

RPOS 103: Introduction to Political Theory
Spring 2019: What is Freedom?
(7887)

Prof. S. McKeever
Political Science Department
smckeever@albany.edu

T/TH 1:15-2:35pm (4 Credits)
Lecture Center 20
Office Hours: T/TH 2:45-3:45 (HU 016)
Fulfills Gen. Ed. Req.--Hum., Intl. Pers.

Course Description

In this course, we will read a sampling of works from some of the most influential thinkers in the Western political theory tradition. Through these readings, we will discover what political theory is and why it is important for the study of politics. For this course, we will be most interested in studying how various thinkers define freedom and how they think that we can be free. These thinkers will be divided into three groups: "Freedom and Truth," "Freedom and Economics," and "Freedom and Government," so they can "debate" the answers to three important clusters of questions: 1) Does the search for truth lead to freedom? If so, how can we arrange our political and/or governmental institutions to facilitate that search for truth, so that we can be free? If not, what does that mean for our political institutions; 2) How do various economic institutions lead toward or away from freedom? How can we build economic institutions that make us free? How will this affect our political and/or governmental institutions?; and 3) Can we construct governmental institutions that lead to freedom? If so, how? If not, then what other options do we have? We will tackle one cluster of questions for each section of the course.

Course Objectives

- 1) To read and understand some of the most important political texts in the Western political theory tradition
- 2) To understand how the different writers of these texts conceptualized freedom and to understand how these various conceptions compare to and contrast with each other
- 3) To connect these various concepts and ideas of freedom to the contemporary political scene
- 4) To better learn how to read complex texts and to comprehend the nuances within and among these difficult texts
- 5) To better learn how to communicate difficult ideas and how to translate them into political practice

Course Requirements

- Arrive on time to all lectures and discussion sections.
- Complete all readings on time.
- Bring the assigned readings to class and to your discussion section.
- Come to discussion sections ready to participate. This requires you to not only read the assigned readings but also to think about them in advance of the classes. Be prepared to answer questions about the text and to ask questions of your own. It

may help to take notes while you are reading, to underline key passages of the text, or to write down questions that you still have about the text.

- Complete two midterm exams and one final exam.

Course Approach and Methodology

- This course is a hybrid of lecture and discussion. Due to the size of our class, our twice weekly sessions will mostly be lectures.
- In these twice weekly lectures, I do not use PowerPoint. I do this by design. Active note taking is an important part of the learning process. Actively making decisions about what is important and how to structure the important material helps you to take charge of the material and to remember it better. I will, when possible however, utilize the board to “write along with you.”
- However, as you will see below, participation is a valuable component of political theory in general and of this course in particular. This is why your weekly discussion section is so important. Though there will be complex parts of the readings that will require extra explication, I expect that you will be ready and able to discuss the material in these weekly discussion sections.
- These discussion sections will be run by your TA, but I and your TA will expect that you will actively discuss the material in these sections. These discussions must always be centered on the readings with the goal of coming to an understanding of each thinker’s respective theory.
- Reading is an essential part of this course as well. It is also a skill, like writing, that must be constantly developed. As such, throughout the course, we will discuss how to read political theory texts. You will be expected to put these skills into practice as you read each class’s material.
- At the beginning of each new thinker, we will examine the life and times of the thinker. This will help us contextualize the theories that we are reading. While this is an important component of the course, all exams will ask you to engage with each thinker’s theories rather than with their biographies.
- Throughout the course, we will be interested in how the theories are put together as well as the content of the theories. That is, we will pay attention to how each thinker wrote, spoke, and argued.
- Even though these thinkers did not all live at the same time, they are still having a conversation with each other. As we will see, many of these thinkers read the earlier thinkers and are explicitly responding to them. As we go through the course, we want to reconstruct the conversation that these thinkers are having across the millennia. We want to see how these thinkers are interested in many of the same fundamental questions, and we want to see how and when they propose to add new questions.
- This also means that these thinkers are giving different answers to the same questions. At the end of the course, we will not have a single answer as to what freedom or justice is, for example. We will want to see the multiple answers that are given, to see how they are different from each other and why those differences matter, and begin to make decisions about which answers are most convincing.

- As we do this, we should start questioning each of the thinker’s ideas. However, we should also let each thinker interrogate us. Just as any theory could be wrong, our own thinking could be wrong. Before rejecting any theory, we should see if it is instead our own thinking that needs to be modified. My job is to make each thinker sound as convincing as possible, but as we do this throughout the course, we will also begin to see how different thinkers question the thinking of the other thinkers.

Required Readings

The following books are required for this course and are available at the University Bookstore or online (please be sure to get the correct edition so we are, literally, all on the same page):

- Plato (Translated by G.M.A. Grube), *Republic* (Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1992) 978-0872201361
- John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty* (Dover Thrift Editions, 2002) 978-0486421308
- John Locke (Edited by C.B. Macpherson), *Second Treatise of Government* (Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1980) 978-0915144860
- Jean Jacques Rousseau (Translated and edited by Donald A. Cress), *The Basic Political Writings*, 2nd Edition (Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2012) 978-1603846738
- Alexis de Tocqueville (Translated by Gerald Bevan), *Democracy in America* (Penguin Classics, 2003) 978-0140447606

Additional readings will be made available online. They are marked with “*” in the “Schedule of Readings and Assignments” section of this syllabus.

Attendance Policy

Political theory is an activity not a formula. The process is at least as important as the result, which is to say it is impossible to understand the theory without understanding how the theory is put together. To understand how the theory works and moves, we will need to pick it up, mull it over, and try it out. This takes both time and conversation. These conversations will be the foundation of your weekly discussion sections, but even in our twice weekly lectures, you should be actively engaging with the material.

All this means that if you miss class time, you will not be able to fully make up what you missed. As such, even though I will not take attendance in the twice weekly lectures, *I strongly recommend that you attend all classes*. On the other hand, your TA will take attendance at the beginning of each discussion section. Missing these discussion sections without an approved, documented excuse will negatively affect your participation grade.

Office Hours

In a class of this size, it is not easy to generate discussions with widespread participation during our twice weekly lectures. Discussion sections are meant to mitigate this. However, the conversations and musings do not need to stop in the classroom. *I and your TA are always happy to further the discussion in our office hours, and, in fact, we encourage it*. The more you can actively engage with the material, the better you will understand it. Attending office hours affords you the opportunity to ask questions that are pertinent to

your individual struggles and also allows you to formulate the theories in your own words. I am always happy to meet with you, but you should utilize your TA and your TA's office hours first.

The TAs for this class are Matthew Kirk (mbkirk@albany.edu) and Zheng Wang (zwang25@albany.edu). Please check your class schedule to see who your TA is and when and where your discussion section meets.

Excused Absences:

If you must miss a discussion section or a class with a scheduled exam, you must have documentation from the dean of undergraduate studies that details the reason for your absence and excuses you from that absence. Barring extraordinary circumstances (in which case you must notify us as soon as possible), you must notify me and your TA of your absence no later than 1 class after the missed class/the exam was taken, and you must submit proper documentation to me and your TA within 1 week of the missed class/exam being taken. Absent this timely, proper documentation, you will not be allowed to take a makeup exam and your absence will no longer be excused.

In addition, if you know that you will miss class time (for an athletic event, a religious holiday, or the like), please inform me and your TA (with proper and official documentation) within the first 3 class meetings or, if that is not possible, as soon as you become aware of them.

Grading

Midterm 1: 25%

Midterm 2: 25%

Final Exam: 30%

Participation: 20%

This course is graded on a scale of A-E. Please note that you cannot pass the course if you do not take all three exams.

Exams:

This class will have two midterm exams and one final exam. All three exams will be essay exams. Each midterm exam will ask you to answer one essay question, which will ask you to synthesize all three thinkers from the preceding unit. Midterm Exam 1 will cover the first unit entitled "Freedom and Truth." Midterm Exam 2 will cover the second unit entitled "Freedom and Economics." The final exam will ask you to answer one or two essay questions: either one question on the course as a whole (with special emphasis on the final unit of the course: "Freedom and Government") or one on the final unit of the course ("Freedom and Government") and one on the course as a whole. That means that the *final is cumulative*.

Prior to each exam, your TA will distribute a sheet of paper that includes all of the possible essay questions. For the exam itself, you will not have a choice of which question(s) you

would like to answer, but you will have seen every possible question before taking the exam.

As per the “Excused Absence” policy outlined above, make-up examinations, early examinations, or incomplete grades will be given only in the event of serious personal or family illness or other unusual circumstances as they are approved by the dean of undergraduate studies. You are required to take all three exams. For the university’s full incomplete grades policy, please refer to:

<https://www.albany.edu/undergraduateeducation/grading.php>.

Participation:

As I have already tried to make clear, participation is an important element of learning political theory. To emphasize this point, participation in your discussion sections is worth 20% of your final grade.

You cannot receive full credit for participation if you do not come to class (see the unexcused and excused absence’s policies above), but attendance alone is not participation. You must contribute to the class discussion on a regular basis throughout the entirety of the semester. Participation includes asking questions that further the conversation, answering instructor or classmate questions, and offering appropriate comments to advance the classroom discussion. Though participation must be ongoing, I and your TA value quality participation over quantity alone. Participation must be centered on the readings and the theories with the goal of coming to a better understanding of them.

Disruptive Behavior:

Participation includes not only actively adding to the academic discourse of the classroom, but it also includes not engaging in activity that is disruptive of that discourse. This behavior includes, but is not limited to, making loud or distracting noises, visually distracting students or the instructor, repeatedly leaving and entering the classroom, persisting in speaking without being recognized, consistently making comments that distract from or destroy proper academic discourse of our course materials, or resorting to physical threats or personal insults. Engaging in any of these activities during any of our thrice weekly meetings will negatively affect your participation grade.

Laptops and Electronic Devices:

All cell phones, iPods, and other electronic devices must be silenced and stored out of sight for the duration of class time. Usage of laptops, iPads, or the like for any activity other than note taking is prohibited and will result in a reduction of your participation grade. Please see me or your TA after the first class if you anticipate taking notes on a laptop or similar device.

Grade Appeals:

In order to appeal a midterm exam grade, you should see your TA during office hours within 1 week of the class receiving back the exam and submit a 1-2 page typewritten explanation of your reasons for believing that the grade should be changed. A grade appeal

may result in the grade being raised, lowered, or left unaltered. After 1 week, grade complaints will not be considered unless there are mitigating circumstances such as a serious illness.

Cheating and Plagiarism

Under no circumstances should you submit someone else's work as your own. This includes, but is not limited to: copying text from another student on tests or papers, copying text from internet sites (e.g. Wikipedia, Sparknotes) or other sources without quotation marks and full citations, or submitting your own work from another course.

Cheating on an exam or plagiarizing written work will result in course failure and referral of the case to a university committee. For more information, please see the undergraduate bulletin: http://www.albany.edu/undergraduate_bulletin/regulations.html. For more information, see: <https://library.albany.edu/infolit/integrity>.

Reasonable Accommodation

Reasonable accommodations will be provided for students with documented physical, sensory, systemic, cognitive, learning and psychiatric disabilities. If you believe you have a disability requiring accommodation in this class, please notify the Director of the Disability Resource Center (Campus Center 130, 518-442-5490, DRC@albany.edu). That office will provide the course instructor with verification of your disability, and will recommend appropriate accommodations (<http://www.albany.edu/disability/current.shtml>).

If you wish to discuss academic accommodations for this course, for the above reasons or other cases including religious holidays, inform the instructor at the beginning of the term. Reasonable accommodations are generally established well in advance and are rarely granted retroactively.

Writing Center (Humanities 140)

The writing center provides tutorials on writing essays and improving language skills (ESL). Visit their website at: <http://www.albany.edu/writing/>.

Academic Support Services (Library Room 94)

Academic support services arrange individual and group tutorials as well as study skills workshops on time management, how to improve your concentration, essay exam skills, listening skills, and overcoming procrastination. Visit their website: <http://www.albany.edu/oaee/index.shtml>.

Schedule of Readings and Assignments

Reading selections not from required books will be made available online.

** This schedule is subject to change. All changes will be announced in class. **

Jan. 24 Introduction

Jan. 25 Discussion Section 1

I. Freedom and Truth

Jan. 29 Plato *Republic* Books I (all) and II (all)

Jan. 31 Plato *Republic* Books III (ln.412b8-end), IV (all), and V (beg.-ln. 471c)

Feb. 1 Discussion Section 2

Feb. 5 Plato *Republic* Books V (471c-end) and VI (ln. 487e6-ln. 489d4; ln. 496a11-end)

Feb. 7 Plato *Republic* Book VII (beg.-521c7)

Feb. 8 Discussion Section 3

Feb. 12 Plato *Republic* Books VIII (all) and X (ln. 608b2-end)

Feb. 14 Mill *On Liberty* Chapters 1 and 2

Feb. 15 Discussion Section 4

Feb. 19 Mill *On Liberty* Chapter 2

Feb. 21 Mill *On Liberty* Chapter 2

Feb. 22 Discussion Section 5

Feb. 26 Foucault "Two Lectures" *

Feb. 28 Foucault "Two Lectures" *

Mar. 1 Discussion Section 6

Mar. 5 Midterm Exam 1

II. Freedom and Economics

Mar. 7 Locke *Second Treatise of Government* Chapters I-IV

- Mar. 8 Discussion Section 7
- Mar. 12 Locke *Second Treatise of Government* Chapter V
- Mar. 14 Locke *Second Treatise of Government* Chapters VI-IX, XIX
- Mar. 15 Discussion Section 8
- Mar. 19 NO CLASS (SPRING BREAK)**
- Mar. 21 NO CLASS (SPRING BREAK)**
- Mar. 22 NO DISCUSSION SECTION (SPRING BREAK)**
- Mar. 26 Marx *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* Pages 66-105 *
- Mar. 28 Marx *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* Pages 66-105 *
- Mar. 29 Discussion Section 9
- Apr. 2 Marx *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* Pages 66-105 *
- Apr. 4 Friedman "Introduction," "The Relation Between Economic Freedom and Political Freedom," and "The Role of Government in a Free Society" *
- Apr. 5 Discussion Section 10
- Apr. 9 Midterm Exam 2
- III. Freedom and Government**
- Apr. 11 Rousseau *Discourse on the Origins of Inequality* Preface; Part I; and Part II
- Apr. 12 Discussion Section 11
- Apr. 16 Rousseau *Social Contract* Book I (all)
- Apr. 18 Rousseau *Social Contract* Books II (all), III (Ch. 1, 10-15, 18), and IV (Ch. 1-3)
- Apr. 19 NO DISCUSSION SECTION (PASSOVER/EASTER)**
- Apr. 23 Tocqueville *Democracy in America* ("Author's Introduction," and Vol. 2, Part 3, Ch. 1, and Vol. 1, Part 1, Ch. 4, 5)

- Apr. 25 Tocqueville *Democracy in America* (“The Author’s Note to the Second Volume; Vol. 2, Part 1, Ch. 1, 2, 5, 6, 8, 10, 11)
- Apr. 26 Discussion Section 12
- Apr. 30 Tocqueville *Democracy in America* (Vol. 2, Part 2, Ch. 1-9; Vol 1. Part 2, Ch. 4, Ch. 7; Vol. 2, Part 3, Ch. 13)
- May 2 Tocqueville *Democracy in America* (Vol. 2, Part 2, Ch. 10, 13, 14; Vol. 2, Part 4, Ch. 1-4, 6, 7)
- May 3 Discussion Section 13
- May 7 Goldman “A New Declaration of Independence;” “Was My Life Worth Living;” “An Anarchist Looks at Life;” and “Anarchism: What It Really Stands For” *

Final Exam: Wednesday, May 15, 2019 1:00-3:00pm