

PLPT 101: Introduction to Political Theory
MW, (PHS) Rm., 203, Fall 2008, 11-11:50

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Teaching Assistants: Nadim Khoury, Shu-Shan Lee, Tom Loome

Purpose and Scope

This course introduces us to some of the most important sources of Western political thought and seeks to develop skills to critically assess these sources and the place they occupy in our imagination and practices. Some of the main ideas we will consider include the following: freedom and autonomy, the social contract, human nature, morality, political friendship, obligation and consent, sovereignty, and slavery and domination. We will also consider some larger historical questions such as the changing conceptions of individual identity, the importance of religion to political society, the possibility for moral truth, and the problem of inequality in society. Although this course will include some of the standard texts of political theory, it will also include literature and film.

Required Books: Materials marked by an asterisk (*) are available in the “Resources” section of Collab.

I STRONGLY ENCOURAGE YOU TO USE THE EDITIONS AND TRANSLATIONS IN THE BOOKSTORE

These books are also on 2 hour reserve at Clemons.

Sophocles, Antigone, trans. H. D. F Kitto (NY: Oxford)

Four Texts on Socrates, trans. Thomas West and Grace S. West (NY: Cornell Press)

Aristotle, The Politics, trans. Carnes Lord (IL: Chicago)

Locke, Two Treatises of Government and A Letter Concerning Toleration, ed. Ian Shapiro (CT: Yale)

Hobbes, Leviathan, ed. C. B. MacPherson (Penguin Books)

Rousseau, Social Contract and First and Second Discourses, ed. Susan Dunn (CT: Yale)

Du Bois, The Souls of Black Folk, ed. Henry Louis Gates & Terri Hume Oliver (NY: Norton)

Tocqueville, Democracy in America, eds. Harvey Mansfield and Delba Winthrop (IL: Chicago)

Danielle Allen, Talking to Strangers (IL: Chicago)

Readings in Collab

Abraham Lincoln, “The Perpetuation of Our Political Institutions”

Aristotle, Selections from Nicomachean Ethics

The Book of Job

Strongly Recommended (Any Edition)

William Strunk Jr. and E. B. White, The Elements of Style (MA: Allyn and Bacon, 1979)

Course Requirements and Standards

Writing:

Papers: There will be **3** papers of **5 pages**. The “Resources” section of Collab will contain instructions on writing a political theory paper. I will post the questions for each assignment at least two weeks before the deadline. Your section instructor will read your paper, write a critical evaluation of it, and record a grade. The point of the critical evaluation is to say what the paper's strengths and weaknesses are so that you can improve the quality of your work. The “Resources” section of Collab will also contain my policy on grading.

Extensions will only be granted on rare occasions and only with permission *in advance* from your section instructor or me (there is no guarantee that an extension will be approved). Late papers will be penalized **½ a letter grade per day**.

Exams: There will be a cumulative final exam in the normal lecture hall from **DATE AND TIME**. Please take note of the exam time when making your vacation plans. We cannot change the time of the final exam for any student except in the case of a medical emergency, and the University prohibits students from taking final exams early.

Participation/Attendance:

Section: **Attendance at sections is mandatory.** Active, thoughtful participation in class discussion is essential for success in this course. You will be expected to complete all of the reading before class, to come prepared to ask critical questions, and to listen and respond to the questions and comments of the TA and other students. Repeated lateness will count as an unexcused absence, and more than two unexcused absences will significantly lower your grade. You will not be penalized if you need to miss class for a religious observance or for travel with an athletic team, but you do need to notify your section instructor in advance.

While reading the assignments, keep asking yourself: “What are the concerns or problems to which the author responds?”, “What does the author mean by that?”, “Do the arguments logically cohere?”, “Are there contradictions in the argument that call into question its viability?”. (Do note that these are some of the same questions your instructor will be asking when reading your work.) When you find something in the readings that seems vulnerable to criticism, try to formulate the criticism precisely, but then try to imagine how the author might want to respond to your question or objection. Think about whether your criticism is internal to the argument—that is, directed at the way the author’s argument holds together—or whether your criticism is based on external considerations that were not considered, but which could have made a difference.

Lectures: The purpose of the lectures is to supplement, not substitute for, careful reading of the texts and discussion in section. **Lectures will only examine a few of the critical issues addressed in the reading, often connecting those issues to a larger story about the development of Western political thought.** Through close engagement with and discussion of the texts, sections will be an opportunity to reaffirm, extend, and/or problematize the larger story. Although it is not always possible to provide a forum for everyone to speak in a class this size, I will make every effort to create opportunities for you to participate throughout the semester. Do not be surprised if I ask you questions. The most important requirement of the course is that you read all assigned texts carefully and before class.

Grading: Every component of this class counts. Your instructors will take participation very seriously. I have provided my policy on grading and I will meet with the TAs to ensure that grading standards are uniform for all sections. The final grade will be determined as follows:

Papers:

Paper 1,	15%,
Paper 2,	20%,
Paper 3,	25%
Final Exam:	30%
Participation:	10%

8/27 Introduction

I. Critical Citizenship and the Nature of Politics

9/1 Sophocles, Antigone

9/3 Plato, Apology, pp. 63-97

9/8 Plato, Crito, pp. 99-114; Abraham Lincoln, “The Perpetuation of Our Political Institutions”*

9/10 Aristotle, selections from Nicomachean Ethics*; Politics, Bks. 1

9/15 Aristotle, Politics, Bks. 3-4

II. The Force of Uncertainty and the Necessity of Humility

9/17 The Book of Job*

III. Thinking About the Habits of Citizenship in Modern Times

9/22 Hobbes, Leviathan, Author’s Introduction, chaps. 1, 4-6

9/24 Hobbes, Leviathan, chaps. 10-16

- 9/29 Hobbes, Leviathan, chaps. 17-19, 21, 26, 29-30
- 10/1 Locke, Second Treatise, chaps. 1-6
- 10/6 Locke, Second Treatise, chaps. 7-11
- 10/8 Locke, Second Treatise, chaps. 12-15, 19
- 10/15 Rousseau, The Second Discourse, pp. 72-113 (Pay attention to endnotes which run from 139-48)
- 10/20 Rousseau, The Second Discourse, pp., 113-38 (Pay attention to endnotes which run from 139-48)

III. Race, Democracy, and the Problem of Sentiment

- 10/22 Du Bois, The Souls of Black Folk, chaps. 1-3; Booker T. Washington “Atlanta Exposition” Address, pp. 167-70 in Souls volume
- 10/27 Du Bois, Souls, chaps. 4-9
- 10/29 Du Bois, Souls, chaps. 10-14
- 11/3 “A Time to Kill” Film (**Arrive Early**)
Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics, Books VIII and IX*
- 11/5 “A Time to Kill” Film;
James Baldwin, “The White Man’s Guilt”*

START READING TOCQUEVILLE, SEE BELOW

- 11/10 **Lecture on “A Time to Kill,” Aristotle, and Baldwin**
- 11/12 Tocqueville, Democracy in America, pp. 3-15, 27-65 (roughly covers Author’s Introduction, Vol. 1, pt. 1, chaps. 2-5); Tocqueville, Democracy in America, pp. 180-192, 220-231 (roughly Vol. 1, pt. 2), 479-492, 496-503 (roughly Vol. 2, pt. 2)
- 11/17 Tocqueville, Democracy in America, pp. 302-348 (roughly, vol. 1, pt. 2)
- 11/19 Danielle Allen, Talking to Strangers, Part I
- 11/24 Allen, Talking to Strangers, Part II
- 12/1 Allen, Talking to Strangers, Part III, chaps. 9-10
SKIM: Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics, Books VIII and IX*

12/3

Wrap Up and Review