

POLS 180
MWF 10:00-11:05, MI 213
Office: MI 214
Office Hours: Mon. 2:45-3:45 / Wed. 2:45-3:45 / Thu. 12:00-1:00 / other times – email me
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Introduction to Political Thinking Fall 2017

Course Description

What is justice? What are the possibilities and limits of power, freedom, and property? What ways are there to conceptualize ‘the good society,’ and what is the role of political theorizing in achieving it? This course provides an introduction to political theory in order to investigate these and other enduring questions in Western political theory, focusing on four major political thinkers. In doing so, the course emphasizes close readings, critical analysis, and class discussion of theoretical texts.

The course explores several different modes of political thinking.

- First, it examines ancient and modern attempts to build theoretical systems, exemplified by Plato, John Locke, and Karl Marx.
- Second, it analyzes political theoretical critique, with “critique” having many dimensions. We engage this kind of thinking in the work of Marx and Wendy Brown, in our examination of political thinking about race, and in contemporary commentaries on race, gender, and colonialism in the works of Plato, Locke, and Marx.
- Third, we practice day-to-day political thinking and close reading through the class blog we will create during the semester.

Throughout the course, we will discuss the ways these different kinds of political thinking relate to one another.

The primary objective of this course is for you to develop your own capacity for political thinking beyond this class alone, as a crucial element in a liberal arts education. This means that responding to, analyzing, critiquing, building on, and connecting the political theorists we read is more important than memorizing every detail. It also means that your active citizenship in the course – in the classroom and on the class blog – is essential, and that you should be open to reflecting on and reevaluating your own political thinking (as I will do myself). Our course discussions and writing assignments provide opportunities for practicing your own political thinking in conversation with your peers and with the texts we read.

This is a discussion-centered class, and all students are expected to actively participate in class. You must prepare for every class by doing the reading, reflecting upon the course texts, and bringing to class issues, questions, and passages for discussion. **Bring the relevant text to class, always!**

Course Goals and Learning Objectives

- Cultivate the capacity for political thinking in its various forms
- Develop a familiarity with central questions, arguments, themes, concepts, and thinkers in Western political theory
- Approach the history of political theory as an ongoing, connected conversation debating enduring questions related to justice, power, freedom, and more

- Develop the ability to critically analyze issues of race, gender, class, sexuality, and colonialism in political theory
- Improve skills for close reading and interpretation of complex texts
- Foster abilities for critical thinking, for discussion and debate with peers, and for analytical writing in the classroom and in political life beyond it
- Reexamine assumptions about politics and political life in order to open one's self to new perspective and ways of thinking about the political world in which one is immersed

Evaluation

- Class citizenship: 25%
- Class blog: 25%
- Take-home essays (3 essays at 10% each): 30%
- Final assignment: 20%

Assignments

- **Class citizenship (25% of grade)**: I care about whether you come to class and the role you play in it; our class will be most rewarding if you attend regularly, and if you are an active citizen. I expect you to come on time, to listen, and to participate. After four absences, the class citizenship component of your grade will decrease. Class citizenship, however, entails more than just showing up, it also means participating in class.
 - Participation can take many different forms: asking questions about unclear concepts or materials, raising ideas we as a class or the author may have overlooked, respectfully sharing opinions, volunteering to read passages when asked, visiting office hours, contributing to class discussions in large and small groups without monopolizing conversations, paying attention to me and to your classmates, and taking risks when there are questions asked that have no clear answers. Participation does not only mean talking—it also means working to be aware of the space you inhabit and how you can best contribute to an atmosphere of supportive learning.
 - I understand that speaking in class can be challenging. We will have a number of different kinds of discussions to encourage participation, and you should use the blog as a way of preparing ideas to bring to our class sessions. Regularly coming to office hours and discussing the readings can contribute to your class citizenship grade as well, as does asking questions in class.
 - Last but not least, class citizenship means being receptive of and interested in others' political and philosophical perspectives, respectful of experiences different than your own, and open to having others disagree with you. Disagreement is inevitable in a political theory class (including with me!), and can be incredibly productive so long as it proceeds collegially.
- **Class Blog (25% of grade)**: Throughout the semester, we will write a class blog, using WordPress. During the first week of class, I will lead a brief WordPress tutorial and distribute instructions on joining WordPress and becoming a member of the blog. You are required to write one post of at least 250 words + 1-3 discussion questions approximately once per week; in addition, you must make 3 comments per week on others' posts. Posts are due by midnight the night before class, on the readings to be discussed the next day; comments can be made at any time during the week. The class will be split into 3 groups, and the group you are in will

determine what days you are required to write a post. The posting schedule will be passed out and uploaded to Moodle.

The blog is *not* intended to be a place for you to summarize the readings, but rather to interpret and analyze them. Your blog posts can take many forms: offer a critique of the reading, connect it to contemporary or historical events, relate it to earlier readings in the course, offer a close reading of an especially important or interesting passage, and much more. We will use responses and discussion questions in each class session. A secondary goal of the blog is to familiarize you with the WordPress platform, gaining a skill set relevant for work in the many advocacy groups, organizations, and businesses that use WordPress or similar content management systems/web platforms. In order to encourage you to grapple with difficult ideas and challenge your own views, this will be a private blog visible only to our class.

- **Take-Home Essays (3 essays, 10% each; 30% total)**: You will write three take-home essays over the course of the semester. For each day (not class period) an essay is late, it loses one letter grade. Essays are due 10/6, 11/3, and 12/11; you will always have at least one week with the assignment before it is due.
- **Final assignment (20% of grade)**: You will have a choice of your final assignment, either a written or oral assignment. Details of the format of each will be made available no later than Fall Break. Note that our scheduled final exam time is 9am-noon on Dec. 19; you need to ensure you will be in Beloit through that time before leaving for winter break.

Texts

The following list of books is required. They are available in the bookstore, and are readily available online. Plato's Republic and the Marx-Engels Reader are available on 2-hour reserve at the library. If you plan to buy them online, please be sure to buy the same edition as listed below (search by the ISBN number). We will read them in the order listed. All other readings will be provided on the course Moodle.

- Plato, *The Republic of Plato*, ed. Allan Bloom. Basic Books 2nd edition (ISBN 9780465069347) or 3rd edition (ISBN 978-0465094080)
 - Note: this book is available on 2-hour reserve at the library
- John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, ed. C.B. Macpherson. Hackett. (ISBN 9780915144860).
- *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker. Norton 2nd edition (ISBN 9780393090406)
 - Note: this book is available on 2-hour reserve at the library

The following book is optional; we will read three chapters from it, but it is also available online through the library

- Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution*. Zone Books (ISBN 9781935408536)

Technology

Numerous studies (for example [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), [here](#); for an overview see [here](#)) demonstrate that, on aggregate, students taking notes by hand learn information more effectively and receive higher grades than those taking notes on computer, even when those on devices are exclusively focused on class tasks. Moreover, many of us (myself certainly included!) find it difficult to pull ourselves away from email, social media, news, etc. when we have screens in front of us. Finally, in a class that will involve lots of discussion with one another, screens impede the conversations that will be

essential to our experience in the course this semester. You need to be able to devote your full attention to your peers, the text, and the ideas we are discussing.

Consequently, in general there will be **no phones, tablets/iPads, or laptops in the classroom**. There are **exceptions** to this rule. **Most importantly, if you have a documented need or accommodation to use an electronic device in class, you are more than welcome to do so.**

Additionally, on the rare times when I lecture, anyone is welcome to take notes on an electronic device, but it should be put away for class conversations, small group work, etc. If you think that using such a device beyond lectures is essential to your success in the course, come talk to me about it. Finally, when we discuss Wendy Brown's *Undoing the Demos* at the end of the semester, you are welcome to bring a device in, since the book is available online through the library catalog.

Because we will not be utilizing screens in the classroom, **you need to bring a hard copy of the texts to every class, including the PDFs we are reading**. If you would like to partner with one other person to alternate printing out PDFs between you, that is fine with me so long as there is one printed copy for every two people in class, and so long as you bring notes on the reading to class.

This policy is open to revision as the semester unfolds.

Disability Accommodations and Tutoring

If you have a disability and need accommodations, contact Learning Enrichment and Disability Services (LEADS) located on 2nd floor Pearsons (north side), [608-3632572](tel:608-3632572), learning@beloit.edu or make an appointment through joydeleon.youcanbook.me. For accommodations in my class, you are to bring me an Access Letter from the Director of LEADS and then we will discuss how to implement the accommodations. Contact that office promptly; accommodations are not retroactive.

Free peer tutoring is available for most classes. For a tutor, apply by going to your Portal, to the Student Life tab, and then apply using the Tutoring Forms (on left) and Request a Tutor. If you have any questions, contact LEADS.

Writing Advising

The Writing Center has student writers who are trained tutors ready to work with you collaboratively on any stage of your writing in this class--from brainstorming to final editing. It's a friendly and supportive place, and their goal is to help you to improve your writing and become a better writer. You can make an appointment here: [Writing Center Appointments](#).

Policy on Inclusivity at Beloit College

Inclusivity is a demonstration of equity and social justice through awareness, understanding, and respect for the differences in identity, culture, background, experience, and socialization, and the ways in which these forms of difference impact how we live and learn. Inclusivity requires equitable, institution-wide representation and access to resources. In practice, this manifests itself by each individual being aware of, committed to, and responsible for the well-being and care of all students, staff, and faculty.

Academic Misconduct and Plagiarism

Academic misconduct and dishonesty are serious offenses. Such acts violate the trust that forms the foundation of the student-teacher relationship, they rob students of opportunities to learn, and they

damage the reputation of the College as a whole. In particular, plagiarism constitutes intellectual theft and is completely unacceptable. I expect that you will follow Beloit's policy on academic honesty printed in the Student Handbook. Any assignments or exams that violate this policy will receive a failing grade. I will also notify the Dean of Students of any cases of academic dishonesty, and she will determine any further penalties.

Other course policies and notes

- If a student has a desired name that is not listed on my course roster, please let me know. Students are encouraged to notify me of their gender pronouns. I use he/him/his pronouns.
 - Check your email regularly.
 - I strongly encourage you to come visit my office hours; if the times listed don't work, email me so we can figure out another time to meet.
 - If you are struggling with any aspect of the course, talk to me sooner rather than later so we can work on the ways to best help you. Please also consider requesting a Peer Tutor, working with the Writing Center, or seeking assistance from Learning Enrichment and Disability Services.
 - If a religious holiday that you observe conflicts with an assignment, please let me know in advance so that we may discuss alternate options.
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READING SCHEDULE

Subject to changes, which will be announced in class and over e-mail. When there are multiple readings assigned, please read in the order listed below.

I. Introduction: What is Political Thinking?

Aug. 28: Welcome, Introduction, Syllabus, and Asking Questions

- In-class: Kyla Wazana Tompkins, "Some Notes On How To Ask A Good Question About Theory That Will Provoke Conversation And Further Discussion From Your Colleagues" (2016)

Aug. 30: What is political thinking?

- John Dryzek, Bonnie Honig, and Anne Phillips, "Introduction," *Oxford Handbook of Political Theory* (2008)
 - Part 1 through 1.5 required, the rest is optional
- Stephen K. White "Pluralism, Platitudes, and Paradoxes: Western Political Thought at the Beginning of a New Century," *What is Political Theory?*, ed. White and Moon (2004)
 - Read pp. 1-4

Sept. 1

What is political thinking?, continued...

- Ruth W. Grant, "Political Theory, Political Science, and Politics," *Political Theory* 30, no. 4 (2002)
 - Read pp. 577-581 and 585-end

Sept. 4: What is political thinking about race in America?

- W.E.B. DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), "The Forethought" and chap. 1
- W.E.B. DuBois on Confederate monuments (1931) and on Robert E. Lee (1928)

Sept. 6: What is political thinking about race in political theory?

- Charles W. Mills, *Black Rights/White Wrongs* (2017), chap. 7 pp. 114-119 and 127-135; chap. 10 pp. 194-200

II. Plato: What is Justice?

Sept. 8

- *Republic* (c. 380 BCE), Book I, start – 336a

Sept. 11

- *Republic*, Book I, 336b – end
- *Republic*, Book II, start – 367e

Sept. 13

- *Republic*, Book II, 367e – end

Sept. 15

- *Republic*, Book III

Sept. 18

- *Republic*, Book IV

Sept. 20

- *Republic*, Book V

Sept. 22

- *Republic*, Book VI

Sept. 25

- *Republic*, Book VII

Sept. 27

- *Republic*, Book VIII

Sept. 29

- *Republic*, Book IX

Oct. 2: Plato and Race

- Rachana Kamtekar, “Distinction Without a Difference? Race and *Genos* in Plato.” In *Philosophers and Race: Critical Essays*, ed. Ward and Lott (2012)
- Martin Bernal, “Isokrates and Plato” in chap. 1 of *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization, Vol. I* (1987)

Oct. 4: Plato and Gender

- Elizabeth V. Spelman, “Hairy Cobblers and Philosopher-Queens.” In *Feminist Interpretations of Plato*, ed. Tuana (1994)

III. John Locke: What is Liberty?

Oct. 6

Essay I Due

- In-class: Intro to Locke and Overview of the *First Treatise* (no reading)

Oct. 9

- Locke, *Second Treatise of Government* (c. 1689), Preface and chaps. 1-4

Oct. 11

- *Second Treatise of Government*, chaps. 5-6

Oct. 13: ONLINE CLASS (will not meet in person; John away at conference)

- *Second Treatise of Government*, chap. 7

Fall break!

Oct. 23

- *Second Treatise of Government*, chaps. 8 (read §95-99 and §112-end), 9, 11

Oct. 25

- *Second Treatise of Government*, chaps. 14, 18, 19

Oct. 27: Locke's Contractual Exclusions

- Carole Pateman, *The Sexual Contract* (1988), chap. 1 pp. 1-7; chap. 4, pp. 91-96
- Stacy Clifford Simplican, *The Capacity Contract: Intellectual Disability and the Question of Citizenship* (2015). Chap. 1, "Locke's Capacity Contract and the Construction of Idiocy"

Oct. 30: Locke and Colonialism

- John Quiggin, "[John Locke Against Freedom](#)." *Jacobin*. 2015
- Uday Singh Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire* (1999), chap. 2, "Liberal Conventions and Imperial Inclusions" (read pp. 46-64)

Nov. 1: NO CLASS (Advising Practicum)

IV. Karl Marx: What is Capitalism?

Nov. 3

Essay II Due

- In-class: Marx lecture
- Marx, Letter to Arnold Ruge (1843), (M-ER, "For a Ruthless Criticism of Everything Existing," 12-16)

Nov. 6: The Critique of Liberalism

- Marx, "On the Jewish Question" (1843-4) (M-ER, read 26-46)

Nov. 8: Marx's Method – Historical Materialism

- Marx, Preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (1859) (M-ER "Marx on the History of His Opinions," 3-6)
- Marx, "Theses on Feuerbach" (1845) (M-ER 143-145)
- Marx and Engels, "German Ideology Pt. I," (1845-6) (M-ER, read 146-165)

Nov. 10: The Critique of Capital - Alienation

- Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, "Estranged Labor" (M-ER, read 70-79)

Nov. 13: The Critique of Capital – Commodities

- Marx, *Capital Vol. I* (1867) (M-ER, "Commodities," 302-12; "The Fetishism of Commodities and the Secrets Thereof," 319-329)

Nov. 15: NO CLASS (International Symposium Day)

Nov. 17: The Critique of Capital - Exploitation

- Marx, *Capital Vol. I* (M-ER, Buying and Selling of Labour Power,” 338-43; “The Limits of the Working Day,” 361-64 “...Exploitation, Sect. 4 and Sect. 5,” 372-376; “Relative Surplus-Population or Industrial Reserve Army,” 422-31
- Optional: “...Exploitation, 367-372”; Primitive Accumulation, 431-438

Nov. 20: Revolution

- Marx and Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (1848-9) (M-ER 469-500)
- *Capital Vol. III*, excerpt (M-ER 439-441)

Nov. 22: ONLINE CLASS; will not meet in person

Marx and Race, Marx and Colonialism

- W.E.B. DuBois, “Marxism and the Negro Problem,” excerpts. In *African American Political Thought, 1890-1930* (1996), ed. Wintz
- Edward Said, *Orientalism* (1978), pp. 153-7

Nov. 24: NO CLASS (Thanksgiving Break)

Nov. 27: Marxist Feminisms

- Heidi Hartmann, “The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism: Towards a More Progressive Union.” *Capital and Class* 3 (1979)
- Angela Davis, “The Approaching Obsolescence of Housework: A Working Class Perspective,” chap. 10 in *Women, Race, and Class* (1981)

V. Neoliberalism and #BlackLivesMatter: What is 21st Century Political Thinking?:

Nov. 29: Neoliberalism

- Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos* (2015), Preface (read pp. 9 -11) and chap. 1

Dec. 1: Neoliberalism

- *Undoing the Demos*, chap. 6

Dec. 4: Neoliberalism

- *Undoing the Demos*, Epilogue

Dec. 6: #BlackLivesMatter

- Christopher J. Lebron, *The Making of Black Lives Matter: A Brief History of an Idea* (2017), Introduction pp. ix-xv, xx-xxii; chap. 5 pp. 127-144

Dec. 8: #BlackLivesMatter

- *The Making of Black Lives Matter*, chap. 5 pp. 145-151; Afterword

Dec. 11: What is political theory, encore

Essay III Due

- In-class: review

Dec. 13: Study/Work Day, NO CLASS

Scheduled Final Time: Tuesday, December 19, 9am-noon