Introduction to Political Theory
POLS 2300
Fall 2018
Old Main 304
Tuesday and Thursday 7:30 am-8:45 am

Robert E. Ross       robert.ross@usu.edu
Scott Dresher (Grad TA)     scott.dresher@gmail.com
Kayla Whiteley (UTF)      kayla.mathews@aggiemail.usu.edu

328B Old Main
Office Hours: Tuesday and Thursday 12:00 pm-1:00 pm or by appointment

“All ideas, in which a whole process is promiscuously comprehended, elude definition; it is only that which has no history which can be defined.”
Friedrich Nietzsche

“A party of order or stability, and a party of progress or reform, are both necessary elements of a healthy state of political life.”

“The progressive principle is antagonistic to the sway of custom. The contest between these two principles, custom and progress, constitutes the chief interest of the history of mankind.”
John Stuart Mill

Course Synopsis
In *Federalist* No. 51, James Madison famously wrote, “But what is government itself, but the greatest of all reflections on human nature?” How often do we deeply consider this dynamic relationship? Do we think of how political actions influence, and are influenced by, our conception of human nature? Should politics aim to correct or merely contain the depravities in human nature? Hence, this course will ask questions we rarely pose in our daily political lives—does our regime foster a good or full human life and how do we design institutions to accomplish our political goals? Answering these questions requires us to grapple with defining the nature of a good regime and understanding the ends of human existence. These are perennial political questions that animate our contemporary society because all political action seeks to either conserve what is good or change what is bad to something better. How can we determine what is worth preserving or changing in society without a conception of what is good for the city and (or) the soul? And, how do we intelligently manage competing answers to these important questions? This course will provide an introduction to some of the key thinkers who, throughout the history of political thought, have grappled with these questions.

Required Texts
Niccolo Machiavelli, *The Prince*, translated by Harvey C. Mansfield (Chicago)
John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government* edited by C.B. Macpherson (Hackett)
Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality* translated by Donald A. Cross (Hackett)
Course Format
This course is primarily discussion based. I will lecture on some occasions to give necessary historical background, but every class will consist of a good deal of discussion. This means that you will have to read each text carefully and thoroughly. My expectation is that you will read actively—that is, you should read and take note of what intrigues you about the text, what you find puzzling or frustrating or downright wrong. Merely bringing a rudimentary understanding based on some Wikipedia summary or SparkNotes will not sufficiently prepare you to grapple with these difficult texts. In general, I would highly recommend avoiding secondary sources of interpretation. Do not assume that this is an easy course simply because it is an “introduction”.

As you read you may want to engage the author in three steps: first, examine the argument the author is putting forth. For instance, ask, what are the assumptions the author brings to the table? What evidence does the author use to support his claims? Second, assess the arguments. Is the author warranted in making this assumption? Is there a better way of looking at this problem than the author does? What kind of bias does the author possess and does this distort his thinking? Does the author correctly understand human nature? Third, apply these arguments to contemporary problems and issues in our liberal democracy. For example, do Socrates’ concerns about democracy or Rousseau’s apprehensions about property still hold true today? How do competing reflections on human nature inform our various approaches to understanding the nature and scope of our own government? Overall, you will want to be a charitable reader and avoid dismissing an author simply because you do not agree with his arguments or you think they are not possible.

Course Goals

This course aims to:
1. Learn fundamental principles, generalizations, or theories
   a. We will be engaging with authors who provide disparate approaches to understanding human nature and politics. It will be essential that you understand the authors’ theoretical framework and how their theories influence their understanding of politics.
2. Learning to apply course material (to improve thinking, problem solving, and decisions)
   a. The texts we will be reading are really, really old (especially Plato). It may not be readily apparent how reading Plato can inform contemporary political debate. Each author provides a unique way of thinking about enduring political questions and can provide different perspectives or ways to address political problems.
3. Learning to analyze and critically evaluate ideas, arguments, and points of view
   a. Guaranteed, you will deeply disagree with at least one of the assigned authors. Rather than simply dismissing their writing as irrelevant or misguided, we will endeavor to engage with them in dialogue through charitable readings. You cannot critically analyze a text without first understanding the argument in its entirety. In turn, this will help you engage more meaningfully with others with whom you disagree.
Assignments and Grading

Current Events (20 Points)

By learning about current events, such as questions of public policy, you will practice applying course materials outside of their original context. This will also help in thinking critically about newspapers as a source of information. Before the class session on the date you are individually assigned to, you will post a link to an article in a major newspaper or news magazine in the Current Events discussion board in Canvas. The article must relate to a general discussion theme you identify in the reading, and you should be able to connect it to the text currently being discussed. With your link, you will need to include a few sentences about how the article relates to the reading and one or two discussion questions to help further engage with the article and the assigned reading. We may use your article and discussion in class, and you may be asked to help lead a discussion based on your posted questions.

Your current events post will be graded according to the following criteria:

• The article must come from a major news outlet.
• The link must be posted to Canvas before the start of the class period on the assigned due date.
• The article must address a discussion theme taken from the reading.
• Your post must explain how the article relates to the course readings and discussion on the theme and include one or two questions to help lead class discussion.

Scholarly Article Analysis (50 Points)

Finding and reading a scholarly article on one of our primary texts will also be an important way you will analyze and critically evaluate others’ ideas, arguments, and points of view. For the assignment, you will locate a peer-reviewed, scholarly article and write a 1,000-1,250 word essay that summarizes the article’s key points and evaluates the author’s arguments in terms of your reading of the primary text. You will need to find an article by April 2nd and submit it on Canvas to ensure you have chosen an appropriate article, and so we can provide any additional research assistance. The due date for this paper is April 16th. You will need to submit your paper to the Political Science office (320 Old Main) by 4:30 pm. There will be a box with my name and our course number. I do not accept email submissions and your paper will be penalized 5 points for every day it is late.

Your analysis of a scholarly article will be based on the following criteria:

Article Characteristics

• The article must be (or include) a critical reading of the primary text of your choosing.
• The article must come from a reputable, peer-reviewed journal.
• The article must be no more than 15 years old.

Paper Characteristics

• Your paper must show thoughtful engagement with these types questions:
Quizzes (50 points)

There will be 10 random quizzes throughout the semester covering the reading material assigned for that day. The quizzes will consist of multiple choice and true/false questions intended to reward those who carefully completed the assigned readings. Each quiz will be worth 5 points, and I will drop your lowest quiz score (including zeros) and replace it with your highest. **There will be no opportunity to make up a missed quiz except for a university excused absence with arrangements made prior to your absence.**

Exams (200 points total)

There will be two exams (50 points each) and a cumulative final (100 points) throughout the semester. The exams will consist of both multiple choice questions and short answer-identifications of key concepts or arguments. The final exam will be comprehensive. I recommend forming study groups to prepare for exams.

**Grading Scale**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>100-94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>93-90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>89-87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>86-84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B-</td>
<td>83-80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C+</td>
<td>79-77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>76-74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C-</td>
<td>73-70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D+</td>
<td>69-67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>66-64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D-</td>
<td>63-60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>59-0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Tentative Reading Schedule**

**Week 1**

01/08: Introduction to course
01/10: *The Republic*, Book I, 327a-336a
Week 2: The Question of the Justice
01/15: *The Republic*, Book I, 336b-354c
01/17: No Class

Week 3: The Question of Justice and the Good Life
01/22: *The Republic*, Book II, 357a-372b
01/24: *The Republic*, Book II, 372c-383c

Week 4: The City in Speech
01/29: *The Republic*, Book III, 386a-398c
01/31: *The Republic*, Book III, 398c-417b

Week 5: Happiness and the Virtues
02/05: *The Republic*, Book IV, 419a-435d
02/07: *The Republic*, Book IV, 435e-445e

Week 6: The “Waves”
02/12: *The Republic*, Book V, 449a-471e
02/14: *The Republic*, Book V, 472a-480a

Week 7: Images and Philosophic Education
02/19: *The Republic*, Book VI, 487e-489a; 489b-497a
02/21: *The Republic*, Book VII, 514a-521c

Week 8
02/28: EXAM 1: In Class

Week 9: (Early) Modern Political Thought
03/05: *The Prince*, pg. 3-33 (Dedicatory Letter-VII)
03/07: *The Prince*, pg. 34-38; 61-68; 71-82 (VIII, XV-XVII, XIX)

Week 10: Spring Break
03/12: No Class
03/14: No Class

Week 11: The Turn to the State of Nature
03/19: *The Prince*, pg. 83-106 (XIX-XXVI)
03/21: Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, cpt. 13 (to be distributed on Canvas)

Week 12: The State of Nature
03/26: *Second Treatise* pg. 7-16 (cpt. I-III)
03/28: *Second Treatise* pg. 18-30 (cpt. V)
Week 13: Institutional Design
04/02: Second Treatise pg. 65-88 (cpt. IX-XIV)
*Article for scholarly analysis due. Upload to canvas by 5:00pm
04/04: EXAM 2: In Class

Week 14: The Critique of the Modern Project
04/09: Discourse pg. 16-29 (part one)
04/11: Discourse pp. 29-44 (part one)

Week 15: The Critique of the Social Contract
04/16: Discourse pp. 44-55 (part two)
*Scholarly analysis assignment due in the Political Science Office (Old Main 320) by 4:30 PM
04/18: Discourse pp. 55-71 (part two)

Week 16
04/23: Review and Course Wrap-Up

FINAL EXAM: TUESDAY, April 30th, 7:30-9:20 AM IN OUR REGULAR CLASSROOM