

POL-UA 100: Political Theory Core Fall 2021

Professor Dimitri Landa

Lectures: M & W 11:00-12:15 CANT 102

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This course is a comprehensive introduction to political theory through the analysis of seminal historical and contemporary texts. Because the subject matter is vast, we will, of necessity, restrict our attention to a handful of critical issues: the distinct nature of public morality, the structure and defense of liberty, equality, and justice, and the different models of democratic politics. Although these issues are, arguably, foundational, our analysis will not directly address many other important issues, which students are encouraged to pursue in their further coursework in political theory.

Our exploration of political theory in this course is structured both conceptually and chronologically. Maintaining this structure both in class lectures and discussions and in thinking through the reading and writing assignments will allow our analysis to remain analytically focused and, at the same time, cognizant of the historic complexity and of the stylized conversation among the historically positioned works. Despite the advanced age of some of the texts we will consider, the issues of interest to us they address are “contemporary,” even if the positions they take are sometimes not. Even where our disagreements with these positions may have a distinctly historic dimension, however, our interest in them will not be antiquarian. To understand both the appeal and the limits of contemporary arguments, we often need to appreciate their historical lineage and the reasons for rejecting the alternatives to them.

Course Requirements

All components of the grade will draw on lecture material, whether or not it is included in the assigned texts, and on material from the assigned texts, whether or

not it is covered in the lectures. Successful performance in the course will, therefore, require both the regular attendance of lectures and the timely completion of reading assignments. You will need to have your texts ready for use in class to follow along the references in the lectures.

The purposes of recitations will be (1) further elucidation of lectures and assigned readings through small-group guided discussions of specific questions central to the covered material; (2) introduction of special topics that are best covered in small groups. Discussion questions for the recitations – typically 2-3 for each recitation – will be distributed by email in advance (on Thursday evening of each week before the corresponding recitation meetings) to allow students the opportunity to think them through by the time of those meetings. In order to make possible the careful tracking of students' performance through the semester, and to maintain the small group discussion dynamic, students are required to attend *all and only* the recitations for which they are registered, unless invited otherwise. To encourage this, students will not be given attendance credit for coming to meetings of other recitation sections, again -- unless otherwise indicated.

Grades for the course will be based on the following components: (1) two short 4-5-page papers addressing a question of your choice from the list of recitation discussion questions; (2) recitation participation; (3) quizzes; (4) a mid-term and a final exam.

Papers. The papers will be due to your respective TAs via NYU Brightspace by 3PM, on the first Monday after you receive the discussion/paper questions. Your TA will create an assignment page on your recitation class website corresponding to that week's essay. In the interest of fairness to other students, papers that are submitted late will not be accepted. Each paper will count for 15% of the final grade.

Recitations. Attendance and participation in the recitation discussions will account for 10% of the grade.

Quizzes. Most of the weeks, recitations will include a 5-7 minute quiz in which, typically, you will be given a quote from your reading assignments and asked to interpret it. The quiz grades will account for 15% of the final grade. You will need to have your texts handy and available to you to answer the quiz questions.

Exams. The two exams will account for a total of 45% of the grade. The exams will be closed-notes and closed-book. No late exams will be given without the prior consent of the professor.

Class policy on electronic devices. In this class, students will not be permitted to use electronic devices (exceptions must be approved by the Moses Center in consultation with the professor). This policy is in line with strong systematic evidence that classroom use of electronic devices by the students lowers comprehension and decreases retention of material.

For similar reasons, I will not be posting lecture notes online, so class attendance will be essential for accessing the lecture material.

Academic Integrity

All the graded assignments for this course must be products of your own work. Words and ideas of other authors used in your work must be properly referenced in accordance with the standard reference manuals (APA, MLA, Chicago, etc.). All instances of plagiarism (whereby the work of other authors is presented as your own) and cheating will be handled in accordance with university policy and forwarded to the University Committee on Academic Misconduct.

Texts

The following texts *and* editions are required for this course:

Classics in the History of Political Thought, Volumes I and II. 2nd Edition. Dome Academic Publishers, 2008.

John Rawls, *Justice as Fairness: A Restatement.* Harvard University Press, 2001.

Brexit: the Uncivil War, Dir. Toby Haynes, 2019.

Please make sure to obtain the correct editions. We will be referring directly to the texts in class by page and line number, which can be done only if we are working with the same editions. You will need to bring the relevant texts to class both to follow the lecture and to use them during the quizzes.

Schedule of Classes, Readings, and Assignments

I. Political Theory: the Why and the How

Lecture 1

Introduction: The Problems of Politics

II. Public Morality and the State

Lecture 2

Aristotle, *Politics*, pp. 42-49; 87-97; 49-56 in CHPT I

Lecture 3

Aristotle, *Politics*, pp. 56-87 in CHPT I

Lecture 4

Niccolo Machiavelli, *The Prince*, pp. 100-131 in CHPT I

Lecture 5

Niccolo Machiavelli, *The Prince*, pp. 131-160 in CHPT I
Brexit: the Uncivil War, Dir. Toby Haynes, 2019.

Lecture 6

Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, pp. 184-206 in CHPT II

Lecture 7

Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, pp. 184-206 in CHPT II cont'd
Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, pp. 172-199 in CHPT I

III. Liberty and the Social Contract

Lecture 8

Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, pp. 199-241 in CHPT I

Lecture 9

Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, pp. 241-260 in CHPT I

Lecture 10

John Locke, *The Second Treatise of Government*, pp. 311-320; 331-348 in CHPT I

Lecture 11

John Locke, *The Second Treatise of Government*, pp. 320-331; 348-368 in CHPT I

Lecture 12

John Locke, *The Second Treatise of Government*, pp. 368-395 in CHPT I

Lecture 13

Rahul Sagar, "Against Moral Absolutism: Surveillance and Disclosure After Snowden," *Ethics and International Affairs* 29(2), 2015
<https://nyuad.nyu.edu/content/dam/nyuad/departments/faculty/rahul-sagar/documents/eia-snowden-sagar.pdf>

Lecture 14

James Madison, *Federalist Papers* pp. 224-244 in CHPT II

Lecture 15

James Madison, *Federalist Papers* pp. 208-218 in CHPT II

Lecture 16

John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*, pp. 296-337 in CHPT II

Lecture 17

John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*, pp. 337-367 in CHPT II

Henry Farrell and Bruce Schneier, "Democracy's Dilemma: How can democratic societies protect—and protect themselves from—the free flow of digital information?" *Boston Review*, May 15, 2019

<https://bostonreview.net/forum-henry-farrell-bruce-schneier-democracys-dilemma>

Riana Pfefferkorn, "Democracy's Dilemma: In the quest to protect democracy, we must be wary of weakening its strengths while leaving existing vulnerabilities unpatched." *Boston Review*, May 15, 2019

<https://bostonreview.net/forum/democracys-dilemma/riana-pfefferkorn-dont-put-anonymous-speech-on-the-chopping-block>

IV. Equality and Justice

Lecture 18

Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*, pp. 24-60 in CHPT II

Elizabeth Colbert, "The Psychology of Inequality" *New Yorker*, January 15, 2018

<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2018/01/15/the-psychology-of-inequality>

Lecture 19

Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*, pp. 60-91 in CHPT II

Karl Marx, "The Estranged Labor," to be distributed

Lecture 20

Karl Marx, "Critique of the Gotha Program," pp. 248-264 in CHPT II

Adolph Reed, "Marx, Race and Neoliberalism." *New Labor Forum* 22 (1), pp. 49-57.

<https://libcom.org/files/Marx,%20Race%20and%20Neoliberalism%20-%20Adolph%20Reed.pdf>

Lecture 21

John Rawls, *Justice as Fairness: A Re-statement*, Part 1, Sections 2-11

Lecture 22

John Rawls, *Justice as Fairness: A Re-statement*, Part 2, Sections 12-18; Part 3, Sections 23-26, 28, 30, 32

Lecture 23

John Rawls, *Justice as Fairness: A Re-statement*, Part 2, Sections 12-18; Part 3, Sections 23-26, 28, 30, 32 con'd

Elizabeth S. Anderson. "What Is the Point of Equality?" *Ethics* 109 (2): 287–337, 1999.

<https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/233897>

Lecture 24

Ta-Nehisi Coates, "The Case for Reparations" *The Atlantic*, June 2014.
<http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2014/06/the-case-for-reparations/361631/>

Glenn C. Loury, "The Bias Narrative v. the Development Narrative
On Different views of African-American Disadvantage" *City Journal*,
December 8, 2020.
<https://www.city-journal.org/bias-narrative-v-development-narrative>

Schedule of Writing Assignments

Quizzes:

(almost) every week in recitations

Papers:

Deadline to submit **the first paper**: October 11

Deadline to submit **the second paper**: December 13

Midterm:

Wednesday, October 20

Final Exam:

TBD

Note: there will be **no class** on October 11