

Problems in Political Thought

POL 120

Spring 2014

Rollins College

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Office: CSS 236

Office Hours: W: 3-5

Meets, TR 9.30-10.45 Room CSS 230

This course will review the most important and general debates in political theory. We will examine fundamental questions that have taxed political thinkers over the course of millennia, starting with the ancients and finishing with contemporary debates about justice and equality. The course will be structured around basic thematic questions but will also follow a chronological order. In this way, students will be able to understand the historical evolution of political theory. Some of the questions we will explore are: Why is political authority justified? What is the meaning of “liberty”? What is “constitutionalism” and why is it important in terms of individual rights? What are the foundations of democracy? What are the requirements of social and economic justice? Do those requirements hold globally or only domestically--within our national borders?

The readings for this class may prove dense and suffused with conceptual and theoretical abstractions. For this reason, it is advisable that you take the necessary time to do them, perfunctory reading will not be sufficient to pass your exams (besides representing a waste of time for you). Additionally, the participation requisite (see below) requires that you are familiar with the arguments to be discussed every time the class meets.

Political theory and political philosophy can help you develop your critical thinking skills, your capacity for in-depth reflection on a given subject, and your ability to come up with solid counterarguments to a given position -- either to weaken and discard it, or to strengthen it by construing a valid

response to the original objection. This is what this class will prepare you to do: Think critically about profound issues. Passively absorbing the knowledge you will encounter in your readings will not be to your advantage, for it will not help you develop that intellectual independence that characterizes autonomous thinkers. Do not be afraid to be original, curious, inquisitive, challenging. Participate in class and ask questions, express your disagreement with me or with the texts, if you have them, or let others know what your reasons for agreeing with the authors we study are. Bear in mind that intellectual autonomy does not mean bringing to the table any type of rhetoric to justify your position, however. I'm not interested in hearing your mere opinion on a subject. I'm interested in knowing what your opinion based on analysis of the arguments is. In other words, I'm interested in your opinion after the careful pondering of analytical reasons. Personal considerations, ad-hominem arguments (directed against the writer instead of his or her arguments) and individual experience do not make for good reasoning in a political theory class. This is why it is crucial that you do the readings every time the class meets and that you try to understand what the concepts, principles and theories put forward are.

Requirements

A midterm, a final, and 12 blackboard discussion entries of 500 words throughout the semester. Each exam will be worth 25 % of the final grade. The blackboard reading responses will be worth 20%, and your class participation, 5 %.

Note: Fewer than 12 blackboard entries will make your total grade decrease by one letter. You are expected to do one entry per week; you have total freedom to decide which weeks to skip. You can't do the entries for the week in question after the week has passed. You miss the week if you don't use it when it's time.

Blackboard entries readings responses: 12 500-word entries pertaining to the weekly readings. The entries are an opportunity for you to relate the readings to current political or social issues, and to express your reactions to the arguments presented (you can explain why you disagree if you do, or why you agree if you do).

Academic Integrity:

You must become familiar with Rollins' Academic Honor Code. You can find the code online at: http://www.rollins.edu/studentrecords/main/academic_regulations.html

Please read the honor pledge and learn what constitutes an honor code violation, especially as regards cheating and plagiarism. Plagiarism is intellectual theft and you must know what constitutes it to avoid it. Failing to cite sources or incorrectly citing your sources constitutes plagiarism. Plagiarism can be unintentional, but it should be punished regardless of intention since it devalues academic quality, and irrevocably damages the credibility of the individual responsible for it. Because of this, please refrain from committing it, by getting familiarized with the honor code.

Late Paper and Email Policy

I do not accept late papers or allow make-up work for no justified reasons. I expect to receive papers on time. I do not accept work that is emailed to me. No exceptions. You must give me a paper copy of your essays in class. You are allowed a maximum of **four absences** for the whole semester. Please provide medical documentation if illness accounts for more than four absences, or I will not be in a position to make them count as valid. Also, absences for religious reasons need to be announced to me before they take place, please.

Disability Services Statement

Rollins College is committed to equal access and does not discriminate unlawfully against persons with disabilities in its policies, procedures, programs or employment processes. The College recognizes its obligations under the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 to provide an environment that does not discriminate against persons with disabilities.

If you are a person with a disability on this campus and anticipate needing any type of academic accommodations in order to participate in your classes, please make timely arrangements by disclosing this disability in writing to the Disability Services Office at (box 2613) - Thomas P. Johnson Student Resource Center, 1000 Holt Ave., Winter Park, FL, 32789. Appointments can be scheduled by calling 407-646-2354 or email: gridgeway@rollins.edu

Required Books (available at the college bookstore. However, other editions are acceptable)

Rousseau/ Social Contract

Hobbes/ Leviathan

Locke/ Second Treatise of Government

Mill/ On Liberty and Other Essays

Plato/ Republic

Other materials will be posted on Blackboard (bb)

Week 1

Tuesday January 14	Introduction to syllabus. What is Political Theory?
Thursday January 16	The Foundations: Ancient Greek Democracy. Hansen on Ancient Dem chapter + Dahl chapter on Ancient democracy, Constant's Liberty of the Ancients (all in bb)

Week 2

Tuesday January 21	Political Obligation and Civil Disobedience: Crito, ML King's Letter from Birmingham Jail (bb) + article civil disobedience
Thursday January 23	Plato, Republic, books 1-4

Week 3

Tuesday January 28	Plato, Republic, 5-7
Thursday January 30	Aristotle, The Politics (bb)

Week 4

Tuesday February 4	Machiavelli, The Prince (bb)
Thursday February 6	Hobbes, Leviathan, chs 13-16 (pp158-173)

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Week 5

Tuesday February 11	Hobbes, Leviathan chs 18,19,21, 26, 29,30
Thursday February 13	Locke, Second Treatise, chs 2-8

Week 6

Tuesday February 18	Locke, chs 9-14, 19 + Locke Letter on Toleration (bb)
Thursday February 20	Rousseau, Social Contract book I, chs.6-10, book II, chs 1-4, 6-7, book III, chs 11-15

Week 7

Tuesday February 25	Midterm
Thursday February 27	Rousseau, Social Contract, book IV, chs 1-4, 8 + Pateman against Consent (bb)

Week 8

Tuesday March 4	Break
Thursday March 6	Break

Week 9

Tuesday March 11	Federalists 10, 78, 51, John Adams' "Thoughts on Government" letter +Redraft the Constitution? (bb)
Thursday March 13	Jefferson's letter to James Madison, September 6 1789 and letter to Samuel Kercheval, July 12, 1816 (both on bb) + Antifederalist thought piece (bb), Federalist 49 (bb), Brutus 2, 11 (bb)

Week 10

Tuesday March 18	Utilitarianism: Bentham (bb) + Mill on utilitarianism (chs 1-5)
Thursday March 20	Critiques utilitarianism (bb) + Singer on famine article (bb) + activity

Week 11

Tuesday March 25	Mill, The Subjection of Women, chs 2,4 + Paternity Leave articles (bb) + a labor market punishing to women article (bb)
Thursday March 27	Mill On Liberty, 1-3

Week 12

Tuesday April 1	Mill, On liberty, 4 + applications piece (bb) + freedom of speech us v europe piece (bb)
Thursday April 3	Skokie movie

Week 13

Tuesday April 8	No class
Thursday April 10	Mill, on Representative Government (chs 2, 3) + Brennan, polluting the polls (bb)

Week 14

Tuesday April 15	Ethics of voting: compulsory voting subverts dem (bb) + in favor of compulsory voting arts (bb)
Thursday April 17	Marx: Communist manifesto (bb) + Alienation of Labor (bb)

Week 15

Tuesday April 22	Rawls + Article democratizing Capital (bb)
Thursday April 24	Movie Born Rich

Tuesday April 29: Basic Income in the US (bb) + Review of Final