POL 10a: Introduction to Political Theory
Spring 2017
Room: Golding 101
T, Th 2:00 – 3:20 PM

Professor Jeffrey Lenowitz
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Olin-Sang 206
Office Hours: Thursday, 3:30 – 5 [please schedule an appointment ahead of time]

Course Description:

This course is designed as an introduction to the field of political theory, which focuses on the concepts, principles, and values used to explain and evaluate political life. Rather than be comprehensive, this course seeks to give students a sense of what this particular approach to the study of politics has to offer. As such, we will concentrate on four central themes in both historical and contemporary political thought:

1) Why do we need political authority? What reasons do we have for wanting to live under the control of a centralized authority that often compels us to do things against our will?

2) Can political authority ever be legitimate, such that it rightfully demands our compliance? In other words, under what circumstances, if any, do we have a duty to obey our government?

3) Assuming that we need or cannot avoid some sort of political authority, who should it be? Who should rule us? Who or what should wield the coercive forces of government?

4) Finally, what makes a political authority and the society that it helps create just? How should we conceptualize justice as it applies to government? For the most part, this means focusing on distributive justice, meaning the normative criteria appropriate for evaluating how political authority distribute fundamental goods.

We will approach these and subsidiary questions from two prominent perspectives in political theory. The first, associated with the history of ideas, involves looking at how different political concepts and ideas evolved over time as authors throughout history reflected on similar questions and engaged in dialogue with one another. The second perspective is more analytical and philosophical, and involves joining these and more contemporary authors in carrying out a normative and interpretative analysis of the issues.

Objectives
The objectives of this course are threefold. First is for students to gain general competence in the several areas of political theory described above. This will provide a foundation for further work in political theory and political science more generally. The second objective is for students to start deploying and evaluating the use of core political concepts with greater care and sophistication, and to start questioning their own political assumptions. By focusing on the foundations for political authority—the reasons governments have power, how they ought to behave, and what citizens owe to them—students will be able to critically evaluate their own political world and see whether their normative beliefs match up with their policy preferences and political actions. The third and final objective is for students to continue developing their critical thinking skills, which will enable them to better comprehend complex texts, evaluate claims, and formulate their own arguments.

**Discussion Sections**

Beginning in the second week of class, you will have to attend an additional weekly 50-minute discussion section led by one of the Teaching Fellows. These sections provide you an opportunity to discuss the material and ask questions in a small-group setting. You are expected to complete the assigned readings prior to the section, and to be ready to engage in conversation about them. Instructions for signing up to discussion sections will be distributed after the first meeting. Note that your grade for participation will depend upon your presence in the classroom, your active presentation, and a demonstration that you have read and prepared.

**Requirements and Grading:**

Students are expected to complete all assigned readings in accordance with the class schedule and to be prepared to discuss them in depth. This course combines lectures with vigorous discussion, both in the main sessions and in the discussion sessions. None of this will be useful unless all material is read before class. These readings are not easy, and some might require rereading, so please give yourself ample time.

*Note that this is Four-Credit Course with three hours of class-time per week. This means that success is based on the expectation that students will spend a minimum of 9 hours of study time per week in preparation for class (readings, papers, exam preparation, etc.).*

In addition, attendance to both lecture and discussion sections is mandatory unless accompanied by a legitimate explanation given ahead of time. Attendance will be taken in discussion section regularly, and will occasionally be taken in the lecture as well.

The breakdown of the grading is as follows:

- **Participation, 15%**. This will include classroom involvement and attendance in both discussion section and lectures.
- **Reading Responses, 15%**: These are short one paragraph or half-page responses to a prompt given on Tuesday, to be due on Thursday. I will assign these irregularly, i.e. you will not have to write a response every week. Additionally, I will only collect three of these to be graded and collection will be unannounced. These responses will be graded on a 4-point scale.

- **1 paper (7-9 pages), 20%**: This paper will be due on April 4, and students will have the option to respond to one of several prompts. The paper will be graded based on grammar, writing style, argumentative force, and knowledge of material.

- **Mid-term, 20%**: This will be take-home exam, to be due on February 28. It will consist of a set of short answer questions.

- **Final exam, 30%**: This will be an in-class final exam consisting of passage identification, short answers, and a long essay. It will take place at the assigned time for our final exam.

* Please note that if you are a student with a documented disability on record at Brandeis University and wish to have a reasonable accommodation made for you in this class, please see me immediately.

**Academic Integrity:**

All students are expected to be familiar with and to follow the University’s policies on academic integrity (see [http://www.brandeis.edu/studentlife/sdc/ai](http://www.brandeis.edu/studentlife/sdc/ai)). Faculty may refer any suspected instances of alleged dishonesty to the Office of Student Development and Conduct. Instances of academic dishonesty may result in sanctions including but not limited to, failing grades being issued, educational programs, and other consequences.

**Technology Policy:**

No phones or computers should be visible during the class. Checking either of them will result in a reduced participation grade. However, if there are exceptional circumstances that require you to use a computer, come talk to me and we can see about the possibility of an exception.

**Late Assignment Policy:**

Late assignments, defined as any assignment turned in more than 15 minutes after the deadline without prior notification, will be downgraded one grade step (i.e. a B+ would automatically become a B). After this, a further grade step will be lost for every day that an assignment is late. For example, a B paper due on Friday but handed in on Monday will receive a C-. Papers submitted more than four days after the due date will not be accepted.

**Texts Available for Purchase:**
Many readings for the course will mainly be drawn from the assigned texts below, all of which are available at the bookstore. For the texts originally written in English you are more than welcome to seek alternative editions, as well as finding them online. I chose the ones below because I believe them to contain the best supplementary materials and best version of the text. For translated texts, use the editions I assign. Translations vary widely in quality and content, making it hard to use something different. Additional readings will be posted in Latte.


**Class Schedule**

1. **Introduction** (Tuesday, January 17)

   **Part I: Why do we need government?**

2. **Aristotle & the Political Animal** (Thursday, January 19)

   - Aquinas. *Summa theologiae*. Ia 96 articulus 4
3. Hobbes & the State of Nature I (Tuesday, January 24)
     
     *This is a long one. Start early.*

4. Hobbes & the State of Nature II (Thursday, January 26)

5. Final Hobbes; Locke & the State of Nature I (Tuesday, January 31)

6. Locke & the State of Nature II (Thursday, February 2)

7. Locke Round-up & Rousseau (Tuesday, February 7)
   - Jean-Jacques Rousseau. *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*, pp 55 and 57 from Part I, and all of Part II.
     
     [Will skip if Locke/Hobbes discussion runs long.]

     Part II: Do we have a duty to Obey? Can government be justified?

8. The Problem of Political Obligation: Antigone & Socrates’ Trial (Thursday, February 9)
   - Plato. *Crito*.
   - Plato. *Apology*

9. Associative Accounts (Tuesday, February 14)
   - Holy Bible. *Romans* 13.1-6
   - Edmund Burke. “An Appeal from the Old to the New Whigs (August 1791).” Selection
   - Martin Luther King Jr. “Letter from a Birmingham Jail.”

10. Transactional Accounts: Consent (Thursday, February 16)
- Locke. *Two Treatises of Government*. Second Treatise, chapter 8
- David Hume. “Of the Original Contract.”

11. **Transactional Accounts: Fair Play** (Tuesday, February 28)


MIDTERM DUE

12. **Natural Duties Accounts: Utilitarianism** (Thursday, March 2)


13. **Philosophical Anarchism** (Tuesday, March 7)

CANCELLED; RESCHEDULE FOR MARCH 6


**Part III: Who Should Rule? (Us?)**

14. **Aristotle: Ideal and Practical Regimes** (Thursday, March 9)

- Aristotle. *Politics*, Book VI, chapter 1-5

15. **Guardianship: For & Against** (Tuesday, March 14)

- Plato. *The Republic*. Selections

16. **Democracy, Generally** (Thursday, March 16)

17. Deliberative Democracy & Its Critics (Tuesday, March 21)


18. Representative Democracy (Thursday, March 23)

- John Stuart Mill. Considerations on Representative Government. Chapter 3 and 6
- James Madison. Federalist 10

19. Minimalist Democracy (Tuesday, March 28)


**Part IV: What Makes a Government Just?**

20. Introduction to Justice; Aristotle (Thursday, March 30)

- Aristotle. Nicomachean Ethics. Book V.

21. Utilitarianism (Tuesday, April 4)

- JS Mill. Utilitarianism. Chapter I, II, V.

**PAPER DUE**

***Start Reading Rawls

22. Rawls: Method & Central Argument (Thursday, April 6)


23. Rawls: First & Second Principle (Thursday, April 20)

24. Rawls: Round-up & Critics (Tuesday, April 25)

- John Rawls. *Justice as Fairness: A Restatement*. Figure 1 and §34-40.

25. Libertarianism (Thursday, April 27)


26. Class Conclusion (Tuesday, May 2)

FINAL EXAM TBD