RPOS 314: Problems of Political Inquiry
Spring 2017: Thinking Political Communities
(9127)

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M/W 2:45-4:05pm
Humanities 124
Office Hours: M/W 1:35-2:35 (HU 016)

Course Description
In political science we often study how to bring about justice or how to be free, for example, and in political theory we try to discover what the concepts of justice or freedom actually mean and how these definitions help determine what kinds of justice or freedom are possible in the political and social world. However, we often forget that how we study politics (or justice or freedom) itself also helps determine what kinds of politics (and what kinds of justice and freedom) are possible. This course will help us begin to discover this latter phenomenon. The course will largely deal with Enlightenment and with various counter-Enlightenment or alternate-Enlightenment methods for studying politics. How do these ways of thinking make certain kinds of politics—with certain kinds of justice and freedom, for example—visible while keeping others invisible? How do the different methods of studying politics privilege and legitimize certain kinds of power relations while demoting and delegitimizing others? How do these various methodologies define what it means to be human and so define what the purpose of humanity and ultimately of humanity’s politics should be? In this course, we will seek to answer these and related questions.

Course Objectives
1) To read and understand some of the important political theory texts explaining the political consequences of various methods of studying politics
2) To understand how the different writers of these texts conceptualized political inquiry and its consequences as well as to understand how these various conceptions compare to and contrast with each other
3) To connect these various concepts and ideas of political inquiry and its consequences to the contemporary political scene
4) To better learn how to read complex texts and to comprehend the nuances within and amongst 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.
• Complete all readings on time.
• Bring the assigned readings to class.
• Come to class ready to participate. This requires you to not only read the assigned readings but also to think about them in advance of the lecture. 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 one midterm exam and one final exam.

**Required Readings**
The following books are required for this course and are available at Mary Jane Books or online (please be sure to get the correct edition so we are, literally, all on the same page):
• Friedrich Nietzsche, *Basic Writings of Nietzsche* (Modern Library Classics, 2000)
• Sigmund Freud, *Interpretation of Dreams* (Basic Books, 2010)
• Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (Stanford University Press, 2007)
• Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition* (University of Minnesota Press, 1984)

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, which is the purpose of the class lectures and the resulting class discussions during our twice weekly meetings. If you miss class time, you will not be able to fully make up what you missed. As such, missing more than 1 class or repeatedly coming late to class or leaving during class will result in a reduction of your overall grade. (See below for the excused absences policy.)

**Office Hours**
Along those same lines, the conversations and musings do not need to stop in the classroom. I am always happy to further the discussion in my office hours, and, in fact, I encourage it. The more you can actively engage with the material, the better you will understand it. If your class schedule makes it impossible for you to meet with me during my regularly scheduled office hours, please send me an e-mail so that we can arrange a mutually convenient time to meet.

**Excused Absences:**
If you must miss more than one class or if you must miss 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 me as soon as possible), you must notify me of your absence no later than 1 class after the exam was taken, and you must submit proper documentation to me within 1 week of the exam being taken. Absent this timely, proper documentation, you will not be allowed to take a makeup exam.
In addition, if you know that you will miss class time (for an athletic event, a religious holiday, or the like), please bring these to my attention (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: 35%
Final Exam: 40%
Participation: 25%

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

**Exams:**
This class will have one midterm exam and one final exam. Both exams will be essay exams. Each exam will consist of one or two essay questions. Prior to the exam, I will distribute a sheet of paper that includes all possible exam questions. While the exam will not allow you to choose which question(s) you would like to answer, you will have every possible exam question available to you about one week before the exam is scheduled.

Since the thinkers in this course often self-consciously build on the work of their predecessors, the final exam will be explicitly or implicitly cumulative. In other words, the questions will either ask you to talk about earlier thinkers from the course or they will require you to have knowledge of those earlier thinkers' theories in order to properly contextualize and answer the questions being asked.

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 both exams.

**Participation:**
As I have already tried to make clear, participation is an important element of learning political theory. To emphasize this point, participation is worth 25% of your final grade.

You cannot receive full credit for participation if you do not come to class (see the unexcused and excused absences 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 value quality participation over quantity alone.

**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, or resorting to physical threats or personal insults. Behavior of this kind will result in a deduction of 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 deduction of your participation grade. Please see me 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 me 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](http://www.albany.edu/undergraduate_bulletin/regulations.html).

**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 Disabled Student Services (Business Administration 120, 518-442-5490). That office will provide the course instructor with verification of your disability, and will recommend appropriate accommodations ([http://www.albany.edu/disability/current.shtml](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/](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/oaae/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. 23    Introduction

I. **Political Inquiry: A Choice**

Jan. 25    Plato *The Myth of the Ring of Gyges* (beg. of Republic Book II through ln. 368c) and *Phaedrus* *

Jan. 30    Plato *Timaeus* (beg. through ln. 52d and ln. 87c-end) *

Feb. 1     Kant “An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?” *

Feb. 6     Kant “Idea for a Universal History with Cosmopolitan Intent” *

Feb. 8     Kant “Perpetual Peace” *

Feb. 13    Nietzsche *Twilight of the Idols* “What I Owe to the Ancients”; *Beyond Good and Evil* Preface and Part 1 (all) and Part 2 (all)
(Recommended: Scan *Beyond Good and Evil* Part 4)

Feb. 15    Nietzsche *Twilight of the Idols* “How the ‘True World’ Finally Became a Fable”; *Beyond Good and Evil* Part 3 (sections 45, 46, 48, 61, and 62) and Part 5 (sections 186, 188, 189, 193-195, 199, 201-203); *Genealogy of Morals* Preface and Part 1
(Recommended: “Eternal Recurrence”)

Feb. 20    Nietzsche *Beyond Good and Evil* Part 6 (all) and Part 7 (all through section 231)

Feb. 22    Nietzsche *Beyond Good and Evil* Part 8 (sections 241, 242, 256), Part 9 (all), and Part 10 (all); *Twilight of the Idols* “The Hammer Speaketh”
(Recommended: *Genealogy of Morals* Part 2; *Ecce Homo *

Feb. 27    Nietzsche Wrap Up

Mar. 1     **NO CLASS (Use this time to review)**

Mar. 6     Midterm Exam

II. **Rethinking Enlightenment**

Mar. 8     Freud *Civilization and Its Discontents* ch. I-IV
**Mar. 13**  
NO CLASS (SPRING BREAK)

**Mar. 15**  
NO CLASS (SPRING BREAK)

**Mar. 20**  
Freud *Civilization and Its Discontents* ch. V-VIII

**Mar. 22**  
Freud *The Interpretation of Dreams* ch. II and III

**Mar. 27**  
Freud *The Interpretation of Dreams* ch. V, sect. a; ch. VI, sect. a-b

**Mar. 29**  
Adorno and Horkheimer *The Dialectic of Enlightenment* “Preface (1944 and 1947)” and “The Concept of Enlightenment”

**Apr. 3**  
Adorno and Horkheimer *The Dialectic of Enlightenment* “The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception”

**Apr. 5**  
Adorno “Culture and Administration”*

**Apr. 10**  
NO CLASS (PASSOVER)

**Apr. 12**  
Adorno “Enigamticalness, Truth Content, Metaphysics”*

**Apr. 17**  
Adorno “Free Time”* and “Resignation”*  
(Recommended: “Commitment”)

**Apr. 19**  
Eliot “Rhapsody on a Windy Night”* and *The Waste Land*

**Apr. 24**  
(Recommended: “Tradition and the Individual Talent” and “The Literature of Politics”)

**Apr. 26**  
Eliot *Four Quartets*: “Little Gidding”* and “The Journey of the Magi”*

**May 1**  
Lyotard *The Postmodern Condition* Introduction; ch. 1-7

**May 3**  
Lyotard *The Postmodern Condition* ch. 10-14  
(Recommended: ch. 8 and 9)

**May 8**  
Lyotard “An Answer to the Question, What Is the Postmodern?,” “Missive on Universal History;”* and “Preface” to *A Postmodern Fable*

**May 10**  
Semester Wrap Up: Kleon *Newspaper Blackout* (selections)

**Final Exam: Thursday, May 18, 2017 10:30am-12:30pm**