

## Fundamental Exercises in Political Theory Gov 1011 Fall 2018

Professor: Michael Hawley

Office: 209 Hubbard Hall

Office Hours: Tu 4:20-5:30 PM, Wed 1:30-3:30, or by apt.

mhawley@bowdoin.edu

### **Course Description:**

How shall we live together? That is the fundamental political question. Aristotle points out—as we will read in this class— that human beings are unique among living creatures in that we cannot live solitary lives by ourselves, yet we also have no fixed method of organization. It thus remains an open question under what terms we will organize our common life. Those who engage in political philosophy attempt to answer this simple yet knotty question. In doing so, they must determine what is permanent and what is malleable about human nature. They weigh tradeoffs between liberty, justice, and stability—and confront disagreement over what those terms actually mean. They judge what sorts of institutions and qualities of character can best support a good political society. In this course, we enter into “the great conversation,” in which political thinkers for more than two millennia have debated these questions with each other.

### **Course Aims:**

The primary aims of this class are those that go into determining your grade for the course. Most basically, you will gain an understanding of the questions and problems that confront political philosophy. You will also achieve some mastery over the specific ideas and arguments of some of the most important contributors to “the great conversation” of western political thought. You will hone your skills at reading carefully and evaluating arguments. Because this is also a writing course, you will also improve your abilities in constructing your own written arguments, demonstrating your analytical skills, and expressing your ideas clearly and persuasively.

But there is another kind of aim for this course, one that will not be reflected in your grade. The thinkers we read in this class wrote not merely for their own contemporaries but for all time. These texts are therefore addressed to you, personally. They make claims to truth about fundamental questions: What is human nature? What does the good life look like? Can you be a good person and a good citizen, or must you choose? What is the relationship between freedom and justice—and how much of either of these should we give up to secure peace and security? What sort of claims do others have on us? What, in the end, is the purpose of political life? These questions matter to each of us, both as individuals and as members of a political community. Our own life choices will inevitably presuppose answers to many of these questions. It is my hope for this class that our encounters with the authors we read will help us to think more deeply about these questions and to be more reflective citizens.

## Course Books:

The following books are required reading and are available for purchase or rent through Bowdoin's textbook partner or online. You may of course purchase books from other sources, provided you use the same editions and translations. It truly is important to get the same editions and translations; it helps keep all of us on the same page (literally) as we discuss the readings and when it comes time to write papers. All other texts will be posted on the Blackboard site.

1. *Four Texts on Socrates*, authors: Plato, Aristophanes,
2. *Aristotle's Politics*, author: Aristotle, translator: Carnes Lord,
3. *The Prince*, author: Niccolo Machiavelli, translator: Harvey Mansfield,
4. *Second Treatise of Government*, author: John Locke, editor: Richard Cox,
5. *'The Discourses' and Other Early Political Writings*, author: Jean-Jacques Rousseau, editor: Victor Gourevitch,
6. *On Liberty*, author: JS Mill, editor: Elizabeth Rapaport

## Course Requirements:

Grade breakdown:

20%: class participation

20%: reading responses

60%: paper grades

Class participation is not automatic! In a seminar such as this one, you have an active responsibility to contribute to the common enterprise of learning. You have interesting thoughts (at least sometimes)! Don't deprive your classmates of them! Asking thoughtful questions, making insightful comments, and furthering our discussion are all ways in which you contribute to both your own learning and that of the rest of the class. The quality of these contributions matters more than their quantity, but making a habit of participating in class is a good way to improve the quality of those contributions.

On the course's Blackboard site, there will be an open discussion forum. You are required to post 12 reading responses (roughly 150 words each) over the course of the semester. This averages out to roughly one such response per week, but you may distribute them however you like throughout the semester. These responses must not exceed 200 words. In them, you should raise a question, pose an objection, or make an argument about some aspect of the next day's reading. You are encouraged also to respond to posts by your fellow students. In order to count, you need to post by midnight of the day before class is to meet—I will read them before class and may incorporate some of them into our discussion. Unlike the class participation component of your grade, here meeting the quantity-quota matters—simply achieving this minimum standard (12 posts) is sufficient to get a “B” for this portion of the overall grade. But beyond the question of quantity, thoughtful and insightful online contributions raise your grade further when I evaluate them holistically at the end of the semester. However, if at the end of the semester you have posted fewer than 12 responses, your grade will fall proportionately (i.e.  $1/12^{\text{th}}$  for each missing response).

Finally, you will write four 5-6 page papers throughout the semester. For each paper I will prompt you to engage a particular question from our readings. These will not be research papers: reading beyond

our class assignments is not required and is in fact discouraged! I will discuss the particulars of these assignments and the expectations for them in more detail in class. See below for paper due dates.

With all of your work, be sure to follow Bowdoin standards of conduct regarding academic honesty and plagiarism. Violations of these standards will be referred to the appropriate dean.

## Reading assignments:

### Part 1: Birth of Political Philosophy: The City and the Soul

Aug. 30	Introductory Discussion
Sept. 4	Plato's <i>Apology</i> (read the whole thing)
Sept. 6	Plato's <i>Apology</i> (read it again)
Sept. 11	Plato's <i>Crito</i>
Sept. 13	Aristotle's <i>Politics</i> Book 1
Sept. 18	Aristotle's <i>Politics</i> Book 2, chs. 1-7; book 3, chs. 1-9
Sept. 20	Aristotle's <i>Politics</i> Book 3, chs. 10-18, Book 4, chs. 8-9, 11; Book 5, chs. 8-9; Book 6, chs. 1-5
Sept 25	Aristotle's <i>Politics</i> Book 7, chs. 1-4, 13-15; Book 8, chs 1-3

### Part 2: Politics in a Fallen World

Sept. 27	Machiavelli, <i>Prince</i> , Epistle Dedicatory, chs. 1-5 <b>First Paper Due</b>
Oct. 2	Machiavelli, <i>Prince</i> , chs. 6-11
Oct. 4	Machiavelli, <i>Prince</i> chs. 12-19
Oct. 9	FALL BREAK
Oct. 11	Machiavelli <i>Prince</i> chs. 20-26
Oct. 16	Hobbes <i>Leviathan</i> (ch 1-6)
Oct. 18	Hobbes <i>Leviathan</i> (13-14, 17-18, 56)

### Part 3: Liberty and Equality

Oct. 23	Locke, <i>Second Treatise</i> 1-5. <b>Second Paper Due</b>
Oct. 25	Locke, <i>Second Treatise</i> 7-10
Oct. 30	Locke, <i>Second Treatise</i> 11-13, 18-19, Declaration of Independence
Nov. 1	Rousseau, <i>Second Discourse</i> , pp. 111-133, plus notes
Nov. 6	Rousseau, <i>Second Discourse</i> , pp. 134-160, plus notes
Nov. 8	Rousseau, <i>Second Discourse</i> , pp. 161-188, plus notes
Nov. 13	Mill, <i>On Liberty</i> pp. 1-33
Nov. 15	Mill, <i>On Liberty</i> pp. 33-71
Nov. 20	Mill, <i>On Liberty</i> pp. 73-113 <b>Third Paper Due</b>

Nov. 22        THANKSGIVING

**Part 4: Modernity and its Discontents**

Nov. 27        Marx, Communist Manifesto

Nov. 29        Marx, On the Jewish Question

Dec. 4         Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil* pref., sections 1-9, 13, 44, 61-21, ch. 5  
(all)

Dec. 6         Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil* sections 214-230, ch. 8 (all), sections 257-265

Dec. 15        **Fourth Paper Due: 1:30 PM.**