

POL270 Western Political Philosophy

Course website: <http://ball.tcnj.edu/pol270/>

Selected political questions that have intrigued Western society from time immemorial and theoretical solutions presented by some of the great political philosophers from classical Greece to the modern era.

Objectives:

In POL270 we will be studying some of the classics of Western political philosophy. This course focused heavily on the reading of primary sources, combining lecture, class discussions, and small group work. It primarily serves the following objectives of the Political Science program:

- To have students appreciate the meaning and historical evolution of the core values in Western political thought such as justice, equality, freedom, human rights, and due process; understand competing theoretical perspectives; and develop their own belief systems.
- To develop in students the ability to locate themselves within an historical, social, and cultural setting; to grasp politics in a conceptual manner; and to transfer that conceptual understanding to other situations.
- To mentor students in developing advanced skills in critical thinking so that they may read analytically, understand complex relationships and concepts, identify underlying assumptions, and “dissect” a scholarly text.
- To refine the communications skills of students so that they can present oral and written arguments that are cogent, compelling, and well-substantiated.

Also, as a Liberal Learning Worldviews and Ways of Knowing course, POL270 embodies Human Inquiry objectives, specifically:

- Students will be able to think critically about how human beings are able to gain knowledge beyond the limits of their own personal experiences.
- Students will be able to identify and explain how theories are challenged and defended in different areas of human inquiry.
- Students should be able to formulate a point of view on the intersection of science, religion, politics, and other forms of culture.
- Students should develop imaginative and conceptual skills needed to compare and evaluate alternative worldviews.

Instructor:

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Office hours: TF 10:30-12
and by appointment

Books:

Morgan, Michael L. (ed.). 2001 *Classics of Moral and Political Theory*. Indianapolis: Hackett.

Dante's *Inferno*. Any edition of the translation by John Ciardi.

Additional material distributed online

Required work:

The course grade will be comprised of the following.

midterm exam	20%
final exam	30%
outlines	15%
social contract exercise	10%
utopia essay	15%
participation & attendance	10%

Exams will be in essay format. Details on the assignments follow. The final will be comprehensive. The course will require frequent access to the web.

Grading:

The distribution of grades varies tremendously from class to class. Given our relatively small class sizes, no true "grading on the curve" is possible. Yet within general guidelines, grading expectations are adjusted to the cumulative experience of teaching the subject at TCNJ, and the specific set of performances on a particular assignment/exam. Some general guidelines for overall course grades follow for you to keep in mind:

A, A- are marks of excellence, not averageness. To earn a grade in the one of these grades a student has to complete all assignments on time and attend and participate actively in all, or virtually all, class sessions. In addition, a student has to rise above these basic expectations on each assignment, providing evidence of great attention to detail, a passion for learning, and considerable time invested outside of class. A grade of "A" is truly a special mark, indicating that the student's performance is among the best of those who have taken the course.

B+, B, B- are indications of good but not outstanding work. To earn a grade in the B range a student has to complete all assignments satisfactorily and on time, and attend and participate in most class sessions. A grade of B+ indicates a student has occasionally distinguished themselves on graded components in the class, but not consistently enough to move into the A range.

C+ through F are indications of substantial shortcomings in one or more major components of the course. Simply showing up and turning in largely complete assignments is C-level work. Less than that (i.e. failing to turn in major assignments and not attending regularly) endangers a passing grade.

Other Policies:

Students are expected to do the reading and study assignments prior to the class period in which they are discussed. I will regularly call upon individual students to report on the reading assignment to the rest of the class. The participation grade will be based on all class discussion.

All work submitted for a grade in this class must be the student's own work and must be done exclusively for this class.

Assignments are due at the beginning of class on the due dates listed below. Late work will lose 10 percent of its grade for every day that it is late. The only exceptions will be for extreme, documented cases in which the student has made a serious attempt to contact me beforehand. Computer/disk/printer failure is not a valid excuse for late work--back up your files often.

Please be careful to avoid plagiarism. Any case of academic dishonesty will be dealt with in accordance with College regulations.

We will occasionally use the extra class period (3:30-4:00 TF) assigned to this section for small group meetings. Do not schedule other activities during this time.

Reading Assignments and Due Dates:

Week	Dates	Topics/Reading Assignments/Transcripts	Due
1	1/20	Course introduction	
2	1/24 1/27	Plato's <i>Republic</i> , Stefanus pages 327-420.	
3	1/31 2/03	Plato's <i>Republic</i> , Stefanus pages 421-520	
4	2/07 2/10	Plato's <i>Republic</i> , Stefanus pages 521-621 Dante's <i>Inferno</i> , complete	Utopia topics due 2/07 Plato outline due 2/10
5	2/14 2/17	Machiavelli's <i>The Prince</i> , complete	
6	2/21 2/24	Bacon's <i>Great Instauration</i>	
7	2/28 3/03	Bacon's <i>New Atlantis</i> Social Contract Lab	
8	3/07 3/10	Midterm Exam Hobbes' <i>Leviathan</i> , Chapters 13-19	Midterm exam 3/07 Social contract part 1 due

			3/10
9	3/14 3/17	No class, spring break	Social contract online discussion opens 3/14
10	3/21 3/24	Hobbes, Chapters 20-30	
11	3/28 3/31	Locke's <i>Second Treatise on Government</i> , complete	
12	4/04 4/07	Rousseau's <i>On the Social Contract</i> , pages 771-793, 813-817 Owen's <i>A New View of Society</i> , complete	Social contract online discussion closes 4/07
13	4/11 4/14	Mill's <i>On Liberty</i> , complete	Final contracts due: 4/14
14	4/18 4/21	Marx's <i>Communist Manifesto</i> , complete	
15	4/25 4/28	Discussion of social contract assign., Class review	Utopia essay due 4/25

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Outline assignment

The outlines should be in sentence form, typed, *single spaced*, with 1 inch margins and a font of 10 characters per inch or more. Follow the format given in the example below. You are required to do an outline for Plato and ONE from Machiavelli, Hobbes, Locke, or Mill. All outlines are due the class period after we finish the reading.

Below is an example of a topic outline. Note the use of letters and numerals for major and supporting points. Note also the use of indentation to indicate the structure of the outline. Several rules of outlining that you should observe:

- Every point that is supported by sub-points needs to have at least two. In other words you can't have a IA without a IB. If you find you have just one sub-point, collapse it into the major point.
- You should not have more than about 6 sub-points at any level. If you do, you need to organize these more hierarchically.
- You complete sentences (or nearly so) in all of your outline levels. Do not use a single word or phrases. I may do this occasionally in class but that's just for clarity on the presentation system. Written outlines should have complete sentences.

Example outline:

- I. The first goal of this exercise is to enhance your logical thinking skills through careful analysis of the texts.
 - A. The works we are reading are highly logical but that logic is not always obvious.
 1. An excellent example is Plato's Republic.
 - a. The Republic is presented as a literary work, and a conversational one at that.
 - b. The logic of the Republic is almost exclusively based on analogy, and unfamiliar reasoning style.
 - c. However Plato's argument is carefully constructed, with a structure that can be made clear.
 2. A second example, using a very different approach to reasoning, is provided by *The Prince*.
 - B. While the texts are logical, they are not necessary correct--their logical occasionally breaks down.
 - C. Thus by requiring you to reconstruct their arguments in logical outline form, you will have to think deeply about the structure of the arguments we are reading and discussing
- II. The second goal of this exercise is to build your ability to present arguments logically.

POL270**Social Contract Assignment**

The social contract assignment will take place in several parts. Details of the contract will be provided as we begin the work (there is a reason I am not providing them at the beginning of the semester). Dues dates are in the syllabus. The social contract assignment will require small group work, individual thought and writing, and participation in an online discussion. One component of your final grade will be assigned by other members of your group, as indicated below.

The break-down of the grading for the contract exercise is as follows:

individual contribution to initial contract scenario:	2%
individual contribution to online discussion and final component:	5%
grade assigned to individual by other members of their group:	3%
total:	10%

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Utopia Essay Assignment

Your essay should be an original work of 9 typed, double spaced pages with 1 inch margins and a font of 12 characters per inch.

Your assignment is to create a political utopia. You should describe your utopia in such a fashion as to answer the questions below--your grade will mostly be based on your answers. Where appropriate, refer to the authors we are studying this semester. If you cite a published source be sure to attribute it. Include a bibliography of any sources you cite at the end of your essay. This is not a research paper. Rather the emphasis is on critical thinking, creativity, clarity, and consistency in interpreting the "enduring questions" we are studying this semester.

What is the key political issue/problem your utopia is designed to draw our attention to or to solve?

How does it do this?

How would your utopia come about?

What are the primary political institutions of your utopian society?

What are the major concepts in western political philosophy that underlie your utopia?

How is political power allocated in your utopia?

What is the relationship between political institutions and other social features (e.g. the economy, the family, the educational system, cultural traditions, etc)?

What are the primary moral values found in the politics of your utopian society?

In what ways is politics important in your society?

I would like to encourage a small group of students in the class (4-8) to undertake an alternative assignment instead of the utopia essay. The goals of the assignment are the same but the modality is different. Instead of creating a fictional utopia, the alternate assignment will involve becoming a participant-observer researching a virtual utopia inside the online simulation Second Life (<http://www.secondlife.com>).

This is an experimental project designed as a prototype to a more extended project for a future class. The individual workload for the alternate will be approximately the same as for the utopia essay however the alternate assignment will require students with the initiative to go exploring on their own.

The core of the alternate assignment is to immerse your self in one of the communities created in Second Life and study its “constitution,” in the broadest sense of the word. You will report your findings in a 6 page paper and a brief presentation to the class. The reports will also be posted on the web for residents of Second Life. The topics studied will be similar to those for the traditional assignment.

We will work out some of the details as we go but here are some key characteristics/requirements to undertake the alternate assignment:

- You must be able to run the Second Life client from your own computer (or one you have reliable access to). It will not be available on campus supported computers.
- You will need to get your own (free) account in Second Life and need to become comfortable with the interface to Second Life.
- You need to realize that you will encounter the full range of human fantasy in Second Life.
- You will need to be a good citizen in Second Life generally and in you chosen community in particular.
- You should plan to work in pairs.
- You should expect to meet with me during the extended class period approximately 3 times during the semester.
- This should be a fascinating and fun experience but it will require personal initiative and independence above the traditional assignment.

If you want to complete the alternative assignment you need to meet me “inworld” by 01/31 and indicate your interest in this assignment and a potential community to study on your utopia topics sheet due 02/07.

I can be found in Second Life as Spengler Roo.