This course will introduce you to some of the major books of political theory and some of the major problems of politics these books address. The goal of the course is to teach you how to read some of these famous texts, and more significantly, how to think through and argue about some of the central questions of politics. This course is going to focus on one of these central questions: what is justice and what is the role of politics in realizing it? While this question may seem abstract, it is central to a variety of contemporary political debates. Here are a few of them:

1. **Justice and Luck:** We know that many people have advantages over others in gaining jobs, income, wealth, and influence on political decisions simply because they had the good luck to be born into the right family, with the right skills, in the right neighborhood, with sufficient resources, and at a moment when abilities and resources they did not produce were in demand. Is it just that a political society should reward people with such advantages at the cost of citizens without them? Should political institutions intervene to offset unearned advantages?

2. **Justice and Unequal Political Resources:** If democracy assumes all citizens are equal with regard to civil and political liberty defined as the opportunity to influence fundamental political decisions, what is the just way to distribute political resources (money, wealth, political power, and political knowledge) to make sure that political liberty is enjoyed equally? Under what circumstances if any can one argue that inequalities of political liberty are just? Is authoritarian rule or rule of superior guardians just?

3. **Justice and the Market:** Proponents of the market claim that the market distributes resources, goods and incomes according to the principle that if each person pursues his/her self-interest, the outcome will be “fair” and just. However, we can ask, is the market a form of just distribution or are there principles of justice that deny this claim?

4. **Justice and Property:** What is a just distribution of property? Specifically how much inequality or equality of property is compatible with justice? What is the answer if justice means treating each human being of equal worth? What is the answer if justice means rewarding each according to his/her unequal abilities?

5. **Justice and Public Goods:** What is the relation of justice to the provision of public goods, that is, goods which we enjoy equally such as education, health care, pensions, environmental regulation, financial regulation, parks, libraries, and security? Is a just political society required to provide such goods or not?
6. **Justice and Political Power**: Are appeals to justice merely a cover for political power? Does every ruling group simply invoke principles of justice to justify its use of political power to further its own interests?

These are some of the questions we will debate in this course. As part of this debate, we will be reading a number of major political thinkers who have addressed the question of justice in different areas of political life—among them Plato, Machiavelli, Rousseau, Marx, and Rawls. Each thinker will have a different answer to the questions above. It is your job to try to figure out who is right and why.

**Course Objectives:**

1. Refine your capacity to analyze political concepts for their meaning and political arguments for coherence on fundamental questions of politics.
2. Learn to interpret political theory texts—their strategy of argument, style, and levels of meaning.
3. Learn to understand differences between older political arguments and present ones.
4. Learn how abstract political arguments apply to day-to-day politics.
5. Learn to focus on those arguments that hold a political theory together, the assumptions about human motivation that political thinkers make, how the logic of a political argument can lead to unexpected conclusions and when a political argument is contradictory and when it is merely paradoxical.

**Required Books**

Machiavelli, *The Prince* (University of Chicago) trans. by Mansfield
Plato, *The Republic* (Hackett) trans. by Grube and Reeve
Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Basic Political Writings* (Hackett)

**Additional Readings on Blackboard** (the password: pos103)

A selection from John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*
A short section on property from John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*
Milton Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom* (chs. 1,2)

**Course Outline** (*means you should read with extra care.*)

I. **Introduction to the course and to political theory** (August 26\textsuperscript{th})—no class August 28\textsuperscript{th}.

II. **Politics without justice: Machiavelli and “matters of state.”**

The necessities of “new princes”: the logic of acquiring and maintain states. People, princes, and nobles. Can political actions accord with moral choices? What necessities in politics force political actors to violate accepted morals? What forces in politics allow them to act in accordance with morals? Why does Machiavelli argue we must learn to “use” the good and the bad according to necessity if we want to be “effective” in matters of state? Why does he think we cannot avoid using laws, force, and appearances in matters of state? Virtù vs. Virtue.
Sept 2, Machiavelli, *The Prince* (chs 1-12). Read chs 1, 3, 6, 7 especially carefully but don’t skip the others!
Sept 4, *The Prince* (chs. 15-19)*
Sept 9 *The Prince* (chs. 20-24)

**Short essay 4-6 pages on The Prince due Monday, September 15 by 3 pm in the Political Science Contact Office HUB16. Essay questions to be handed out a week in advance.**

### III. Justice and Guardianship: Plato’s Soul Based Theory of Justice

Does justice require rule by those who by nature have superior character and insight? What is a just distribution of political and social goods? What should be politically distributed? What should not? Do we “deserve” the benefits of our natural and social endowments?

-Sept 16, Plato, *The Republic*: Justice as Identity of Polity and Properly Ordered Soul Book I and Book II until (par 363). (Ordinary concepts of justice—equality vs inequality: paying debts; helping friends and harming enemies; right of the stronger; power vs. right—what does it mean to rule well?; the story of the Gyges Ring.)

-September 18, Rest of Book II (Understanding justice as building the most perfect polis in theory. Polities as forms of education to justice. Political education and the need for fictions. Creating a stratified polity according to function)

-Sept 23, Book III (Completing the education of the guardians and selecting rulers)

-September 25, no class.

Book V (The completion of the kallipolis; communal ownership, the rule of philosophers based on the differences in genuine “knowledge” vs. “opinion” or “belief”. The superiority of theory to practice.)

-Oct 2, Book VI* (Justice as knowledge of the good and why only philosophers have access to it. (Knowledge of forms vs. knowledge of appearances. )

-Oct 7, Book VII* (The double meaning of the allegory of the cave—political and philosophic. Is dialectic the only way to grasp justice? If justice can only be understood by philosophy can justice be “political”? Book VIII (552d-566d) (Plato’s criticism of politics: How does oligarchy lead to democracy and democracy to tyranny? Is democratic justice as equal political membership defensible?)

**Essay on Plato on Justice and Inequality due in section October. 17th.**
IV. Democratic Justice: Rousseau, The Social Contract and Equalizing Political Liberty

Is Plato wrong in claiming democracy is unjust? Does popular sovereignty (rule of the people) require the equal enjoyment of full citizenship through participation in fundamental decisions affecting common life? If justice is modeled on political equality, how should we distribute power and wealth? Why does liberty as unrestrained pursuit of private interest lead to injustice? Is private liberty compatible with political liberty? What does the realization of political equality require under modern conditions of politics—the 1/n problem? How should we organize the state so that it does not become unjust if justice depends on the identity of rulers and ruled?

Jean-Jacque Rousseau, Social Contract
-Oct 9th, Social Contract Book I
-Oct 14, Social Contract Book II** Read very carefully.
-Oct 21, Social Contract Book IV, ch. 1, 2.

Essay, 4-6 pages, on Plato due in section on Friday, Oct. 17! Questions to be handed out 2 weeks in advance.

V. Politics, property and justice I: Is Property the source of Social and Political Inequality? Is property the source of all social and political injustice?

Rousseau, Discourse on the Origins of Inequality
-Oct 28, 30. Part II (A hypothetical history of the origins of social and political inequality. The political contract as deception—inequality of property and power in the modern state as the height of injustice. How should we restore justice if we are all morally equal?)
Recommended: a short extract from John Locke on private property (on Blackboard).

VI. Politics, property and justice II: Capitalism, Class Inequality and Freedom in Marx.
Is capitalism unjust or is justice irrelevant for understanding capitalism? What would equality of property mean for individual and social liberty?

Karl Marx. The denaturing of property through history: Capital as class conflict. Capital as Exploitation.
-Nov 4. The Communist Manifesto, in Marx-Engels Reader Sections 1-2
-Nov 11. Finish up Marx.
-Nov 13 catch up or outside speaker.

November 18 (Tuesday), In-Class Exam on Rousseau and Marx
VII. Modern Concepts of Justice, and Equality 
(the problem of justice—dealing with deep inequalities; the two principles of a just political 
society; the original position and the social contract). Why is it that deep inequalities in our life 
chances “cannot possibly be justified by an appeal to the notions of merit and desert” (TJ, p. 7)?
-Nov 25, Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*: 17, 36 (a democratic concept of justice; justice and the fair 
value of political liberty). (on Blackboard)

VIII. Justice and the Claims of Market Liberty. 
-Dec 2, Milton Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom*, chs. 1-2 (on Blackboard)
-Dec 9, Michael Sandel, *What Money Can’t Buy*, chs 3-5

Final exam on Friday, Dec 11th: 10:30am -12:30pm LC 18.

Assignments and Course Obligations:
1) You will have two short essays (one 4 pages and approximately 6 pages). The first will be on 
Machiavelli’s account of political necessity and his argument that politics and justice may be 
incompatible due on Sept 15 in HUB16. The second will be on Plato’s argument for why only a 
polity derived from philosophy can be just and be due in section on Oct 17. Topics will be 
handed out at least a week before the papers are due.
2) There will be an in-class exam on Rousseau and Marx’s arguments for why justice requires 
equality of citizenship and equality in the control of property on Nov 18.
3) There will be occasional political theory puzzles, which I will assign a session in advance and 
will ask you to write a paragraph or two on how you would solve the puzzle. These will be 
graded, but if you demonstrate a good faith effort in seeking to solve the puzzle, this should 
 improve your course grade not diminish it.
4) Finally there will a final exam on Friday, Dec 10th: 10:30am -12:30pm in LC 18 This exam 
will focus on justice and the market.
5) You are expected to attend every class and every section. If you are absent from section 
more than two times without a legitimate excuse, your grade will fall by a half. Two more, it will 
fall by a half again and so on. You cannot pass the class if you do not attend sections.
6) You should bring the books or reading to class. I will often refer to passages in these 
books, and you will be clueless without the books in hand.

Grading:
Grading will be as follows:
The two papers will each count 15% of your grade for a total of 30%
The midterm: 20%,
The final: 20%.
Section grade and puzzles 30%
Grading will take improvement into account. But note: 30% of your grade will be based on 
section participation and puzzles.

Plagiarism
Plagiarism means to pass off someone else’s work as your own. Please be warned that should I find you have plagiarized, you will receive an immediate E in the course and further actions will be taken, including sending your case before a university committee. You should also be warned that taking text off internet sites such as Sparknotes or Wikipedia will also earn you an E along with further actions. It is your job to demonstrate to us that you have worked out your essays from the texts at hand through clear arguments and proper citations. It is not our job to demonstrate you haven’t!

Office Hours:
My office hours will be Tu Th 11:40-12:40 in HUB16. If you alert me, I can meet the hour before our class: 9:30-10:30. I am also happy to meet with you in my downtown office Milne 204 on Wednesday afternoons or answer your question and comments through e-mail: pbreiner@albany.edu

Teaching Assistants
The teaching assistants for this course are Yeu-Fen Hsieh (yhsieh4@albany.edu) Reed Williams (rwquazi77@gmail.com), and Jinxin Liu (liukrimhim@gmail.com). You should feel free to see them in their office hours, talk to them after class, or write them e-mails. They will be happy to discuss the class material with you as well as help you with any problems you are having with the class. Since this is a class that deals with the “big” questions of politics you should not feel any hesitation in engaging either the TAs or me in dialogue on the course material

Blackboard:
As mentioned above, a number of the readings are on Blackboard. Find our course, RPOS 103, Introduction to Political Theory, and then click on it. Here you will find a subdirectory with readings for the course. These directories contain not just the additional readings but also a sheet on how to write political theory papers, the syllabus, and occasionally lecture outlines. You must download and print off the readings on e-reserve, for you will be expected to bring them to section and lecture. Reading them on line will simply not do!