

INTRODUCTION TO POLITICAL THEORY

PLSC 1360 • SMU • Spring 2018

Thurs. 6:30-9:20p • Fondren Science Bldg. 0155

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Office Hours: Thurs. 3-6pm

Course Rationale:

What is the best way for each of us to live? How do we best arrange society? The notion that there may be only one correct answer to these and similar questions is alien and perhaps unnerving to us. As the products of Liberalism, we tend to think that one should live and let live – that however one might decide such questions, it is one’s own business and no one else’s. We, in the West, may decide to live as we wish and we do so nearly free from coercion.

Nevertheless, it seems that satisfaction with the easy-come-easy-go lifestyle of individual autonomy familiar to us has waned. Doubt has crept in, even if we don’t quite recognize it. Although external challenges to Liberalism are most easily recognized (e.g. terrorist attacks, election of fundamentalist governments), there also appears to be an almost ineffable gloom that surrounds even the most ardent proponents of Liberalism. Perhaps we feel that we are “missing” something but can’t quite put our finger on what change we desire or why. We change careers frequently – more than ever before. The youthful life-stage in which one “finds oneself” has extended into middle age or longer. We find nothing steady, nothing we’re willing to stand by. Our near-constant agitation suggests that the once held certainty that individual freedom is both necessary and sufficient for happiness has been called into question. This happiness has, after all, been a long time coming and yet still does not appear to be within hailing distance. Have we backed the wrong horse?

This class will take up the questions of classical political philosophy: what is the best life for a human being? Is political life compatible with that best life and, if so, which regime is best? What is justice? Virtue? Are these to be pursued for their own sake or for their benefits? We will investigate the responses of classical thinkers to these questions, and try to understand them *on their own terms*. We will then turn to an investigation of the texts that laid the foundation for modern Liberalism to assess *our* contemporary political situation.

We will not take issue with particular, partisan political issues, though they may arise in discussion as an example of a more general trend or concept. This course aims to provide a foundational understanding of political life that should be useful to us regardless of partisan affiliation or ideological disposition.

Required Texts: All students should purchase the following texts. These editions have been selected for their superior readability and quality of translation. It is imperative that you purchase *these* editions as other editions vary significantly.

- Aristophanes and Plato, *Four Texts on Socrates*. Trans. Grace and Tom West. ISBN: 0801485746
 - <http://amzn.to/2G953Ze> (\$13.50)
- Aristotle, *The Politics*. 2nd Edition. Trans. Carnes Lord. ISBN: 0226921840 [1st edition also acceptable]
 - <http://amzn.to/2G92aYh> (\$15.00)
- Machiavelli, *The Prince*. Trans. Harvey C. Mansfield, Jr. ISBN: 0226500446
 - <http://amzn.to/2G92aYh> (\$6.48)
- Plato, *Republic*. Trans. Allan Bloom (Basic Books) ISBN: 0465094082
 - <http://amzn.to/2E3z641> (\$15.63)
- Rousseau, *First and Second Discourses*. Trans. Roger Masters. (St. Martin’s Press). ISBN: 0312694407
 - <http://amzn.to/2E3MCEH> (\$21.29)
- Locke, John. *Second Treatise of Government*. (Hackett Publishing) ISBN: 9780915144860
 - <http://amzn.to/2G6ROYW> (\$9.50)

The instructor reserves the right to make changes to the information on the syllabus. Any changes will be announced in class, and a revised syllabus posted online. Students are responsible for noting any modifications that are announced.

Recommended: Various recommended resources will be uploaded to Blackboard. Students do not need to read these, but you should begin there if looking for supplementary readings.

COURSE ASSIGNMENTS & GRADING

Percent of final grade	Assignment	Due date
13%	Reading Quizzes (on eLearning)	Each class day
10%	Short paper (2-4 pages)	Feb. 15 th
15%	Midterm paper (4-6 pages)	Mar. 29 th
15%	Midterm Exam	Mar. 29 th
25%	Final paper (5-8 pages)	May 10 th
25%	Final exam	May 10 th
103%	Course Total	

Grading: The standard university grading scale will apply: A = 93-100%, A- = 90-92%, B+ = 87-89%, B = 84-86%, B- = 80-83%, C+ = 77-79%, C = 74-76%, C- = 70-72%, D+ = 67-69%, D = 64-66%, D- = 60-63%, F = below 60%

Grades will be neither rounded nor changed unless I make an error. The grade you receive is the grade you earn.

Extra Credit: There will be no extra credit for this class. Please do not ask. You have the opportunity to earn “extra” points in the reading quizzes. Please take advantage of this opportunity.

Attendance: Regular attendance is highly correlated with success. I want students to be successful. Each student is permitted to miss 3 course meetings throughout the semester. These “free” absences are intended to cover car trouble, appointments, illness, job interviews, etc. Every absence *beyond* these 3 will result in the loss of 2% from the student’s *final grade* earned in the course. You should reserve absences in case an unexpected issue arises.

Exams: Both the midterm and final exams will be taken in class in blue books that will be provided. Do not bring or use your own. No exams will be distributed after the first exam is turned in. Be on time.

Make up policy: Granting make up exams is to be entirely at the instructor’s discretion. Requests for make up exams must be made in person and for a valid reason. No request will be heard after one week past the exam date -- prior to missing the exam is obviously better and more likely to be granted. University sponsored events will be excused, but the student must bring written record of participation in the event prior to the exam. Make up exams will not be the same questions as the missed exam.

No reading quizzes may be made up.

Reading quizzes: Reading quizzes will be posted in Canvas and must be taken *before* the class during which we discuss the material covered by the quiz. Quizzes will close at class time. Students will have **one attempt** to complete a quiz once it is opened. I highly recommend that you read *before* opening the quiz if you wish to be successful. Quizzes may be completed early, but availability will be staggered to match course progress.

Paper Assignments: Students will be given a handout with prompts approximately two weeks prior to the due date of each paper. Page limits are to be followed; learning how to write clearly and with concision is a must. Papers should **NOT** be a “book report.” Your first task is to answer the question. You should demonstrate your understanding of the question and present your evidence from the text in a clear, argumentative paper. We will talk about this more when we hand out paper topics.

Papers must be turned in at the start of class *and* submitted to turnitin.com (see below for log in details; do NOT use Canvas). As long as the paper is submitted at the beginning of class, it will be considered on time. No grade will be released, however, until your paper is submitted to turnitin.com. **Papers must be stapled and titled.**

Late papers will be docked 10% for every calendar day that they are late.

Turnitin Info:

Course ID: 17294679

Enrollment Key: SMUpTheory (This password is case sensitive)

**You will need to create an account at turnitin.com if you don't already have one and add our course. You can then upload your papers in a variety of formats.

MISCELLANEOUS INFORMATION:

Email Etiquette: Email is the preferred means of contact. When emailing, you need to follow a few rules:

1. Include the course number (PLSC 1360) in the subject line of the email.
2. Do not use text/instant message language. Emails that lack punctuation, or are spelled such that I cannot be sure what question you are asking will not receive responses.
3. Clearly identify yourself. If your email address is “n’sync_no1fan_1991@aol.com,” “OMG_robert_pattinson@hotmail.net,” “ToughDude42069@tx.rr.com,” or something similar, I won’t know who you are unless you sign your name.
4. Check the syllabus first. If your question is directly answered in the syllabus, you may not receive a response.
5. If you’ve not received a response to your email, please follow up. I intend to reply to all emails within 24 hours or so, but may have overlooked yours.

Slack Workspace: Since this class meets so infrequently, I’ve created a space for us to discuss course material or ask questions using Slack (available at slack.com). Please make an account and join our course’s Slack at <http://bit.ly/2rBaehi>. This is a useful resource since others may have the same question as you and your classmates may be able to respond more quickly than the instructor. The workspace name is SMUPLSC1360spring2018. The Slack Workspace also has a channel dedicated to stories and articles related to course material.

Communication: I will not discuss grades via email or telephone. This is to protect *your* privacy, in accordance with FERPA. Grading questions must be addressed during my office hours. If my office hours are in direct conflict with your course schedule, please contact me to set up an appointment.

Classroom Conduct: There will be little tolerance for disruptive behavior. Students are to be attentive and awake in class. Texting, online chatting, surfing the internet, carrying on conversation with those around you, etc. will not be tolerated as these things are a distraction to other students. Students not displaying appropriate conduct will be asked to leave class. Beverages are fine but please do not eat in class.

Class will begin and end on time. I will not hold you late. Do not, therefore, begin shuffling papers and loading your bags prior to the end of class. This is rude and distracting to other students.

Academic Integrity (cheating): No form of cheating will be tolerated. The SMU Student Honor Code expressly prohibits it. Cheating includes, but is not limited to: (1) depending on sources that are unauthorized and/or without proper citation, (2) unauthorized assistance on exams/workbook assignments, (3) possession of faculty or staff's academic material. Plagiarism includes, but is not limited to: (1) a direct quotation or paraphrase of uncited material, whether intentional or owing to neglect; (2) use of work done by another individual, even if done expressly for you. Cheating and/or plagiarism will be treated severely, and may result in failure of the course and the filing of a report with the University, who may impose further penalties. For more information, please see <https://www.smu.edu/StudentAffairs/HonorCouncil>

Religious Observances: I will be happy to recognize and excuse religious holidays and observances that conflict with class assignments and/or meetings. It is, however, the student's responsibility to bring these to my attention ahead of time. Notification after the fact will not suffice for excuse. (University Policy No. 1.9.)

Disability Accommodations: Students needing academic accommodations for a disability must first register with Disability Accommodations & Success Strategies (DASS). Students can call 214-768-1470 or visit <http://www.smu.edu/Provost/ALEC/DASS> to begin the process. Once registered, students should then schedule an appointment with the professor as early in the semester as possible, present a DASS Accommodation Letter, and make appropriate arrangements. Please note that accommodations are not retroactive and require advance notice to implement.

TENTATIVE READING SCHEDULE:

January 25 — Introduction: “What is Political Philosophy?”

The Classics Against Socrates

February 1 – Aristophanes *Clouds* (in *Four Texts*) – complete play

A Case for Socrates Against Critics?

February 8 – Plato, *Apology* (17a-33c)

February 15 – Plato, *Apology* (33c-42a)

[Short Paper due]

Classical Political Philosophy and the Question(s) of Justice, Education, and the City

February 22 – Plato, *Republic* (327a-354c)

March 1 – Plato, *Republic* (TBA)

Classical “Political Science” & The Investigation into the Nature and Origin of the Best Regime

March 8 – Aristotle, *Politics* (TBA)

March 15 – NO CLASS (Spring Break)

Armed Prophecy: Modern Attack on the Classics

March 22 – Machiavelli, *Prince* (Dedicatory Letter – Chapter X)

March 29 – Machiavelli, *Prince* (Chapter XI – Letter to Vettori (appendix))

[Midterm Paper Due]

[Midterm Exam 1st half of class]

April 5 – NO CLASS

Building a Better Nature: Liberalism, Law, and Individual Rights

April 12 – Locke, *Second Treatise* (TBA)

April 19 – Locke, *Second Treatise* (TBA)

Return to Nature? Impossible, but...: Rousseau’s Critique of the Enlightenment

April 26 – Rousseau, *Second Discourse* (TBA)

Return to Art: Nietzsche’s [Fatal?] Critique of the Enlightenment

May 3 – Nietzsche, selections (see Canvas)

May 10 – Final Exam (in class)

[Final Paper Due]