

GOV 080: Elements of Political Theory

Department of Government

Georgetown University

Summer 2022

Professor R. Boyd

MTWR 10:50-12:55

Office Hours: Wednesdays 9:30-10:45AM and by appointment

ICC 674

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Course Goals:

This course will explore fundamental theoretical issues surrounding life in a political community. Philosophical questions as basic as “What is justice?” or “Where does freedom come from, and what are its necessary limits?” must be addressed by self-reflective citizens of a liberal democracy in order to formulate any tolerable justification for our own democratic way of life. Classic philosophical and literary texts shed light on these and other timeless questions, such as the ambiguous relationship between law and liberty, the relationship between ethics and politics, the limits of political obligation, the origin and nature of totalitarianism, and the meaning of justice.

Students will be evaluated based on their interpretive understanding of these classic texts; their ability to apply these ideas to contemporary moral and political dilemmas; their analytical writing in advancing an original thesis or interpretive claim about the readings; and thoughtful, productive intellectual discussions centered on the readings and lectures.

Required Texts (inexpensive paperbacks for purchase at GU Bookstore):

Sophocles, *Antigone*. (Chicago)

Machiavelli, *The Prince*. (Chicago)

John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*. (Hackett).

Karl Marx, *The Marx-Engels Reader*. (Norton).

Art Spiegelman, *Maus I: My Father Bleeds History*. (Pantheon).

Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*. (Hackett).

§Additional readings available online via the GU CANVAS system

Class Sessions and Required Readings:

June 6: Course Introduction; background of *Antigone*.

June 7: Sophocles, *Antigone*.

June 8: Aristotle, *Politics*, Book I.

June 9: Aristotle *Politics*, Books I and III.

June 13: Aristotle *Politics*, Book III.

June 14: §Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, “On Law,” pp. 44-80.

June 15: §Martin Luther King, Jr. “Letter from a Birmingham Jail.”

June 16: Niccolo Machiavelli, *The Prince*, “Dedictory Letter,” Chapters 1-13. (***Essay #1 due***)

June 21: Machiavelli, *The Prince*, Chapters 14-25.

June 22: Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, “Letter Dedicatory,” “Author’s Introduction,” Chs. 13-15.

June 23: Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Chs. 16-19, 21, 24, 26-28, 30.

June 27: John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*, Chs. 1-3.

June 28: Mill, *On Liberty*, Chs. 4-5.

June 29: Karl Marx, “Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844,” pp. 70-106.

June 30: Marx, “Manifesto of the Communist Party,” pp. 469-500. (***Essay #2 due***)

July 5: §Joseph Mazzini, “Duties to the Nation,” selections.

July 6: §Hannah Arendt, “Origins of Totalitarianism,” Ch. 9.

July 7: Art Spiegelman, *Maus I: My Father Bleeds History*. (***Essay #3 due***)

Course Requirements:

There are four formal requirements for GOV 080.

- 1) Three short essays of 3-4 pages each (*) on required readings and lectures=3@25=75%.
- 2) Attendance and active participation in class discussions=25%.

Statement on Attendance Policy for Summer Session:

In lieu of weekly recitation sections, which are required of all students in Elements of Political Theory during the regular academic year, attendance and class participation is a graded component of Gov 080 in the Summer Session.

Attendance is obviously important during the regular academic year, but it takes on heightened importance in an intensive, accelerated Summer Session. We are going to move very quickly this summer. Missing even a single class in the Summer Session means that one may have missed an entire thinker. Missing two or three classes is the equivalent of weeks in a regular academic term. If you anticipate missing—for any reason whatsoever—conspicuous amounts of class time this summer, then you should not enroll in the course.

Students should come to class having done the readings for each session and be prepared to answer questions about the material if called on. Regular attendance as well as engaged and productive contributions to our class discussions is not only necessary for a student to meet our learning objectives. It is also a graded component of the course. Students might take the following as a very rough guideline for how A&P will be assessed:

- Absent in three or more sessions without medical documentation: 0-10/25 points

- Present in most or all sessions but no significant contributions: 20 points
- Regularly present; occasional/ unproductive contributor: 21-22 points
- Regular, active, productive participant: 23-24 points
- Class leader: 25 points

GRADING SCALE FOR GOV 080

A=100-93

A-=92.99-90

B+=89.99-87

B=86.99-83

B-=82.99-80

C+=79.99-77

C=76.99-73

C-=72.99-70

Mathematical cut-offs are absolute; I do not round grades up except under extraordinary circumstances. Students should familiarize themselves with the Department of Government's guidelines on academic evaluation (<https://government.georgetown.edu/undergraduate>):

“Grades in the Department of Government reflect high standards and university norms. For the four introductory courses, no more than 40 percent of the grades will be A-minus or higher. For other undergraduate level courses, the expectation is that no more than 50 percent of grades will be A-minus or higher. Classes with substantially higher percentage of A-minus and higher grades will be reviewed by the Department. In certain cases, such as Honors courses or courses with demonstrated high levels of effort and learning, grading percentages may go higher, but the basis for these higher grades will need to be documented.”

While I don't impose a formal “curve” with the intention of hitting these targets, and actual grade distributions may deviate significantly higher (or lower) depending on the actual quality of work submitted, this statement may serve as a rough indication of the high academic standards to be applied in evaluating academic work.