

POLS 3322-600: Early Modern Political Theory
Texas A&M University – San Antonio
Spring 2026

Time: Asynchronous
Location: OLC

Instructor:
Thomas Beaumont, PhD
CAB 351-B
tbeaumont@tamus.edu

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: Tue/Thu 11:00 am — 12:15 pm or by appointment.

[Schedule Office Hours meeting](#)

I will be holding office hours via Microsoft Teams every Tuesday and Thursday from 11 am to 12:15 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, email me to set up an appointment that works with your schedule. Click the link above to schedule a meeting.

Class Resources

- [GroupMe](#): Everyone in the class is welcome to join the GroupMe chat for informal discussion, asking questions, and/or general ranting about the course. I will be in the chat to answer any questions that come up about course materials or assignments. This is a great place to ‘think out loud’ and get feedback. This has been a great resource, and I

highly encourage everyone to join.

Student Learning Objectives

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

- analyze and evaluate foundational texts in modern political theory, identify central arguments and underlying assumptions, and assess their relevance to contemporary political and ethical issues (Critical Thinking).
- effectively communicate complex interpretations of modern political theory in clear, well-organized writing that uses appropriate academic conventions and textual evidence from primary sources (Effective Communication).
- articulate how political theories relate to their own beliefs, ethical frameworks, and decision-making processes as a member of a political community (Personal Responsibility).
- explain how modern political thinkers understood justice, power, and civic engagement, and assess how those ideas can inform responsible participation in modern democratic societies (Social Responsibility).

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%. No late submissions will be accepted for the Midterm or Final Papers; late work will be accepted for all other assignments for 48 hours after original deadline, with 30% being taken off for the first day and 40% for the second. No assignments will be accepted more than 48 hours late.

Grade breakdown:

30% Writing Assignments
10% Self-Assessments
10% Peer-Assessments
30% Critical Reflections
10% Midterm Paper
10% 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-Assessments:** Following some Writing Assignments, you will conduct a Self-Assessment review of 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.
- **Peer-Assessments:** Following some Writing Assignments, you will conduct a peer assessment of your classmates' work. The peer-assessment process is an opportunity to provide feedback to classmates on their written communication by assisting them in identifying writing strengths as well as areas for development. See the Peer-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 19 – 25): Course introduction and overview

- Read the syllabus thoroughly and familiarize yourself with the course in BlackBoard.
- Review Self-Assessment Guidelines, Critical Reflection Guidelines, and Writing Assignment grading rubric.
- Watch *Why Study Political Philosophy?* clip (located in Course Content folder).

Week 2 (Jan 26 – Feb 1): Authorship and Ownership

- Reading Assignment:
 - o Foucault, “What is an Author” (handout)
 - o Barthes, “Death of the Author” (handout).
- Critical Reflection Assignment #1 due Sunday, Feb 1st

Week 3 (February 2 – 8): Human Nature

- Reading Assignment:
 - o *Political Thought*, “Introduction,”
 - o *Political Thought*, Section I Introduction, pp. 11-17, 20-22, 37-43.
- Writing Assignment #1 due Sunday, February 8th via BlackBoard

Week 4 (February 9 – 15): Justification of the State

- Reading Assignment: *Political Thought*, pp. 52-54, 56-65.
- Self-Assessment #1 due Sunday, Feb 15th

Week 5 (February 16 – 22): The Role of Obedience

- Reading Assignment:
 - o *Political Thought*, pp. 66-70, 78-88.
- Critical Reflection Assignment #2 due Sunday, Feb 22nd

Week 6 (February 23 – March 1): The Democratic Ideal

- Reading Assignment:
 - o *Political Thought*, pp. 89-90, 96-102, 107-110, 115-116.
- Writing Assignment #2 due Sunday, Mar 1st

Week 7 (March 2 – 8): Liberty and Rights

- Reading Assignment:
 - o *Political Thought*, pp. 119-121, 124-127, 133, 142-144, 156-159, 172-175.
- Peer-Assessment 1 due Sunday, Mar 8th

Week 8 (March 9 – 15): NO CLASSES: SPRING BREAK

- No assignments due

Week 9 (March 16 – 22): Private Property and Distributive Justice

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

Week 10 (March 23 – 29): Midterm Paper

- Reading Assignment: none
- Midterm Paper due Sunday, March 29th

Week 11 (March 30 – April 5): Justice

- Reading Assignment:
 - o *Political Thought*, pp. 256-269.

- Critical Reflection Assignment #3 due Sunday, Apr 5th
- Self-Assessment 2 due Sunday, Apr 5th

Week 12 (April 6 – 12): Minority Rights

- Reading Assignment:
 - o *Political Thought*, Sections VI.c. – VI.e.
- Writing Assignment #3 due Sunday, Apr 12th

Week 13 (April 13 – 19): Conservatism

- Reading Assignment:
 - o *Political Thought*, pp. 319-334.
- Peer-Assessment 2 due Sunday, Apr 19th

Week 14 (April 20 – 26): Communitarianism and Socialism

- Reading Assignment:
 - o *Political Thought*, pp. 335-358.
- Critical Reflection Assignment #4 due Sunday, Apr 26th
- Final Paper available in BlackBoard

Week 15 (April 27 – May 3): Final Paper

- Work on Final Paper
- Self-Assessment 3 due Sunday, May 3rd

Week 16 (May 4 – 10): Finals Week

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

FINAL PAPER DUE NO LATER THAN MAY 8th @ 11:59 P