

PSC 231
MWF 9.00-9.50, Hawkins 209
Office: Hawkins 149G (inside Political Science suite)
Office Hours: Mon. 2-3pm / Wed. 4.50-5.30pm / Thur. 2-3.30pm / other times, email me

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HISTORY OF POLITICAL IDEAS SPRING 2019

About the Course

Should you obey the laws, even when they unjust? What makes government, private property, and the law legitimate? Can you be subject to a government and still be free? What is power? How important is equality? What kind? Is it legitimate to dissent from or resist an unjust political system? This course examines these and other core questions and ideas about political life. Through selections drawn from important works of political thought from 2500 years ago to today, we study the most basic questions humans can ask about society.

This introduction to political theory emphasizes close readings, critical analysis, and class discussion of theoretical texts. Each of the main sections of the course pairs an important political thinker—three historical, one contemporary—with important political ideas. You will develop your own capacity for articulating and analyzing political ideas in this class and beyond, as a crucial element in your own political life. This means that your active citizenship in the course is essential, and that you should be open to reflecting on and re-evaluating your own political ideas (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.

While large, this is still 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, important passages, and critiques for discussion. *Bring the relevant text to class, always!*

Course Learning Outcomes

By the end the semester, students should be able to successfully:

- Analyze political theories and their component concepts
- Demonstrate knowledge of central questions, arguments, themes, concepts, and thinkers in Western political theory
- Explain the history of political ideas as an ongoing, connected conversation debating enduring questions related to freedom, power, and order
- Discuss issues of race and gender in political theoretical discourses
- Assess questions about political theory in written and oral form
- Apply abstract ideas in order to evaluate their own political beliefs

General Education Learning Outcomes

This class fulfills the Western Civilization 5WC General Education requirement. Following a course in this category, students will:

- Demonstrate knowledge of the development of the distinctive features of the history, institutions, economy, society, culture, etc. of Western civilization,
- Relate the development of Western civilization to that of other regions of the world,
- Demonstrate understanding of the complexity of our world,
- Explain the moral responsibility of the individual,
- Describe the continuity of history and the changes influenced by historical processes,
- Communicate effectively in written and oral expression, and
- Filter, analyze, and critique information and experiences.

Evaluation

- Class citizenship, including attendance: 20%
- Class blog: 30%
- Take-home essays: 30% (2 highest essay grades out of 3 essays, 15% each)
- Final assignment: 20%

Grading: Grades will be assigned in accordance with the SUNY Plattsburgh College Catalog: *Superior:* A (92.5-100), A- (90-92.4); *Above Average:* B + (87.5-89.9), B (82.5-87.4), B- (80-82.4); *Average:* C+ (77.5-79.9), C (72.5-77.4), C- (70-72.4); *Passing but unsatisfactory:* D+ (67.5-69.9), D (60-67.4); *Failing:* E (0-59.9)

I reserve the right to incorporate pop quizzes on the reading, which would become part of your class citizenship grade.

Assignments

- Class citizenship (20% of overall 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. I also realize that being sick, taking mental health days, and other things are a part of life. After four absences, the class citizenship part of your grade will decrease for each additional absence; if have a long-term health issue or any kind of emergency that is going to keep you out for two class sessions or more in a row, be in touch so we can work out alternate arrangements. When you miss class, contact a classmate, and then come to me with questions about the reading, things you'd like to discuss, needed clarifications.

Class citizenship, however, entails more than just showing up, it also means participating in class.

- Doing the reading is part of your classroom citizenship.
- 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 aloud, 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.

- Class blog (30% of overall grade): Throughout the semester, we will make 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 175 words + 1-3 discussion questions once per week; in addition, you must make 2 comments (at least 50 words each) 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 groups during the first week of class, 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, media companies, 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 (30% of overall grade): There are three take-home essay assignments throughout the semester; I will count your highest two grades 15% each toward your final grade. This means you can write all three essays and I will drop the lowest score, or you can write two essays that will both count. The three essay due dates are 2/15, 3/11, and 4/10. They will require you to write approximately 1000-1200 words, and you will have the assignment at least one week before the due date.

- Final Assignment (20% of overall grade): You will have a choice between (1) a written take-home final essay and (2) a creative project and/or a group-based spoken exam/conversation. All forms of the final will require you to reflect upon and analyze the course as a whole. Details about the formats will be distributed no later than mid-November.

Texts

The following books are required. They are available in the bookstore for purchase and rental. If you plan to buy/rent them elsewhere, please be sure to buy the same edition as listed below (hint: search by ISBN number). We will read them in the order listed, and all other material will be provided through the course Moodle.

- Plato, *Trial and Death of Socrates*, Hackett edition (ISBN: 9780872205543)
- John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, Hackett edition (ISBN: 9780915144860)

- Christopher J. Lebron, *The Making of Black Lives Matter: A Brief History of an Idea*, Oxford University Press (ISBN 9780190601348)

You are required to have the reading(s) with you in paper or electronic (see below) form for every class session. Regularly not having the readings with you will lower your class citizenship grade.

Inclusivity and Classroom Environment

The diversity of this classroom and campus is a strength. I intend to cultivate a classroom environment that is attentive to and respectful of diversity in its many forms, including but not limited to the intersections of race, gender and gender identity, sexuality, class/socioeconomic background, ability, age, culture, national origin, religion, and political and philosophical opinion. I strive for inclusivity in education, understood as a demonstration of equity through awareness, understanding, and respect for the ways that the differences, identity, culture, background, and experience, and socialization impact how we live and learn. Please let me know if something said or done in the classroom, by either myself or a fellow student, is particularly troubling.

I believe that the best way to learn and engage with the course material is adopting a critical perspective. I expect us to challenge all taken for granted assumptions, including our own. To this end, we have to first give all arguments the benefit of doubt, learn how these ideas are constructed, and how they operate in our political world. This class is an open floor for all types of ideas as long as we acknowledge that there might be fundamental differences in our opinions and political positions, cultivate respect for each other, and avoid discriminatory language.

Further, disagreement (including with me!) is inevitable in a political science class, and can be generative for everyone in the room, so long as it proceeds equitably. A diversity of opinions and experiences can be a source of learning for us all. It is also likely that readings in this class will contradict your beliefs. My conviction is that, as the [American Association of University Professors writes](#), this kind of challenge “is inevitable in classrooms if the goal is to expose students to new ideas, have them question beliefs they have taken for granted, grapple with ethical problems they have never considered, and, more generally, expand their horizons so as to become informed and responsible democratic citizens.”

Gender Pronouns

All people deserve to be addressed in accordance with their identity, ranging from preferring a nickname to your gender pronouns. Students are encouraged to notify me of their gender pronouns so I can address you correctly (she, he, they, ze, etc.), especially if they have reason to believe I may refer to you by the incorrect pronoun. I use he/him/his pronouns.

Accessibility and Student Support Services

It is the policy of the College that any student requiring accommodations of any kind to fully access this course must be registered for accommodations with the Student Support Services office located in the Angell College Center. If you need any accommodations for this course, please contact Student Support Services at 518-564-2810.

Students with diverse learning styles and needs are welcome in this course. If there are ways I can assist you in reaching your full potential in class, please talk to me or email me. Please feel free to bring and use (quiet) fidget/stim toys in the classroom.

Learning Center

The Learning Center (101-103 Feinberg) offers many resources that may be useful for this course, including free appointment and walk-in tutoring, academic peer mentoring, “academic personal trainers,” and more. Visit the [Learning center website](#), contact them, or ask me for a referral. I am also available to answer any questions, to help with readings, to brainstorm, to assist on assignments, to offer advice, and more – email me or drop-in during office hours.

Technology

Numerous studies (for example [here](#), [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 electronically, even when those on devices are exclusively focused on class tasks (which is hard to do!). Moreover, many of us (myself certainly included) find it difficult to pull ourselves away from 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, alerts, and notifications can distract you and your classmates, and can impede the conversations that will be essential to our experience in the course this semester.

Nevertheless, many of our readings for the course are in PDF/electronic form, and I recognize that laptops/tablets are essential to the learning of many students. So, while I encourage you to print out course materials and take written notes, you may use laptops and tablets for referencing readings and taking notes in class; you may NOT use your phones. Any in-class use of technology (e.g., laptop, tablet, etc.) or other activity that is disruptive to your fellow students or to me will result, without warning, in your citizenship grade going down. If you have concerns or want to talk to me for advice on technology use, please come talk to me.

Academic Honesty

It is expected that all students enrolled in this class support the letter and the spirit of the Academic Honesty Policy as stated in the College Catalog.

Academic misconduct and dishonesty—such as cheating, plagiarism, submitting someone else’s work as your own, submitting work from other classes without permission, etc.—are serious offenses. Such acts violate the trust that forms the foundation of the student-teacher relationship, they take away opportunities to learn, and they discount the work of others, including peers, faculty, and scholars. In particular, plagiarism constitutes intellectual theft and is unacceptable. Any acts of suspected academic dishonesty, including plagiarism, will be addressed through the [Suspected Academic Dishonesty Procedure](#).

Other course policies and notes

- Check your email regularly – I will do the same for you.
- If a student has a desired name that is not listed on my course roster, please let me know.
- I strongly encourage you to come visit my office hours, even if only to chat; 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 visiting the Learning Center.
 - If you would like a little bit of extra credit, email me a cute animal picture by 8:30am on January 30 to demonstrate that you have read all way through the fine print of the syllabus
 - 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

Read the listed text(s) before coming to class for that day (earlier, if you are writing a blog post for that day). The schedule is subject to change at the instructor's discretion; any changes will be announced in class and/or over email. When there are multiple readings, please read them in the order listed.

I. What are Political Ideas?

1/28: Welcome

1/30

- Read the syllabus, start to finish; highlight/underline things that are important; bring your questions to the class
- Ursula K. Le Guin, "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas" (1973)

2/1

- Sheldon Wolin, *Politics and Vision: Continuity and Innovation in Western Political Thought* (2004), chap. 1, excerpts
 **The pages I want you to read are marked in the PDF (4-5, 6-7, 9-12, 17-20, 23-26); reading the other pages will be helpful, but is not required
- Scott Samuelson, "Why I Teach Plato to Plumbers," *The Atlantic* (2014)

II. Dissent, Law, Citizenship: Socrates

2/4

- Plato, *Apology* (c. 399 BCE), beginning –29d

2/6

- *Apology*, 29e-end

2/8: *Simulation* – Socrates' Trial

- Prepare for simulation; go over the *Apology* again

2/11

- Plato, *Crito* (c. 399-390 BCE), all

2/13

- Wendy Brown, "Political Idealization and its Discontents," *Edgework: Critical Essays on Knowledge and Politics* (2005), pp. 17-27 and 34-36

2/15: **ESSAY I DUE**

- In-class: Intro to John Locke (no reading)

III. Liberty, Property, Contract: John Locke

2/18

- Locke, *Second Treatise of Government* (c. 1689), chaps. 1-3

2/20

- Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, chaps. 4-5

2/22: *Simulation* – The State of Nature

- Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, chap. 6

2/25

- Locke, *Second Treatise*, chap. 7 §82-end; chap. 8, §95-99 and §112-end; chap. 9 all

2/27: “Many Faces of Social Justice” Teach-In: no class; you are required attend a teach-in session during our usual class time

- Catch-up on the reading and/or get a head start on the rest of Locke

3/1

- Locke, *Second Treatise*, chaps 11 all, chap. 12 §143-144, chap. 13 §149-150, chap. 14 all

3/4

- Locke, *Second Treatise*, chap. 18, §199, 201-204, chap. 19 §211-231, 240-243

3/6

- Carole Pateman, *The Sexual Contract* (1988), pp. 1-7, 10-12, 90-96

3/8

- John Quiggin, “[John Locke Against Freedom](#)” (2015), *Jacobin*
- Uday S. Metha, *Liberalism and Empire* (1999), pp. 124-132

3/11: ESSAY II DUE

- In-class: Marx introductory lecture

IV. Capitalism, Inequality, Revolution: Karl Marx

3/13

- Friedrich Engels, “Speech at the Graveside of Karl Marx” (1883)
- Marx, “Letter to Arnold Ruge (For A Ruthless Criticism...)” (1843)
- Marx, “Theses on Feuerbach” (1845)

3/15

- Marx, Preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (“Marx on the History of His Opinions”) (1859), excerpts
- Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology* (1845-6), excerpts

Spring Break!

3/25: Alienation

- Reading: Marx, *The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* (1844), “Estranged Labour”

3/27: Commodities

- Marx, *Capital, Vol. I* (1867), excerpts on commodities

3/29: Labor and Surplus Value

- Marx, *Capital, Vol. I* (1867), excerpts on labor and the workday

4/1: *Simulation* – Simulating Marx’s understanding of capital

- Marx, *Capital, Vol. I* (1867), “Relative Surplus-Population or Industrial Reserve Army”

4/3: Revolution

- Marx and Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (1848), Introduction and Parts I and II

4/5: Freedom

- Marx, “Critique of the Gotha Program” (1875), excerpts
- Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology* (1845-6), excerpt on communism

- Marx, *Capital Vol. III* (1894), excerpt on freedom and necessity

4/8

- W.E.B. Du Bois, “Marxism and the Negro Problem” (1933) excerpts. In *African American Political Thought* (1996), ed. Wintz

4/10

- Nicole Cox and Silvia Federici, “Counter-planning from the Kitchen” (1974)

4/12: **ESSAY III DUE**

- No reading

V. Race, Resistance, Freedom: Black Political Thought

4/15

- Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., “Letter from a Birmingham Jail” (1963)

4/17:

- Lebron, *The Making of Black Lives Matter: A Brief History of An Idea* (2017), Introduction

4/19

- *The Making of Black Lives Matter*, chap. 1

4/22

- Reading: *The Making of Black Lives Matter*, chap. 2

4/24

- *The Making of Black Lives Matter*, chap. 3

4/26

- *The Making of Black Lives Matter*, chap. 4

4/29

- Glenn C. Loury, “The political inefficacy of saying, ‘Black lives matter’” (2015), *Brown Daily Herald*
- Loury, “Ferguson Won’t Change Anything. What Will?” (2015), *Boston Review*

5/1

- *The Making of Black Lives Matter*, chap. 5

5/3

- *The Making of Black Lives Matter*, Afterword

5/6

- Audre Lorde, “Age, Race, Class, and Sex” (1980)

VI. Political Ideas, Revisited

5/8

- Ursula K. Le Guin, “The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas” (1973)

5/10

- Bring your questions for your final

Finals week begins May 11