

POLS 3322 - 600: Early Modern Political Theory
Texas A&M University – San Antonio
Spring 2025

Time: Asynchronous
Location: OLC

Instructor:
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Is political freedom about doing what you want, sharing power, or actively participating in political life? Is freedom an inherently individual practice or a necessarily collective one? Is it a personal or public matter? What secures freedom and what erodes it? What is the relationship of political freedom to power, equality, community, and identity? What government is and how it is practiced relies on a whole host of assumptions, some of which must be clearly agreed upon at the outset. For instance, how groups will organize themselves – will they have representatives or not? How will those representatives be elected? How will they decide policy? How will they enforce it? etc. – requires consent to legitimate governing bodies. Answers to such questions as “What is justice? (Or freedom? Or equality?)” “Who is a good citizen and why?” “What is a good state?” and “What should my obligations be?” remain under continual debate, even as they paradoxically determine much of the world we live in and share with others. This course is an introduction to early modern political theory and the field of study that helps us develop working answers to those more contentious questions surrounding the ways in which we live our political and social lives.

Course Meetings:

As this is an asynchronous course, there will be no mandatory scheduled meeting times. **THIS COURSE WILL BE A SELF-PACED PROGRAM.** This means that you will be given assignments at the beginning of the week that you complete on your own schedule before the due dates at the end of the week. I highly encourage the use of my weekly office hours if you are interested in a Q&A or a general discussion of the weekly topics and/or assignments.

Virtual Office Hours:

Time: W/Th 11:00 am — 12:00 pm or by appointment.

[Schedule Office Hours meeting](#)

I will be holding office hours via Microsoft Teams every Wednesday (10:30 am to 12:00 pm) and Thursday (11:00 am to 12:00 pm). You are highly encouraged to make use of my office hours throughout the semester to discuss any ideas you have – big or small – pertaining to this course or your general course of study. If you cannot make the designated time, please do not hesitate to email me to set up an appointment. Click the link above to schedule a meeting.

Student Learning Objectives

After completing POLS 3322 students will be able to do the following:

- Demonstrate the ability to read and evaluate the texts we have read and the kinds of arguments encountered during the course.
- Articulate contrasting points of view on major political issues.

- Demonstrate a comprehension of political theory as a field of study and major themes in modern political theory
- Be able to effectively express your views on political inquiry in writing.
- Describe and evaluate the impact of government and social institutions on the lives of individuals and society.

Grading

Your grade for this course will be based on the following: Writing Assignments (30%), Self-Assessment Assignments (10%), Critical Reflection Assignments (30%), Midterm Paper (15%), and Term Paper (15%). Submissions with vague and generic language that omit the specific issues/questions raised in the assignment prompt will get a maximum grade of 49%. To receive credit for the course, your participation must be made and your work submitted by the stated deadlines: late work will be accepted, with 5% being taken off for each day passed the assignment deadline. No assignments will be accepted more than one week late.

Grade breakdown:

- 30% Writing Assignments
- 10% Self-Assessment Assignments
- 30% Critical Reflection Assignments
- 15% Midterm Paper
- 15% Term Paper

Course Requirements

- **BlackBoard:** Each student will be expected to sign onto Blackboard regularly (I define this as at least once every other day). It is the student's responsibility to make sure they have regular access to a computer that can access the Internet (see me if you need assistance with this). I will use Blackboard for official class announcements so check your Blackboard regularly.
- **Readings:** All required readings for each class period must be completed in their entirety. Details and nuance matter in political thought, and the details are in the text.
- **Writing Assignments:** Posted on BlackBoard and due no later than 11:59 pm on the posted deadline. Writing assignments should be double-spaced, 12-point Times New Roman font, 1-inch margins, and no less than 750 words in length to be considered for full credit. Responses for Writing Assignments should address each topic/item in the assignment prompt, labeled by number and in order (e.g. #1, #2, etc.). Writing Assignments will be graded in accordance with the rubric posted on BlackBoard.
- **Self-Assessment Assignments:** Following each Writing Assignment, you will have a Self-Assessment Assignment to review your work. This is an opportunity to develop your writing and communication skills, and to recognize your strengths and areas for improvement. See the Self-Assessment Guidelines for detailed instructions.
- **Critical Reflection Assignments:** Critical Reflection assignments are posted at the beginning of the week and due in class on the date assigned in the syllabus. Guidelines for Critical Reflection submissions can be found in the "Course Content" folder in BlackBoard.
- **Midterm Paper** (5 pages, double spaced): Midterm paper assignment will be issued

approximately two weeks before the due date. The assignment will be a reflection and critical engagement essay, responding to questions raised by texts we have read to date.

- **Term Paper** (7 pages, double spaced): Term paper assignment will be issued approximately two weeks before the due date. The assignment will be a reflection and critical engagement piece, responding to questions raised by texts we have read after the midterm.

Course Materials

Buy your books **early** in the semester. Students with the use of a credit/debit card can also obtain course material at on-line merchants (e.g. amazon.com, bn.com, half.com, powells.com, abe.com) or from the student bookstore. I suggest buying used, if available, for a lower priced text. Alternate editions/versions/formats are permissible for this course. *Email me if you have any questions.*

Required Books:

Political Thought

Edited by Michael Rosen and Jonathan Wolff

Oxford University Press

ISBN: 9780192892782

ISBN-13: 978-0192892782

Course Schedule and Readings

Week 1 (January 21 – 26): Course introduction and overview

- Reading assignment: Syllabus. Watch *Why Study Political Philosophy?* clip (located in Course Materials).
- Review Self-Assessment Guidelines, Critical Reflection Guidelines, and Writing Assignment grading rubric

Week 2 (January 27 – February 2): Authorship and Ownership

- Reading Assignment: Foucault, *What is an Author* (handout located in *Course Materials*). Barthes, *Death of the Author* (handout).
- Critical Reflection Assignment #1 due Sunday, Feb 2nd

Week 3 (February 3 – 9): Human Nature

- Reading Assignment: *Political Thought*, “Introduction,” *Political Thought*, Section I Introduction, pp. 11-17, 20-22, 37-43.
- Writing Assignment #1 due Sunday, February 9th via BlackBoard

Week 4 (February 10 – 16): Justification of the State

- Reading Assignment: *Political Thought*, pp. 52-54, 56-65.
- Self-Assessment #1 due Sunday, Feb 16th

Week 5 (February 17 – 23): The Role of Obedience

- Reading Assignment: *Political Thought*, pp. 66-70, 78-88.
- Critical Reflection Assignment #2 due Sunday, Feb 23rd

Week 6 (February 24 – March 2): The Democratic Ideal

- Reading Assignment: *Political Thought*, pp. 89-90, 96-102, 107-110, 115-116.
- Writing Assignment #2 due Sunday, Mar 2nd

Week 7 (March 3 – 9): Liberty and Rights

- Reading Assignment: *Political Thought*, pp. 119-121, 124-127, 133, 142-144, 156-159, 172-175.
- Self-Assessment 2 due Sunday, Mar 9th

Week 8 (March 10 – 16): NO CLASSES: SPRING BREAK

- No assignments due

Week 9 (March 17 – 23): Private Property and Distributive Justice

- Reading assignment: *Political Thought*, pp. 187-194, 202-206, 229-232.
- Work on Midterm Paper.

Week 10 (March 24 – 30): Midterm Paper

- Reading Assignment: n/a
- Midterm Paper due Sunday, March 30th

Week 11 (March 31 – April 6): Justice

- Reading Assignment: *Political Thought*, pp. 256-269.
- Critical Reflection Assignment #3 due Sunday, Apr 6th

Week 12 (April 7 – 13): Minority Rights

- Reading Assignment: *Political Thought*, Sections VI.c. – VI.e.
- Writing Assignment #3 due Sunday, Apr 13th

Week 13 (April 14 – 20): Conservatism

- Reading Assignment: *Political Thought*, pp. 319-334.
- Self-Assessment #3 due Sunday, Apr 20th

Week 14 (April 21 – 27): Communitarianism and Socialism

- Reading Assignment: *Political Thought*, pp. 335-358.
- Critical Reflection Assignment #4 due Sunday, Apr 27th

Week 15 (April 28 – May 4): Progress and Civilization

- Reading Assignment: *Political Thought*, Section VIII
- Work on Final Paper

Week 16 (May 5 – 13): Finals Week

- No assignments this week.
- Work on Final Paper.

FINAL PAPER DUE NO LATER THAN MAY 9th @ 11:59 P