

Hamilton College, Department of Government
Government 117W.01-02 – Spring 2015
Introduction to Political Theory

Instructor: Joel Winkelman
Office: KJ137
E-mail: jwinkelm@hamilton.edu
Office Phone: x4984

Class: MWF 01.9–9:50am, KJ101
02.11–11:50am, Red Pit
Office Hours: T 1:30–4:30p
and by appointment.

Course introduction and goals

“Guesses, with persons left to themselves, tend to become opinions, and opinions dogmas. To hold theories and principles in solution, awaiting confirmation, goes contrary to the grain. Even today questioning a statement made by a person is often taken by him as a reflection upon his integrity, and is resented.” —John Dewey, *Freedom and Culture*

Political theory is the study of the ideas, principles, and concepts that inform political life. The primary goal of the course is to introduce the most important and enduring problems in political life. We will develop the analytical skills necessary to do more than simply guess, preventing opinions from becoming dogmas by asking questions not only of one another, but also—and especially—of ourselves. Our method will be to explore the thought of a selection of thinkers across history, from Ancient Greece to the 20th-century United States. At the end of the course, students will be able to (1) describe and explain the important ideas of 8 major thinkers in the history of Western political thought; (2) synthesize conceptual histories of key ideas such as authority, justice, and democracy; (3) assess and evaluate competing interpretations of these key ideas and (4) articulate their own position within these conceptual histories.

Required Reading

All texts available at the College Store. Please refer to ISBN numbers if purchasing from another source. Page numbers on the syllabus will correspond to these editions. While I have made every effort to order inexpensive editions of the texts, an equally important criterion was inclusion and quality of bibliographic, introductory, and other supplemental essays, which are valuable resources for your written assignments.

Sophocles, *Sophocles I* (Chicago) [9780226307923]
Plato, *Republic* (Hackett) {C.D.C. Reeve, trans.} [9780872207363]
Machiavelli, *The Prince* (Oxford World’s Classics) [9780199535699]
Montesquieu, *Persian Letters* (Oxford World’s Classics) [9780192806352]
Rousseau, *A Discourse on Inequality* (Penguin Classics) [9780140444391]
Mill, *Essays on Sex Equality* (Chicago) [9780226525464]
Marx, *The Communist Manifesto: A Modern Edition* (Verso) [9781844678761]
Dewey, *The Public and its Problems* (PSU Press) [9780199555833]¹

¹The bookstore has erroneously ordered an edition published by Sparrow Press, which you may also use.

Course Requirements

Preparation and participation. Class will be centered on textual analysis. I will provide historical, biographical, and contextual information to situate each text. Students will be asked (alone and in groups, with and without warning) to interpret specific passages, to proffer evidence of an interpretation, and to identify what's at stake for a given interpretation. Occasional reading quizzes may be used to assess daily preparation.

Midterm exams. Two essay exams will ask students (1) to describe and explain an important concept of one thinker; and (2) to answer a synthetic question comparing and contrasting two thinkers.

Group presentations. Students will prepare in groups a 10-minute presentation on competing scholarly interpretations of class readings. Scholarly readings will be assigned, and students will be assessed on the accuracy of their presentation, the clarity of their explanation, and the strength of their argument for a given interpretation.

Final exam. The final exam will ask students to summarize concisely the core features of each text, and to provide evidence to answer basic questions regarding each thinker. This exam will reward brevity, clarity, and command of the text.

Final grades will be determined according to the following rubric:

Assignment	Percentage
<i>Participation and preparation</i>	10
<i>Group presentation</i>	10
<i>First midterm</i>	25
<i>Second midterm</i>	25
<i>Final exam</i>	30
Total	100

Class Conduct and Expectations

All students are expected to abide by the Hamilton College Honor Code. A copy of the honor code can be found at: <http://www.hamilton.edu/student-handbook/studentconduct/honor-code>.

Unless you have a documented disability that requires use of a laptop in class, all personal electronic devices must be silenced and put away while in class. If you are texting or using an electronic device without authorization during class, you will be marked as absent for the day.

[Notice: Hamilton College will make reasonable accommodations for students with properly documented disabilities. If you are eligible to receive an accommodation(s) and would like to make a formal request for this course, please be certain to discuss it with me during the first two weeks of class. You will need to provide Allen Harrison, Associate Dean of Students (Elihu Root House; ext. 4021) with appropriate documentation of your disability.]

Course Schedule

Wed, January 21 – Course introduction

Fri, January 23 – Truth, fate, and authority
Sophocles, *Oedipus the King* (entire).

Mon, January 26 – Glory, death, and the *polis*
Sophocles, *Oedipus at Colonus* (entire).

Wed, January 28 – Conscience, law, and authority
Sophocles, *Antigone* (entire).

Fri, January 30 – Recap: Athenian tragedy
Discuss group presentation assignment.

Mon, February 2 – Socrates and the Purpose of Politics
Plato, *Republic*, Book 1 (entire).

Wed, February 4 – The Soul and the City
Plato, *Republic*, Book 2 (entire).

Fri, February 6 – The Cave and the King
Plato, *Republic*, Book 7, pp. 207–215 (top, 521b).

Mon, February 9 – The Prince and Power
Machiavelli, *The Prince*, chs. 1–7.

Wed, February 11 – The Prince and the People
Machiavelli, *The Prince*, chs. 8–18.

Fri, February 13 – Fortune and *virtù*
Machiavelli, *The Prince*, chs. 19–26.

Mon, February 16 – Recap: from ancient to modern.
Group presentation check-in.

Wed, February 18 – **Group presentations 1**
No reading.

Fri, February 20 – **Midterm 1**
Due 11:59pm.

Mon, February 23 – Introducing the *Persian Letters*
Montesquieu, *Persian Letters*, #s 1–15.

Wed, February 25 – Love and Freedom
Montesquieu, *Persian Letters*, #s 32, 36, 44, 51, 60, 62–63, 65, 74, 76, 78.

- Fri, February 27 – Gender and Genre
Montesquieu, *Persian Letters*, #s 84, 87, 88, 93, 120, 135, 139–150, SL 8.
- Mon, March 2 – Natural Man and the Origin of Society
Rousseau, *Discourse on Inequality*, pp. 55–97.
- Wed, March 4 – Inequality and Civil Society
Rousseau, *Discourse on Inequality*, pp. 98–139.
- Fri, March 6 – **Group presentations 2**
No reading.
- Mon, March 9 – Marxism and Revolution
Marx, *The Communist Manifesto*, pts. 1 & 2.
- Wed, March 11 – Communism, Class, and History
Marx, *The Communist Manifesto*, pts. 3 & 4.
- Fri, March 13 – The Early Marx
Marx, “Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts” (PDF).
- Mon, March 30 – Woman Suffrage
Harriet Taylor Mill, “Enfranchisement of Women,” pp. 89–122.
- Wed, April 2 – Sex Equality
Mill, “On the Subjection of Women,” pgs. 123–182.
- Fri, April 3 – **Midterm 2**
Due 11:59pm.
- Mon, April 6 – Modern liberalism
Mill, *On Liberty*, ch. 1 (PDF).
- Wed, April 8 – Liberalism, individuality, and authority
Mill, *On Liberty*, chs. 3–4 (PDF).
- Fri, April 10 – Recap: modern thought, contemporary democracy
No reading.
- Mon, April 13 – **Group presentations 3**
No reading.
- Wed, April 15 – The contemporary public
Dewey, *Public and its Problems*, ch. 1.
- Fri, April 17 – The modern state
Dewey, *Public and its Problems*, ch. 3
- Mon, April 20 – Democracy and expertise

Dewey, *Public and its Problems*, ch. 4.

Wed, April 22 – The great community

Dewey, *Public and its Problems*, ch. 5.

Fri, April 24 – Dewey recap and loose ends.

No reading.

Mon, April 27 – Justice as fairness

Rawls, “Justice as Fairness,” first principle (PDF).

Wed, April 29 – Inequality and justice

Rawls, “Justice as Fairness,” second principle (PDF).

Fri, May 1 – **Group presentations 4**

No reading.

Mon, May 4 – Distributive justice and its critics

Iris Marion Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, ch. 1 (PDF).

Wed, May 6 – Oppression and justice

Iris Marion Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, ch. 2 (PDF).

Fri, May 8 – Class TBA

Mon, May 11 – Exam review.

Thu, May 14 – **Common final exam, 9am.**