

Political Science 225 – Issues in Political Theory**Power, Knowledge and Politics****OVERVIEW**

This course focuses on the intersection of knowledge and politics. We will consider whether social and political relations can, or should be, constructed around processes of individual reason or collective deliberation. We will also consider the possibility that concepts such as justice, freedom or equality possess no inherent meaning but are the result of subjective perspectives and interpretations. Are attempts to stabilize conflict and disagreement by relying on individuals' capacities to reason, viable (and perhaps necessary) attempts at consensus building? Or are such attempts always subjective impositions, intertwined with relations of power and resulting in dominance and marginalization? We will not focus on these problematics in a strictly abstract or historical mode; we will also consider the effects of stabilization and consensus on the current political world and the individuals who navigate within it.

As an example of the problematics which arise around the intersection of power and knowledge, consider the following question: do we want our society to be just? Framed in this way, there are few of you who would not answer "yes." After all, justice appears to be a good ordering principle for any society. However, a "yes" answer does not end the discussion over the role of justice in society but only serves to open a number of additional questions. Some points to consider: what constitutes "justice?" Does "justice" consist of foundational principles which are constituted outside of societal power relations (and by which these power relations should be guided)? If so, where and how are these principles constituted and how do we come to know and understand these tenets? Is everyone capable of this understanding? If, in a democracy, all individuals are presumably able to perceive and understand the content of a principle such as "justice" - and are thus able to shape not only their own lives but also to build a society based on such fundamental principles - how do we approach, and potentially resolve, conflicts over the meaning of "justice?" Are such conflicts resolved through reasoned argumentation over the meaning and application of basic principles or are "resolutions" an effect of power-based relations, with the "winner" being the individual or group who succeeds in having their particular view of "justice" function as a fundamental principle?" If the latter, how does one win, or even intervene in, such a battle?

The above discussion concerning justice is posed in order to provide you with an indication of the complex ways in which claims concerning the nature of "truth" (objective or an effect of power?) and "knowledge" (who has the ability to "know" the "truth") lead to questions concerning the form and distribution of power. The questions which emerge from these inquiries are not easily resolvable, yet they often shape the ways in which societies function and the manner in which individuals live their lives. The theorists we will be reading each have something to say about the relationship between truth, knowledge and power. Their viewpoints range from a belief in individual reason, to a reliance on deliberative processes, to a conviction that all "reasoned outcomes" are perspectival constructions. You should not approach the readings in this class expecting to discover at the conclusion a singular answer to the questions posed. You should view this course as a process of engagement. You, the student, have an important role to play in this engagement. You are not simply an empty receptacle expected to memorize texts. Rather, it is up to you to analyze and organize the viewpoints of the various theorists under consideration and to provide coherent, cogent arguments as to how *you* think it is best to approach the problematic. However, in order to construct a good argument you must read the texts carefully and with great thought. You must consider the arguments presented in the texts and be able to analyze their strengths and weaknesses.

Political Science 225 – Issues in Political Theory**REQUIREMENTS**

1. Students are expected to attend all classes, to have read the assigned materials and to participate in class discussion. An excused absence requires written documentation. All medical documentation must be given to me (not merely shown to me) and must include the student's name as well as the name of a medical doctor or clinic with a verifiable phone number. Students who do not regularly attend class will receive an "F" for their class participation grade. Students who miss classes or assignments with a valid excuse should consult with me in order to make up their work in a timely fashion.
Students are allowed two unexcused absences without affecting their grade.
Lateness: Students who arrive more the five minutes late will be marked absent.
2. Written work will consist of two papers and a final exam. In the papers you will not be answering descriptive questions (e.g. - describe Locke's State of Nature). Rather, you will be given a "prompt" offering a particular argument or contention which you must defend or contest.
 - **First Paper** – 2-3 pages on Hobbes and Locke (topic to be assigned)
 - **Second Paper** – 3-4 pages on Mill (topic to be assigned)
 - **Final Exam** – will focus on all the theorists and material we have read in class. Exam will be open book, open notes. You must take the final exam at the scheduled time – there are no make-up exams.

Papers do not require outside research. They are to utilize the course readings and appropriate media components we have considered in class. You may also utilize current social and political events as examples of your assertions, but examples are not substitutes for arguments. The course materials constitute your research for the papers – *papers must cite textual and media evidence* in the proffering of assertions and the formulation of arguments.

Late papers will not be accepted without a grade reduction except for viable medical reasons or death in the family. Absences due to official University activities should be cleared in advance. Written documentation will be required.

The last chance to hand in a paper is with your final exam. If you hand in a viable paper, the lowest grade will be a D, even with deductions. If you do not hand in a paper, the grade is F.

Though you should already know the following, it always bears repeating. *Do not plagiarize.* Do not utilize outside sources, even those that supposedly offer merely objective information. Plagiarism will be dealt with severely.

Students are not allowed to use computers during class lectures and discussions.

The procedures for withdrawal from this course will conform to university policies.

Students requiring accommodation for university verified disabilities must notify me in advance.

Political Science 225 – Issues in Political Theory**COURSE OBJECTIVES**

- Distinguish systematic normative inquiry from other kinds of inquiry within the discipline of political science.
- Write a clear and coherent expository synopsis of the theory of a major thinker in the history of political thought.
- Identify some of the most important contributors to Western political thought and explain why their contributions are important.
- Understand and explain some of the central concepts in Western political thought.
- Demonstrate the ability to apply abstract theory to concrete problems by using the ideas of political theorists to address contemporary social issues.

GRADING

- **20% Class participation and attendance**
Participation includes attendance. Excellent participation is when, in the instructor's judgment, the student contributes regularly in ways that demonstrate both an *understanding* of the reading materials *as well as* thoughtful *consideration* of and *reflection* on the issues and themes that are addressed in readings and in class discussion.
- **20% First paper**
- **30% Second paper**
- **30% Final Exam**

CONTACT

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COURSE MATERIALS

The materials we will consider span the theoretical world from the ancient to the modern to the postmodern. These texts should not be read in isolation from one another. Instead, you should view the structure of this course as an ongoing dialogue in which theorists speak to one another – later theorists are responding to earlier ones and, through the development of your own arguments in class, in papers and in the final exam, earlier theorists are given a chance to respond in turn.

TEXTS

- John Locke: *Two Treatises of Government* (ed. Peter Laslett, Cambridge University Press)
- John Stuart Mill: *On Liberty and other writings* (ed. Stefan Collini, Cambridge University Press)
- Friedrich Nietzsche: *On the Genealogy of Morals* (ed. Walter Kaufmann, Vintage Books)

ONLINE

- Thomas Hobbes: *Leviathan*
<http://socserv2.socsci.mcmaster.ca/econ/ugcm/3ll3/hobbes/Leviathan.pdf>

E-RESERVE (password is: **Issues99)**

- Karl Marx
 - The German Ideology
- Friedrich Nietzsche:
 - *On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense*
- Michel Foucault:
 - *Nietzsche, Freud, Marx*
 - *Nietzsche, Genealogy, History*
 - *Two Lectures*
 - *Truth and Power*

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ASSIGNMENTS

Students should have completed the assigned readings by the date indicated

INTRODUCTION, Plato**WEEK 1:** 8/22, 8/24

Introduction, Lecture on Plato

HOBBS AND LOCKE

Weeks 2-4: 8/31 – 9/16

WEEK 2: 8/29, 8/31Hobbes: *Leviathan*:
Chapters 13, 14, 17, 18**WEEK 3:** 9/7Locke: *The Second Treatise of Government*:
Chapters I-VIII: 267-349**WEEK 4:** 9/12, 9/14Locke: *The Second Treatise of Government*:
Chapters IX-XIX: 350-428**JOHN STUART MILL**

Weeks 5-8: 9/21 – 10/14

WEEK 5, 6: 9/19, 9/28*On Liberty*:
Chapters 1-3: pp. 5-73***1st Paper Due 9/21*****WEEK 7:** 10/3, 10/5*On Liberty*:
Chapters 4-5: pp. 75-115**WEEKS 8:** 10/10 – 10/12*The Subjection of Women*:
Chapters 1-4: pp. 119-217**KARL MARX**

Week 9: 10/19 – 10/21

WEEK 9: 10/17, 10/19*The German Ideology***FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE**

Weeks 10 - 14: 10/26 – 11/25

WEEK 10: 10/24, 10/26*On the Genealogy of Morals*:
Preface, First Essay: 15-56***2nd Paper Due 10/26*****WEEK 11:** 10/31, 11/2*On the Genealogy of Morals*:
Second Essay: 57-96**WEEK 12:** 11/7, 11/9*On the Genealogy of Morals*:
Third Essay, Appendix: 97-118**WEEK 13:** 11/14, 11/16*On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense***WEEK 14:** 11/21, 11/23**FALL BREAK****MICHEL FOUCAULT**

Weeks 15 - 16: 11/30 – 12/9

WEEK 15: 11/28, 11/30*Nietzsche, Freud, Marx*
*Nietzsche, Genealogy, History***WEEK 16:** 12/5, 12/7*Two Lectures*
*Truth and Power***WEEK 17****FINAL EXAM**