

Essentials of Political Thought
POLS 300-01, Fall 2013
Syllabus (Revised 8/28/13)

Professor Brian Smith

Friday, 2:30-5 pm, Partridge 209

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Office Hours: Monday 1-2:45 and Thursday 1-2:15 at Café Diem, and by appointment

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Office Hours: Monday 4:15-5:15 and Friday 5:45-6:45, at Café Diem

Prerequisite: The official requirement for this course is any 200-level POLS course. Students will find that previous courses with heavy reading and writing, and courses that teach deep textual analysis (English, Philosophy, etc.) will be useful preparation.

Course Description

As the Political Science and Law Department's required course in political philosophy, this class will introduce a variety of major concepts in politics. Focusing on several important primary sources about vital questions of politics and life, the class will lead students to discuss certain permanent questions concerning political and social order. In our efforts, we shall attempt to gain some understanding of the relationship between human nature and politics, the nature of political obligation, political economy, and liberty. Each of our authors approaches these questions in differing ways; all of them will provoke other questions of importance for our own lives.

Course Goals

Students will improve their ability to interpret difficult texts and both their written and verbal expression. They will also acquire a basic understanding of the most important problems in politics and society and various prominent attempts to grapple with these dilemmas. Moreover, knowledge of these ideas will help prepare students for understanding advanced concepts in politics.

Course Expectations

First and most importantly: Read this syllabus carefully. Clearly understanding the class requirements will save us all trouble later.

I will conduct the class primarily as a discussion. I will also post a powerpoint-based lecture on Blackboard each week to further your understanding of the readings. Some students get a great deal from participating in class discussions; others do not. For this reason, class participation will count for extra credit only. Questions count as a form of participation. Class discussions should be respectful and considerate of others' views and opinions. Expect to be challenged, but look on it as an opportunity, not a threat.

Students should come to class with the assigned texts in hand and read, and your participation in class should directly reference the readings. The reading load will vary from week to week, averaging between fifty and eighty pages per meeting (sometimes more or less). In order to be prepared for this, you should take notes on the readings that identify key passages for discussion, or which you do not understand. Under each class meeting, I have listed a few questions designed to guide your reading of the texts. In preparing for class, you should try to outline answers to these questions in your reading notes. This effort will allow you to gain more from the class.

Some additional observations about reading for the class: these are not standard textbooks with bold lettering around every word you need to know. A casual reading or one undertaken with various distractions present will probably not get you very far. Because of all this, you should probably allot three or more hours of focused attention per class meeting to the material. If you fail to do this, your ability to follow class discussion will be minimal and your chances of doing well on any of the writing assignments will be slim.

In terms of notes on the class readings, I recommend all students both mark up their books and take extensive notes with page references that essentially index the readings. You should type these up so that they are searchable. This is time-consuming, but will benefit you tremendously for the writing assignments.

Regarding note-taking in class, I have noticed that once some time has passed, most students have a very difficult time following their notes from a discussion based class like this. Because of the circuitous nature of most discussions, you will not leave class with a neat outline. This means that if you want decent notes you can use to help you with papers and the final, within a day or so of each class, you should rewrite or type up the class notes and attempt to provide a structure for them that you will understand later in the class.

Silence all cell phones, pagers, or other communication devices while in class. Keep distractions from the class conversation to a minimum, especially side-conversations. You may bring food, but please note that opening plastic food wrappers usually cannot be done quietly, so just tear it open and get the noise over. I will ask anyone who is consistently disruptive to leave.

This syllabus is subject to change, but I will always provide advance notice both in class and via email. You can always find a copy of the most up-to-date syllabus on Blackboard.

Assignments and Grading

Because we will discuss the sections listed in class on the corresponding day, you must keep up with the reading and be ready to talk about it. You must complete two essays and a take-home final. All late essays will be marked down one minus step per day until I receive them. I will determine your grades using the following breakdown:

First Paper:	25%
Second Paper:	25%
Final Exam:	50%

Active participation in class discussions may increase your grade by up to two + steps.

Both the individual components and final grade will be calculated on and entered into the gradebook under the slightly more generous 4.0 scale. So, A = 3.71-4.0, A- = 3.31-3.70, B+ = 3.01-3.3, and so on.

Textbooks

Please purchase the following books from a source of your choice. They should all be at the bookstore relatively early in the semester. Other readings and all course documents may be always found online at our course website on Blackboard. Many different translations of the historical books we will read exist. As class discussions will frequently refer to the text and our discussions will be hard to follow without the right page numbers, you *must* use these editions for the course. Some students put off buying books or don't buy them at all because of financial concerns. The Dean of Students Office runs a program where you can get a loan to purchase course materials. They are located on the 4th Floor of the Student Center. You can also find contact information for them at their website:

<http://www.montclair.edu/deanstudents/contact.html>

Thomas Aquinas, *Treatise on Law*, Richard J. Regan trans., Hackett Publishing, ISBN: 0872205487

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Robert C. Bartlett and Susan D. Collins trans., University of Chicago Press, ISBN: 0226026752

Aristotle, *Politics*, Carnes Lord trans., University of Chicago Press, 2nd edition, ISBN: 0226921840

John Dewey, *Freedom and Culture*, Prometheus Books, ISBN: 0879755601

Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and John Jay, *The Federalist*, George W. Carey and James McClellan, eds., Liberty Fund Books, ISBN: 0865972893

C.S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man*, HarperCollins, ISBN: 0060652942

Plato, *The Trial and Death of Socrates*, John M. Cooper and G.M.A. Grube trans., Hackett Publishing, ISBN: 0872205541

Course Schedule and Readings

Before the first meeting, you should download and read these two handouts on writing and outlining off of Blackboard, as well as complete the Lewis reading – we will begin work on the first class session. You should reference the writing tools for all future courses and writing assignments with me and anyone else:

Colburn and Uphoff, “Common Expository Problems in Students’ Papers and Theses,” in *PS: Political Science & Politics*, Vol. 45, No. 2 (April 2012), pp. 291-297

J. Budziszewski, “Course Handout on Analytical Outlining”

9/6: On the Power of Words

Read: Lewis, *The Abolition of Man*, Ch. 1, pp. 1-26

Discussion Questions:

- 1) Why does it matter to Lewis that the authors of *The Green Book* undermine the idea that moral judgments reflect reason and emotion?
- 2) What political importance does he think the denial of reason has on those that take this position?

9/13: The Modern Political Wager – Denying Natural Law

Read: Lewis, *The Abolition of Man*, Chs. 2-3, pp. 27-101

Discussion Questions:

- 1) Lewis argues that instinct provides little or no guidance for a moral human life. Why?
- 2) What is the *Tao*? Why does Lewis believe it is so important for decent political life?
- 3) Why does Lewis fear the “abolition of man”? What does he mean by this phrase?

9/20: In Defense of the Laws

Read: Plato, *Apology* and *Crito*, pp. 20-54 (this assignment is short, but read it very carefully – students often have a hard time with the dialogue format)

Discussion Questions:

- 1) To who or what does Socrates claim his highest allegiance? Why does he do this?
- 2) What relationship does Socrates claim with the city of Athens? What sorts of obligations does he believe the city has to him, and he to it?

Essay 1 on Lewis and Plato assigned, hard copy due in my mailbox in Dickson 204 on October 7th by 4:30 pm

9/27: Virtue and Character in Politics

Read: Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Books I-III, pp. 1-66

Discussion Questions:

- 1) How does Aristotle define virtue? What importance does it have for the good life?
- 2) What character traits does Aristotle suggest carry the greatest importance for political life?

10/4: Prudence and the Difficulties of Being Moral

Read: Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Books V-VII, pp. 90-162

Discussion Questions:

- 1) How does Aristotle attempt to categorize the various kinds of justice? Which seem most important to the city?
- 2) What is prudence? What makes so important for Aristotle?
- 3) Categorize the moral character types Aristotle discusses in Book VII. How do they relate to one another?

10/11: Politics, Friendship, and the Good

Read: Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Books VIII-X, pp. 163-235

Discussion Questions:

- 1) What role does pleasure have in the formation of a good character?
- 2) Why is friendship so important to Aristotle's discussion of politics?

10/18: Households, Cities, and Regimes

Read: Aristotle, Books I, III-IV, pp. 1-26 and 62-128

Discussion Questions:

- 1) How ought the household relate to the community? The economy?
- 2) What regimes must work hardest to preserve themselves against threats?

10/25: On Regime Types and Educating for Good Citizenship

Read: Aristotle, Books V-VI, VII: Chs. 1-3, 8-10, and 13-15, and Book VIII: Chs. 1-2, pp. 129-194, 200-205, 209-216, and 223-224

Discussion Questions:

- 1) What contributes most to the death of each of the kinds of regimes?
- 2) How does education and the choice of the correct institutions mitigate against the threats Aristotle sees to the various regimes?

Essay 2 on Aristotle assigned, due in my mailbox in Dickson 204 on November 11th by 4:30 pm.

11/1: Theology, Natural Law, and Politics

Read: Aquinas, *Treatise on Law*, Questions 90-92 and 94-97, pp. 1-21 and 33-67

Discussion Questions:

- 1) According to Aquinas, how does law relate to man's reason?
- 2) How does Aquinas distinguish human (positive) law from the other forms of law? How do these kinds of law depend upon one another?

11/8: A Government of Law and Reason amidst Fallen Nature and Self-Interest

Read: Hamilton, Madison, and Jay, *The Federalist*, Papers 1-3, 6-10, 14-17, 22, and 30, pp. 1-12, 20-49, 62-84, 104-12, and 145-49

Discussion Questions:

- 1) How do the authors' assumptions about human nature guide their analysis of interests in politics?
- 2) What themes consistently run through the various essays? Why do they matter to the authors?

11/15: A Partial Constitutional Remedy

Read: Hamilton, Madison, and Jay, *The Federalist*, Papers 35-40, 47-49, 51, 54-55, 57, 70, and 78, pp. 167-206, 249-64, 267-72, 282-91, 295-300, 362-69, and 401-8

Discussion Questions:

- 1) What balance between local, state, and federal government does the *Federalist* aim at?
- 2) With the exception of issues in foreign affairs governed by the executive, why do the authors demand slow action in government for so many purposes?

11/22: On the Nature of Evolutionary Freedom

Read: Dewey, *Freedom and Culture*, Chs. 1-3, pp. 11-61

Discussion Questions:

- 1) What does Dewey think about the connection between economics and culture?
- 2) How does Dewey critique Publius' vision? What role does the idea of "administration" play in this?

11/29: No class, Thanksgiving Break

12/6: A New Science of Politics

Read: Dewey, *Freedom and Culture*, Chs. 4-6, pp. 62-118

Discussion Questions:

- 1) What kind of morality does Dewey believe inherent in democracy?
- 2) How does Dewey criticize Marx?

12/11 (this is a “Wednesday as Friday” meeting): Democracy and Progress

Read: Dewey, *Freedom and Culture*, Ch. 7, pp. 119-134

William James, “The Moral Equivalent of War”

Online at: <http://www.constitution.org/wj/meow.htm>

Wilfred M. McClay, “The Moral Equivalent of War?”

Online at: http://www.nationalaffairs.com/doclib/20100918_McClay_pdf%5B1%5D.pdf

Discussion Questions:

- 1) What does Dewey believe defending American democracy requires?
- 2) What is a “moral equivalent of war”?
- 3) Compare and contrast Dewey’s arguments to those of William James.

Hard copies of take-home final exam due on Tuesday, December 19th in my mailbox in Dickson 204 by 4:30 pm.