

Classics of Social and Political Thought

Spring 2024

CTI 302 (Unique Number: 29235)/GOV 314E (Unique Number: 37290)

MWF 11am-12pm; WAG 308

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OH: TBA

Course Description

In this course, we will ask the most fundamental questions that guide political life: what is justice? What is the best regime, or form of political organization, for human beings? One of the key ways we know that a regime is good is because it provides for human happiness. So to pursue the question of the best regime, we also have to answer the question: what is a happy, fulfilled human life? In this version of “Classics of Social and Political Thought,” we will be confronted also with a more particular question: what is the proper role of the arts and sciences in a political society? What benefits and challenges are attendant on the modern liberation of the arts and sciences and the attempt to have science or philosophy guide political life?

To approach these challenging but fundamentally important questions, we will carefully study works by great authors who took up such questions and answered them with great depth and originality. In doing so, we will attempt to learn not just *about* the authors, but *from* them. We will approach the texts with the spirit that we can really learn something of relevance for our own lives and world.

We will begin by studying the most powerful classical exploration of the relationship between philosophy and society, Plato’s *Apology of Socrates*. We will continue by studying Plato’s exploration of the meaning and limits of justice, the *Republic*. From there, we turn to the great Christian theologian Thomas Aquinas’ account of law in his *Summa Theologiae*. We next study one of the founders of liberal modernity and thereby the modern break with classical and medieval political thought, John Locke and his *Second Treatise of Government*. This study is continued with Locke’s *Letter Concerning Toleration* and Mill’s *On Liberty*, both expressions of the modern liberal concern with free thought and speech in political life. With Rousseau’s *Discourses* and Nietzsche’s *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, we will study some of the most powerful criticisms of the early modern political project and its aim of stable political life aimed at comfortable self-preservation. We conclude with a study of Max Weber, whose *Politics as Vocation* is a classic statement of the study of political life from the perspective of modern social science.

Class Meetings

You are expected to participate with thoughtful comments and questions in class. Our class discussions will be centered on a careful analysis of the assigned readings. It will therefore be necessary to read the assigned texts carefully, taking notes, recording your observations, etc. (ideally more than once, but at minimum one time carefully).

Electronics Policy

Electronics are not allowed in class, including e-readers, tablets, etc. (this means you will need a hard copy of the assigned texts). If you would like to request an exemption from this rule, speak with me directly.

Food/Drink Policy

You may bring drinks to class, but please do not eat in the classroom so as not to distract other students. If you need a snack, please leave the classroom and have it in the hallway before returning to class.

Course Requirements and Grading Rubric

50%—Two take-home papers. Each paper will be 1200-1500 words and will be worth 25% of your overall final grade. I will distribute each paper topic on Canvas two weeks before the paper is due.

30%—Final paper. The final paper will be somewhat longer than the first two, at 1500-1800 words.

10%— Attendance. Attendance is **required** at every class meeting. You are allowed two unexcused absences, **after which you will lose 10% of your attendance grade (1% of final grade) for each unexcused absence.** Please let me know in advance if you need to miss class for an excused reason (e.g. illness with doctor's note, religious observance, etc.).

10% - Participation. You are expected to participate in class with your thoughts and questions, so come prepared with your reactions to the reading.

University Requirements

This course counts towards the Certificate Program in Core Texts and Ideas, a 6-course sequence in the great books, ideas, and controversies that have shaped Western civilization. The program is open to students in all majors and colleges. For more information, visit <http://www.utexas.edu/cola/centers/coretexts/> or email the academic director, Professor Lorraine Pangle, at: lorraine.pangle@austin.utexas.edu.

This course may be used to fulfill the social and behavioral sciences component of the university core curriculum and addresses the following four core objectives established by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board: communication skills, (critical) thinking skills, empirical and quantitative skills, and social responsibility.

Grading Policy

We will use the plus / minus grading system for this class. Quizzes, tests, attendance, and participation will be graded numerically. Papers will be given letter grades. In order to calculate your final grade, these will be translated into number grades as follows:

A: 95; A-: 92.5; B+: 87.5; B: 85; B-: 82.5; C+: 77.5; C: 75; C-: 72.5; D: 65; F: 50

Grades in between two letters grades count as the average of those two grades (e.g. A-/B+ = 90). Final grades are calculated numerically, then translated into a letter grade using the following scale:

A: 93 and up; A-: 90-93; B+: 87-90; B: 83-87; and so on.

Required Texts

You are required to have the following editions of each text that we use in class. This will be crucial for keeping everyone on the same page, both literally in terms of page numbers, and because of the translations: translations vary greatly in quality, and these are the best I know of.

Four Texts on Socrates. Translated by West and West. Cornell University Press.

Plato, *Republic*. Translated by Allan Bloom. Basic Books

Locke, *Two Treatises of Government and a Letter Concerning Toleration*. Edited by Ian Shapiro. Yale University Press.

Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. *The Major Political Writings of Rousseau*. Translated by John Scott. University of Chicago Press.

Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Portable Nietzsche*. Translated by Walter Kaufmann. Penguin Books.

Weber. *Politics as Vocation*. Translation TBD

Readings

As we proceed, I will announce specific readings in class and post them on Canvas.

Week 1:

1/17: Introduction to the course

1/19: Plato *Apology*

Week 2:

1/22: *Apology*

1/24: *Apology*

1/26: Plato *Republic* I

Week 3:

1/29: *Republic* I

1/31: *Republic* I

2/2: *Republic* II

Week 4:

2/5: *Republic* II

2/7: *Republic* III

2/9: *Republic* III

Week 5:

2/12: *Republic* IV – **FIRST PAPER TOPICS RELEASED**

2/14: *Republic* IV

2/16: *Republic* V

Week 6:

2/19: *Republic* V

2/21: Selections from Aquinas *Summa Theologiae* on Law (PDF handout)

2/23: *Summa Theologiae* – **FIRST PAPER DUE**

Week 7:

2/26: Locke *Second Treatise* Chapters 1-4

2/28: *Second Treatise* 1-4

3/1: *Second Treatise* 1-4

Week 8:

3/4: *Second Treatise* 5-9

3/6: *Second Treatise* 5-9

3/8: *Second Treatise* 5-9

Week 9:

NO CLASS – SPRING BREAK

Week 10:

3/18: *Second Treatise* 10-19 – **SECOND PAPER TOPICS RELEASED**

3/20: *Second Treatise* 10-19

3/22 : *Second Treatise* 10-19

Week 11:

3/25: Locke *Letter Concerning Toleration*

3/27: *Letter Concerning Toleration*

3/29: Mill *On Liberty* – **SECOND PAPER DUE**

Week 12:

4/1: Rousseau *First Discourse*

4/3: *First Discourse*

4/5: *First Discourse*

Week 13:

4/8: Rousseau *Second Discourse*

4/10: *Second Discourse*

4/12: *Second Discourse*

Week 14:

4/15: Selections from Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* – **FINAL PAPER TOPICS RELEASED**

4/17: *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*

4/19: *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*

Week 15:

4/22: Max Weber *Politics as Vocation*

4/24: *Politics as Vocation*

4/26: *Politics as Vocation*

Week 16:

4/29: *Politics as Vocation* – **FINAL PAPER DUE**

Additional Policies

Students with disabilities: Students with disabilities may request appropriate academic accommodations from the Division of Diversity and Community Engagement, Services for Students with Disabilities, 471-6259, <http://www.utexas.edu/diversity/ddce/ssd/>

Academic dishonesty: Plagiarism will result in a failing grade for the course. The university's Honor Code, with information on the meaning of academic integrity, can be found here: <http://catalog.utexas.edu/general-information/the-university/>

Accommodations for religious holidays: If you need to miss class for a religious observance, please email me. I will excuse your absence and we will make arrangements to keep you updated with the course material.