

Political Science 2496: Introduction to Political Philosophy

TR 9:30-10:50

GH 441

Instructor: Prof. Heath Fogg Davis

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Office Hours: in my office (GH 455), W 1:30 pm-3:30 pm, and by appointment.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

The primary aim of this course is to provide students with an introduction to the Political Science field of Political Theory—its motivating questions, themes, and mode of inquiry. A theory is a model or blueprint for making sense of our environment. Descriptive theories are models we use to describe what is, whereas prescriptive theories are models used to envision what can and/or should be. Political theories relate to our political environment, and come in both *descriptive* and *prescriptive* forms. But what distinguishes our political environment from other aspects of our social world? Whether a government is monarchical, theocratic, democratic, or socialist is obviously a political matter. But other matters are less clear-cut such as the structure of families, the provision of health care, the promotion and cultivation of the arts, the psychological trauma of war, and our moral obligations to non-human animals and the natural environment. What is “politics,” and what does it mean to theorize about it? The course is based upon close readings of some of the key political theory texts from ancient times to the 21st century.

In reading and thinking about our course materials, please keep three categories of critique in mind:

1. **Form:** What kind of writing is it? (e.g. dramatic dialogue, formal essay, book chapter, primary/secondary source, journalistic article, blog, etc.) Why do you think the author chose the form? Is it effective, and to what end? What is your reaction to the author’s writing style? For example, does she/he use writing tools and/or resources such as metaphor, social scientific data, personal narrative, and/or anecdote effectively? What are the benefits and limits of specific writing formats? What is your evaluation of the writing style? Is it “well written,” and what is the basis of your evaluation?
2. **Content:** What is the main argument (thesis)? Do you agree or disagree with it? Why or why not? Could the thesis be strengthened? If so, how? What other arguments does the author make to support his/her main argument? Are these supporting arguments effective in your view?
3. **Resonance:** Does the text “speak” to you? Is it relevant to your perception of our contemporary political world? Why or why not? If the text does resonate, then *how* does it resonate?

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

There will be several quizzes given at the start of class throughout the semester. Each quiz will consist of three short questions from the reading assignment due that day. You are permitted

to use your notes to answer these questions, but not our course texts. The purpose of the quizzes is to reward those who complete the reading assignment, and to encourage good note taking. Each quiz will be graded as follows: 3 correct answers=100; 2 correct answers=85; 1 correct answer=70; 0 correct=50; absent=0. I will drop your lowest score when calculating your final grade. Everyone is allowed one absence or bad day.

This is a *writing intensive* course. There will be four writing assignments spread over the course of the semester (see schedule below for due dates). In each assignment you will be asked to answer a question posted on our Blackboard site. It is my job to assist you with your writing, and so we will spend some of our class time covering the basic elements of good academic writing and tackling some of its challenges. All assignments must be submitted electronically via Blackboard. Due dates and times are firm. Late papers will not be accepted and will receive a failing grade unless you have a documented emergency.

Your active participation is crucial to the success of this class. We need you! You will have the *opportunity* to lead our seminar discussion with an individual presentation of 10-15 minutes. Please get creative! Zoom in on something that resonated with you from our assigned reading, and then search for some artifact from our contemporary world that demonstrates this resonance. This might be a brief YouTube video of a movie or television scene, a news article, a commercial advertisement, an artistic image, song lyrics, a poem, a photograph, an object, or anything else that you'd like to share with us. Your presentation should consist in explaining the artifact's *resonance*. Be sure to tell us the *connection you see between our reading assignment and your artifact*. My hope is that you will find this format less daunting and more interesting than a traditional class presentation. Have fun, be yourself!

I am available during my regular office hours each week to discuss any aspect of the course. I am happy to schedule alternative times if my office hours conflict with your schedule.

Required Texts

Unless otherwise specified, all of our readings will be posted on our Blackboard site.

Final Grade Breakdown

Quizzes	10%
First Writing Assignment	15%
Second Writing Assignment	15%
Third Writing Assignment	15%
Fourth Writing Assignment	20%
Presentation	15%
Participation	10%

Letter Grade Equivalencies*

A	93-100
A-	90-92
B+	87-89
B	83-86
B-	80-82
C+	77-79
C	73-76
C-	70-72
D+	67-69
D	63-66
D-	60-62
F	59 and below

*I use these to assign your final grade.

COURSE POLICIES

Attendance

You should neither miss a class nor be late. Late arrivals and early departures are disruptive and unacceptable; if you anticipate being late or having to leave early on a regular basis, please make other arrangements. In the unlikely event that you arrive late to class, take a seat closest to the door in order to minimize disruption.

Class Engagement

Active course engagement and an attentive presence are essential. You must come to class prepared to present your response to the reading when asked, to engage course material thoughtfully, and to share your observations and insights with your classmates.

Class Etiquette

This class is designed to encourage discussion and exchanges of ideas in conjunction with the development of critical thinking, reading, and writing skills. I expect you to treat your fellow students with respect and courtesy, listening when they speak and refraining from personal attacks in your own statements and questions. You may disagree with your fellow students, but listen attentively when they are speaking and respond in a courteous manner.

Notes

You are strongly advised to take notes during discussions and presentations. I expect you to pay attention in the classroom and you are responsible for remembering discussions about the material we cover. Please keep in mind that the emphasis on note taking is meant to emphasize the importance of attentiveness and of assimilating information, ideas, and concepts in a thoughtful and intelligent manner. You should keep a weekly account of the course and be able to respond to points raised in previous classes. To aid you, I have provided a template for note taking on our BB site.

Disability Disclosure Statement

This course is open to all students who meet the academic requirements for participation. Any student who has a need for accommodation based on the impact of a disability should contact the instructor privately to discuss the specific situation as soon as possible. Please also contact Disability Resources and Services at 215-204-1280 in 100 Ritter Annex to coordinate reasonable accommodations for your coursework and participation.

Statement on Academic Freedom

Freedom to teach and freedom to learn are inseparable facets of academic freedom. The university has adopted a policy on Student and Faculty Academic Rights and responsibilities (Policy # 03.70.02) which can be accessed through the following link:

http://policies.temple.edu/getdoc.asp?policy_non=03.70.02

Plagiarism

This instructor and the University take plagiarism extremely seriously. Personal pride should be sufficient deterrent, but there are also severe academic penalties for academic dishonesty. Please consult the University Bulletin concerning Temple's policy on plagiarism. Any kind of plagiarism for this class will result in a failing final grade for the course. The infraction will also be reported to university authorities.

Finally

Please remember that I hold everyone accountable to these course policies. They are here to provide a framework for the class – without which we would not get much accomplished. This seminar should be a fun time, as well as a challenging period of intellectual growth, and I look forward to working with you.

Course Schedule

Reading assignments are to be completed for the day listed. You are expected to come to class prepared to discuss the reading assignment. I reserve the right to alter reading assignments, but will always give you fair warning.

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| 1. | 1/21 | Introduction, no reading assignment |
| | 1/23 | Plato, <i>The Republic</i> , Bk 1 |
| 2. | 1/28 | Plato, <i>The Republic</i> , Bks 2 and 3 |
| | 1/30 | Aristotle, <i>Politics</i> , Bk 1 |
| 3. | 2/4 | Hobbes, <i>Leviathan</i> , chs. 13-14 |
| | 2/6 | In-class writing workshop (reading assignment TBD) |
| 4. | 2/11 | Locke, Excerpt from <i>The Second Treatise</i> |
| | 2/13 | Rousseau, <i>On the Social Contract</i> , Book 2 |
| 2/14: First writing assignment due (electronic submission) | | |
| 5. | 2/18 | Tocqueville, Excerpt from <i>Democracy in America</i> |
| | 2/20 | Kant, Excerpt from <i>Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals</i> |
| 6. | 2/25 | Mill, Excerpt from <i>Utilitarianism</i> |
| | 2/27 | Mill, Excerpt from <i>On Liberty</i> |
| 7. | 3/4 | Spring Break—no class |
| | 3/6 | Spring Break—no class |
| 8. | 3/11 | Mill, Excerpt from <i>The Subjection of Women</i> |
| | 3/13 | Marx, Excerpt from “The Communist Manifesto” |

3/14: Second writing assignment due (electronic submission)

9. 3/18 Rawls, Excerpt from *Justice as Fairness*
 3/20 Friedman, Excerpt from "Capitalism and Freedom"
10. 3/25 Okin, Excerpt from "Justice, Gender, and the Family"
 3/27 Young, "Taking the Basic Structure Seriously"
11. 4/1 Foucault, "Power, Right, and Truth"
 4/3 Fanon, Excerpt from "The Wretched of the Earth"
12. 4/8 Appiah, "The Case for Contamination"
 4/10 Snyder-Hall, "Choice Feminism"

4/11: Third writing assignment due (electronic submission)

13. **4/15 TBD**
4/17 TBD
14. 4/22 Waldron, "Homelessness and the Issue of Freedom"
 4/24 Singer, "Animal Liberation at 30"
15. 4/29 TBD (class votes on reading assignment topic)

5/1: Fourth writing assignment due (electronic submission)

- 5/1 Conclusion and celebration!