5
Discuss: Why create an ideal city if it is simply going to collapse?
- 4/25: **Read:** Republic, Bk X, ll. 595a-621c5
Discuss: What is the lesson of the Myth of Er?

Final Exam: April 27 3:30-5:30 (in classroom)

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. Each response should choose a theme from the story, explain that theme with specific examples and then connect that theme to class discussions. 2 points (out of 10) are automatically deducted for late short story responses. Responses **MUST** be submitted via the dropbox. **No submissions via email or in hardcopy!**

Responses should 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 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.

Participation:

There are multiple ways to engage and to show your engagement in this class. First, you may directly participate in class discussion. To do this you should come to class having done the reading and with ideas about what you find: interesting, confusing, connecting (items that connect to either earlier readings or to events in the world). Second, I will ask for you to reflect on your class engagement twice in the semester based on in class discussion prompts. Each class will have a reflection question posed at the beginning of class. Each student must have a note taking system that can also be used for class reflection prompts. The reflection questions will allow you to make connections between your own perspectives and the concerns of the authors we read. You will not turn in your reflection. However, twice during the semester you will turn in a larger participation reflection that will ask you to look back on these prompts.

Quizzes:

After each unit there will be a quiz covering the main terms and ideas that we discuss in each unit. Those terms will be highlighted in the lectures (and on powerpoint). These quizzes will be primarily short answer based on key ideas and passages from the assigned reading.

Lecture/event responses:

Three responses to lectures or events happening on campus or off are required. These responses should briefly explain the focus (do not rehash the entire event) of the event and then make a clear connection to class themes and or discussions. The POLI newsletter will give announcements for many events.

Papers:

There are four short (3-5 pages) papers for this class. I will hand out prompts for these papers one week prior to the due date and the papers are due on OAKS. No matter the paper assignment be sure 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).

Additionally papers **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 and double-spaced with page numbers.
- 2) Attach the paper worksheet to all papers (worksheet on OAKS under assignments in Content tab)
- 3) All citations will be in accordance with the departmental referencing guide.
<http://polisci.cofc.edu/documents/12policitationguide.pdf>
- 4) Extensions may be approved 24 hours before the paper is due
- 5) Students will retain a copy of the paper, either on your computer or in hard copy
- 6) 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://deanofstudents.cofc.edu/honor-system/studenthandbook/>

Additional policies:

OAKS:

OAKS, including Gradebook, will be used for this course throughout the semester to provide the syllabus and class materials and grades for each assignment, which will be regularly posted.

Accommodations: The College will make reasonable accommodations for persons with documented disabilities. Students should apply for services at the Center for Disability Services/SNAP located on the first floor of the Lightsey Center, Suite 104. Students approved for accommodations are responsible for notifying me as soon as possible and for contacting me one week before accommodation is needed.

Food and Housing Resources

Many CofC students report experiencing food and housing insecurity. If you are facing challenges in securing food (such as not being able to afford groceries or get sufficient food to eat every day) and housing (such as lacking a safe and stable place to live), please contact the Dean of Students for support (<http://studentaffairs.cofc.edu/about/salt.php>). Also, you can go to <http://studentaffairs.cofc.edu/student-food-housing-insecurity/index.php> to learn about food and housing assistance that is available to you. In addition, there are several resources on and off campus to help. You can visit the Cougar Pantry in the Stern Center (2nd floor), a student-run food pantry that provides dry-goods and hygiene products at no charge to any student in need.

Weather/Illness: In the event of class being cancelled on account of the weather or a rising number of people in isolation, we will pivot online. For a weather event that requires evacuation I expect you to use

OAKS and to have your books available. Every effort will be made to have discussions online during a weather event.