

**Essentials of Political Thought**  
**POLS 300-02, Spring 2013**  
**Syllabus (Revised 1/21/13)**

Professor Brian Smith  
Monday, 5:30-8 pm, University Hall 1030  
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Office Hours: Mondays 4-5:15 and Thursdays 4-5:45 at Café Diem

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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. 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 two 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 three short 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:	10%
Second Paper:	20%
Third Paper:	20%
Final Exam:	40%

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 4<sup>th</sup> 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*, trans. Richard J. Regan, Hackett, ISBN: 0872205487

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Terence Irwin, 2nd ed., Hackett, ISBN: 0872204642

John C. Calhoun, *A Disquisition on Government*, ed. H. Lee Cheek, St. Augustine's Press, ISBN: 1587311852

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

John Locke, *The Second Treatise of Government*, ed. C.B. Macpherson, Hackett Publishing, ISBN: 9780915144860

Plato, *The Trial and Death of Socrates*, trans. G.M.A. Grube and John M. Cooper, 3rd ed., Hackett Publishing, ISBN: 9780872205543

Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, trans. Donald A. Cress, Hackett Publishing, ISBN: 087220068X

Sophocles, *Antigone*, trans. George Young, Dover Thrift Edition, ISBN: 0486278042

### **Course Schedule and Readings**

Before the first meeting, you should download and read these two handouts on writing and outlining off of Blackboard. You should reference them 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

Budziszewski, “Course Handout on Analytical Outlining”

#### **1/28: Ancient Politics – Piety and Morality**

Read: Plato, *Euthyphro*, pp. 1-19  
Sophocles, *Antigone*, all

Discussion Questions:

- 1) How does Euthyphro define “holiness”? How does Socrates question his logic?
- 2) What role does the idea of “approval” play in the dialogue?
- 3) On what grounds does Antigone justify her defiance of Creon’s edict?
- 4) What place does Creon appear to believe human law has in relation to morality, religious or otherwise?

#### **2/4: Socrates on Trial and Defending Athens’ Laws**

Read: Plato, *Apology* and *Crito*, pp. 20-54

Discussion Questions:

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

**Essay 1 on Sophocles and Plato assigned – due via email on Friday, February 15<sup>th</sup>**

2/11: Character Development, Virtue, and the Good

Read: Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, pp. 1-49 (Books I-III)

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?

2/18: Magnanimity, Honor, and Justice

Read: Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, pp. 49-119 (Books IV-VII)

Discussion Questions:

- 1) What is magnanimity? How does it relate to honor?
- 2) How does Aristotle attempt to categorize the various kinds of justice? Which seem most important to the city?
- 3) What is prudence? What makes so important for Aristotle?

2/25: Friendship and Community

Read: Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 119-171 (Books VIII-X)

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?

3/4: Theology, Natural Law, and Politics

Read: Aquinas, *Treatise on Law*, pp. 1-21, 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?

Essay 2 on Aristotle and Aquinas due via email on Friday, March 8<sup>th</sup>

3/11: No class – Spring Break

3/18: From the State of Nature to Civil Society

Read: Locke, *Second Treatise*, pp. 1-65

The U.S. Declaration of Independence, online here:

<http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/index.asp?documentprint=1>

Discussion Questions:

- 1) Discuss the rules Locke believes men live under in the state of nature. How does this natural state differ from the state of war?
- 2) What Locke think the natural limits of political power are? What role does property play in this?
- 3) How does Locke's argument enhance the claims of the Declaration of Independence?

3/25: The Limits of Politics

Read: Locke, *Second Treatise*, pp. 65-124

Discussion Questions:

- 1) In what ways does Locke limit the scope of political power? What functions do you think the modern state could not undertake if they followed his theory?
- 2) What sorts of actions dissolve government and return people to the state of nature? Why does Locke think "revolution" counts but "rebellion" does not?

4/1: History and the Force of Custom in Defending Liberty

Read: David Hume, "That Politics May Be Reduced to a Science," "Of Civil Liberty," "Of Commerce," and "Idea of a Perfect Commonwealth," in *Essays: Moral, Political, and Literary*, revised edition, ed. Eugene Miller (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1987), pp. 14-31, 87-96, 253-267, and 465-487 (pdfs on blackboard)

Discussion Questions:

- 1) How does Hume's liberalism differ from Locke's mode of thinking?
- 2) What criticisms, implicit or explicit, might we draw out of Hume against the ancients?
- 3) What kind of political science is Hume willing to defend?

4/8: The Sovereign People

Read: Rousseau, *Social Contract*, pp. 17-48

The French Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen, online here:  
[http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th\\_century/rightsof.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/rightsof.asp)

Discussion Questions:

- 1) What is the General Will? How does Rousseau believe the people join to create it?
- 2) Why does Rousseau believe that a real republic must remain small?
- 3) How does reading Rousseau change or enhance your understanding of the French Declaration?

4/15: The Republic of Virtue

Read: Rousseau, *Social Contract*, pp. 49-103

Discussion Questions:

- 1) Why does Rousseau believe that political representatives are dangerous to liberty?
- 2) How does the legislator help shape the General Will, or at least focus its attention on the most important matters?

Essay 3 on Locke, Hume, and Rousseau assigned – due via email on Friday, April 26<sup>th</sup>

4/22: Organic Communities and the Concurrent Majority

Read: Calhoun, *Disquisition*, pp. 1-40 (to end of last full paragraph)

Lincoln, “The Perpetuation of Our Political Institutions” online at:  
<http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/index.asp?documentprint=157>

Discussion Questions:

- 1) What is the Calhoun’s concurrent majority? How does he believe it guards liberty?
- 2) How do Lincoln and Calhoun disagree about the basis for protecting minority rights and the Constitution?

4/29: Inequality and Liberty

Read: Calhoun, *Disquisition*, pp. 40-81

Alexander Stephens, “Cornerstone Speech,” online at:  
<http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/index.asp?documentprint=76>

Discussion Questions:

- 1) Does Stephens follow Calhoun’s logic in justifying the Confederates’ secession from the Union?
- 2) What lessons does Calhoun believe defenders of liberty should draw from history?

5/6: The Idea of Natural Law

Read: Lewis, *Abolition of Man*, all

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? What political importance does he think this has?
- 2) Lewis argues that instinct provides little or no guidance for a moral human life. Why?
- 3) What is the *Tao*? Why does Lewis believe it is so important for decent political life?

Final Exam due on Tuesday, May 14<sup>th</sup> in my mailbox in Dickson 204 by 4:30 pm