

Western University: Department of Political Science

POLISCI 2537F: Foundations of Political Theory

Summer 2023

Distance Online

Course Instructor

Caleb Althorpe, calthorp@uwo.ca

Office Hours: Friday 11-12, or by appointment

Course Description

This course offers a topical survey of a very diverse field. It will address: (i) what is the purpose of the state? (ii) what is freedom and what are the limits of liberty? (iii) what is equality and how might we pursue it? (iv) what is justice and how is it best achieved? In the course we will be assessing how different theoretical perspectives answer these questions, and also looking at the variety of methodologies and research methods available to do political theory. The emphasis throughout the course will be on critical review of the arguments provided in the readings and which we analyze in the lectures, but also on how to develop your own views of these matters: what do you think and, more importantly, why? In each reading response you will be expected to discuss the merits and demerits of each reading. The essay and exam will require you to be able to argue persuasively, taking due consideration of others' arguments.

Antirequisite(s); Political Science 2237E, Philosophy 2800F/G, Philosophy 2801F/G, Philosophy 2802E, Political Science 2237W/X

Course Objectives

By the end of the course, students will be able to:

- Understand the major concepts, questions, and themes in political theory, including how different theoretical perspectives and methodologies answer these questions
- Read, understand, and critically evaluate academic articles in political theory
- Formulate your own considered opinions about live issues in political theory, expressing them coherently in writing.

Readings

There is no textbook for this course. All readings will be posted on OWL.

Course Format

This course is online and there is **NO** in-person learning. Each week's content (lecture videos and readings) will be posted on OWL and made available the Monday morning of each week. The lecture videos do not simply cover or explain the material in the readings, but also include additional material. It is thus crucial that for each week you watch the videos **and** do the

readings. Assessments will cover all assigned material. There will also be an optional synchronous tutorial session once a week (time to be confirmed depending on student availability), where we can discuss as a group the course material. While not compulsory, I **strongly encourage** you to come to these discussions as asking questions and hearing what fellow students say will be helpful tools to understand the material.

For Weeks 2-6 you will be required to submit a reading response by 12pm Friday (more info below). My office hours will be held each week over Zoom. I am also available over email (calthorp@uwo.ca) and aim to reply to all emails within 24 hours.

Statement on Inclusion

Political theory in general, and this course in particular, covers topics and issues that might be controversial, difficult, or personal for some students. I recognize that members of this class will be coming into the course from different standpoints and with different life experiences (academic background, race, religion, gender, class, etc.). I endeavour to create a learning environment in which each student has the opportunity to be heard, to be respected, and to feel safe being themselves. If there are circumstances that make your participation in this class difficult, please reach out to me and we can discuss accommodating strategies. This includes discussing whether certain topics in the course are particularly sensitive or triggering for you.

Assessment

20%: Reading Responses
40%: Essay (5% for essay proposal)
40%: Exam

Reading Responses

Each week (except Week 1) you will submit reading responses of approximately 300-400 words, focusing on **one** of the readings for that week (each week I will list which readings can be used as a response). These responses will be graded on a four-point scale. To receive consideration the responses must be sent to me by **12pm on Friday** for the applicable week. The 20% reading response grade will be made up of 5 reading responses, so 4% for each response. To achieve high marks for the reading responses, it is imperative to not only summarize the reading, but to also analyze its argument and tell me what you found strong or weak about it. I will provide feedback on your responses, so they are a great way to hone the skills you will need for the paper and the exam.

Essay

2500 words (+/- 10%). **Due 11:59pm June 5** via OWL.

A list of essay questions will be posted shortly after the commencement of the course. For the essay you are expected to research from outside the course syllabus (\approx 5 external and academic sources is fine). The emphasis is on developing a clear argument in support of a thesis. You are also able to choose your own question if you wish (however, you must confirm the question with me beforehand). I will also send out documents on how to do well on the essay.

A 1-page essay proposal (5% pass/fail) will be **due 11:59pm May 26** via email. For the proposal you do not need to know exactly what your thesis will be, but you will be expected to have selected a topic and a research question, and to have an idea of how you will go about answering the question. I will provide feedback on the proposal.

Exam

Timed (2hours). **June 16, 10am-12pm** via OWL.

The exam will be composed of two parts: the first part will be short answers, and the second part will be essay responses. For each of the two parts, you will select from a list of five questions **two** questions to answer. The short answer questions will be assessing your understanding of particular topics and arguments, while the essay response will be assessing your ability to make connections between topics from across different weeks. The exam will be open book (i.e., you are permitted to look at your notes). **If you have an unresolvable conflict with the exam, please contact me as soon as possible.**

Late Submission and Plagiarism:

Late submission will be penalized 5% per day. Extensions may be granted in extenuating circumstances, so long as this is arranged with me **before** the deadline. If you think you may need an extension for an assignment, please email me as early as possible.

Any use of artificial intelligence (such as ChatGTP) to help with assignments constitutes plagiarism and will be responded to accordingly. Turnitin now has AI detection software, and I will also be copying sections of submitted material into online AI detectors.

Course Schedule

Week 1: Intro to the Course and the Methodology of Political Theory

What is political theory? Why should we study it? How do we do political theory? What is political theory's relationship to other subfields of political science? To what extent should political theory be normative and idealized?

Readings:

- Writing Philosophy, 6-11
- Issues in Political Theory, 1-5
- DePaul "Reflective Equilibrium"
- Kimberley Brownlee and Zofia Stemplowska, "Thought Experiments" in *Methods in Analytical Political Theory*

Week 2: The State, Political Obligation, and Punishment

What is the state and what is its purpose? What makes a state legitimate? Are we under a moral obligation to obey the law, and if so, on what grounds? Under what conditions might it be justifiable (or even required) to break the law? What might justify the state punishing a person when they break the law?

Readings:

- Bird, "Authority," 154-166 from *An Introduction to Political Philosophy*
- MacKinnon, "The Liberal State"
- Martin Luther King Jr., "Letter from a Birmingham Jail"

Week 3: Liberty and Freedom

What does it mean to be 'free'? What sort of things limit our freedom: being interfered with? being dominated? not being able to do what we want? Does poverty limit our freedom? What role does freedom play in struggles for liberation? How is freedom affected by systems of power?

Readings:

- Waldron, "Homelessness and the Issue of Freedom"
- Bird, "Oppression" in *An Introduction to Political Philosophy* (2nd ed.)
- Fanon, "On Violence"

Week 4: Rights

What does it mean for someone to have a 'right' to/over something? What best grounds a right? Can groups hold rights or only individuals? Are there such things as human rights? What do we do when different rights conflict? Is there something conservative about rights-based liberalism, or can it have emancipatory power?

Readings:

- Waldron, "Rights" in *A Companion to Contemporary Political Philosophy*
- O'Neill, "The Dark Side of Human Rights"
- Darby, "Race and Rights"

Week 5: Equality

What does an equal society look like? To what extent is it based on social relations being equal, or people having equal 'stuff'? What are some alternatives to the focus on equality? How far can objections to systems of oppression (e.g., colonialism, racism, sexism) be based on their violation of the principle of equality?

Readings:

- Anderson, "What is the Point of Equality?" 312-end
- Ypi, "What's Wrong with Colonialism"

Week 6: Justice

What does a just society look like? Is it based on certain outcomes, or on what persons are entitled to? What is structural injustice? In thinking about justice is it more appropriate to idealize a perfectly just state, or to focus on rectifying the injustices faced by the currently and historically disadvantaged? How might justice be achieved for victims of oppression, exploitation, and colonialism?

- Rawls, selected pages
- Mills, "Retrieving Rawls for Racial Justice?" from *Black Rights/White Wrongs*
- Young, "Structural Injustice and the Politics of Difference"

APPENDIX TO UNDERGRADUATE COURSE OUTLINES DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE

Prerequisite checking - the student's responsibility

"Unless you have either the requisites for this course or written special permission from your Dean to enroll in it, you may be removed from this course and it will be deleted from your record. This decision may not be appealed. You will receive no adjustment to your fees in the event that you are dropped from a course for failing to have the necessary prerequisites."

Essay course requirements

With the exception of 1000-level courses, most courses in the Department of Political Science are essay courses. Total written assignments (excluding examinations) will be at least 3,000 words in Politics 1020E, at least 5,000 words in a full course numbered 2000 or above, and at least 2,500 words in a half course numbered 2000 or above.

Use of Personal Response Systems ("Clickers")

"Personal Response Systems ("clickers") may be used in some classes. If clickers are to be used in a class, it is the responsibility of the student to ensure that the device is activated and functional. Students must see their instructor if they have any concerns about whether the clicker is malfunctioning. Students must use only their own clicker. If clicker records are used to compute a portion of the course grade:

- the use of somebody else's clicker in class constitutes a scholastic offence,
- the possession of a clicker belonging to another student will be interpreted as an attempt to commit a scholastic offence."

Security and Confidentiality of Student Work (refer to current *Western Academic Calendar*
<http://www.westerncalendar.uwo.ca/>)

"**Submitting or Returning Student Assignments, Tests and Exams** - All student assignments, tests and exams will be handled in a secure and confidential manner. Particularly in this respect, leaving student work unattended in public areas for pickup is not permitted."

Duplication of work

Undergraduate students who submit similar assignments on closely related topics in two different courses must obtain the consent of both instructors prior to the submission of the assignment. If prior approval is not obtained, each instructor reserves the right not to accept the assignment.

Grade adjustments

In order to ensure that comparable standards are applied in political science courses, the Department may require instructors to adjust final marks to conform to Departmental guidelines.

Academic Offences

"Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at the following Web site:
http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_undergrad.pdf

Submission of Course Requirements

ESSAYS, ASSIGNMENTS, TAKE-HOME EXAMS MUST BE SUBMITTED ACCORDING TO PROCEDURES SPECIFIED BY YOUR INSTRUCTOR (I.E., IN CLASS, DURING OFFICE HOURS, TA'S OFFICE HOURS) OR UNDER THE INSTRUCTOR'S OFFICE DOOR.

THE MAIN OFFICE DOES NOT DATE-STAMP OR ACCEPT ANY OF THE ABOVE.

Attendance Regulations for Examinations

EXAMINATIONS/ATTENDANCE (Sen. Min. Feb.4/49, May 23/58, S.94, S.3538, S.3632, S.04-097) A student is entitled to be examined in courses in which registration is maintained, subject to the following limitations: 1) A student may be debarred from writing the final examination for failure to maintain satisfactory academic standing throughout the year. 2) Any student who, in the opinion of the instructor, is absent too frequently from class or laboratory periods in any course will be reported to the Dean of the Faculty offering the course (after due warning has been given). On the recommendation of the Department concerned, and with the permission of the Dean of that Faculty, the student will be debarred from taking the regular examination in the course. The Dean of the Faculty offering the course will communicate that decision to the Dean of the Faculty of registration.

Absences from Final Examinations

If you miss the Final Exam, please contact the Academic Counselling office of your Faculty of Registration as soon as you are able to do so. They will assess your eligibility to write the Special Examination (the name given by the University to a makeup Final Exam).

You may also be eligible to write the Special Exam if you are in a "Multiple Exam Situation" (e.g., more than 2 exams in 23-hour period, more than 3 exams in a 47-hour period).

Note: Missed work can *only* be excused through one of the mechanisms above. Being asked not to attend an in-person course requirement due to potential COVID-19 symptoms is **not** sufficient on its own. Students should check the Western website to see what directives for Covid are to be followed. Western has been and will continue to follow directives established by the Middlesex-London Health Unit. That directive will state whether students should or should not come to campus/class and any other requirements (e.g., masks are mandatory). Please check on your own and do not email the instructor, the Department Undergraduate Advisor/Coordinator or the Faculty of Social Science Academic Counselling Office.

Accommodation and Accessibility

Religious Accommodation

When a course requirement conflicts with a religious holiday that requires an absence from the University or prohibits certain activities, students should request accommodation for their absence in writing at least two weeks prior to the holiday to the course instructor and/or the

Academic Counselling office of their Faculty of Registration. Please consult University's list of recognized religious holidays (updated annually) at

<https://multiculturalcalendar.com/ecal/index.php?s=c-univwo>.

Accommodation Policies

Students with disabilities are encouraged to contact Accessible Education, which provides recommendations for accommodation based on medical documentation or psychological and cognitive testing. The policy on Academic Accommodation for Students with Disabilities can be found at:

[https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/Academic Accommodation_disabilities.pdf](https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/Academic_Accommodation_disabilities.pdf).

Academic Policies

The website for Registrarial Services is <http://www.registrar.uwo.ca>.

In accordance with policy,

https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/policies_procedures/section1/mapp113.pdf,

the centrally administered e-mail account provided to students will be considered the individual's official university e-mail address. It is the responsibility of the account holder to ensure that e-mail received from the University at their official university address is attended to in a timely manner.

During exams/tests/quizzes, no electronic devices (e.g. a phone, laptop, iPad) are allowed and must be powered down and stored out of reach.

Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at the following Web site:

http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_undergrad.pdf.

All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between The University of Western Ontario and Turnitin.com (<http://www.turnitin.com>).

Computer-marked multiple-choice tests and exams may be subject to submission for similarity review by software that will check for unusual coincidences in answer patterns that may indicate cheating.

If a course uses remote proctoring, please be advised that you are consenting to the use of this software and acknowledge that you will be required to provide **personal information** (including

some biometric data) and the session will be **recorded**. Completion of a course with remote proctoring will require you to have a reliable internet connection and a device that meets the technical requirements for this service. More information about this remote proctoring service, including technical requirements, is available on Western's Remote Proctoring website at:

<https://remoteproctoring.uwo.ca>.

Support Services

Please visit the Social Science Academic Counselling webpage for information on adding/dropping courses, academic considerations for absences, appeals, exam conflicts, and many other academic related matters: [Academic Counselling - Western University \(uwo.ca\)](https://www.uwo.ca/academic_counselling/)

Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to Mental Health@Western (<https://uwo.ca/health/>) for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.

Western is committed to reducing incidents of gender-based and sexual violence and providing compassionate support to anyone who has gone through these traumatic events. If you have experienced sexual or gender-based violence (either recently or in the past), you will find information about support services for survivors, including emergency contacts at

https://www.uwo.ca/health/student_support/survivor_support/get-help.html.

To connect with a case manager or set up an appointment, please contact support@uwo.ca.

Please contact the course instructor if you require lecture or printed material in an alternate format or if any other arrangements can make this course more accessible to you. You may also wish to contact Accessible Education at

http://academicsupport.uwo.ca/accessible_education/index.html

if you have any questions regarding accommodations.

Learning-skills counsellors at the Learning Development and Success Centre (<https://learning.uwo.ca>) are ready to help you improve your learning skills. They offer presentations on strategies for improving time management, multiple-choice exam preparation/writing, textbook reading, and more. Individual support is offered throughout the Fall/Winter terms in the drop-in Learning Help Centre, and year-round through individual counselling.

Western University is committed to a thriving campus as we deliver our courses in the mixed model of both virtual and face-to-face formats. We encourage you to check out the Digital Student Experience website to manage your academics and well-being: <https://www.uwo.ca/se/digital/>.

Additional student-run support services are offered by the USC, <https://westernusc.ca/services/>.

Plagiarism:

Students must write their essays and assignments in their own words. Whenever students take an idea, or a passage from another author, they must acknowledge their debt both by using quotation marks where appropriate and by proper referencing such as footnotes or citations. Plagiarism is a major academic offence." (see Scholastic Offence Policy in the Western Academic Calendar).

Plagiarism Checking: "All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between The University of Western Ontario and Turnitin.com (<http://www.turnitin.com>)."

Multiple-choice tests/exams: "Computer-marked multiple-choice tests and/or exams may be subject to submission for similarity review by software that will check for unusual coincidences in answer patterns that may indicate cheating."

Note: Information excerpted and quoted above are Senate regulations from the Handbook of Scholarship and Academic Policy. https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/academic_policies/index.html

PLAGIARISM*

In writing scholarly papers, you must keep firmly in mind the need to avoid plagiarism. Plagiarism is the unacknowledged borrowing of another writer's words or ideas. Different forms of writing require different types of acknowledgement. The following rules pertain to the acknowledgements necessary in academic papers.

A. In using another writer's words, you must both place the words in quotation marks and acknowledge that the words are those of another writer.

You are plagiarizing if you use a sequence of words, a sentence or a paragraph taken from other writers without acknowledging them to be theirs. Acknowledgement is indicated either by (1) mentioning the author and work from which the words are borrowed in the text of your paper; or by (2) placing a footnote number at the end of the quotation in your text, and including a correspondingly numbered footnote at the bottom of the page (or in a separate reference section at the end of your essay). This footnote should indicate author, title of the work, place and date of publication, and page number.

Method (2) given above is usually preferable for academic essays because it provides the reader with more information about your sources and leaves your text uncluttered with parenthetical and tangential references. In either case words taken from another author must be enclosed in quotation marks or set off from your text by single spacing and indentation in such a way that they cannot be mistaken for your own words. Note that you cannot avoid indicating quotation simply by changing a word or phrase in a sentence or paragraph which is not your own.

B. In adopting other writers' ideas, you must acknowledge that they are theirs.

You are plagiarizing if you adopt, summarize, or paraphrase other writers' trains of argument, ideas or sequences of ideas without acknowledging their authorship according to the method of acknowledgement given in 'A' above. Since the words are your own, they need not be enclosed in quotation marks. Be certain, however, that the words you use are entirely your own; where you must use words or phrases from your source, these should be enclosed in quotation marks, as in 'A' above.

Clearly, it is possible for you to formulate arguments or ideas independently of another writer who has expounded the same ideas, and whom you have not read. Where you got your ideas is the important consideration here. Do not be afraid to present an argument or idea without acknowledgement to another writer, if you have arrived at it entirely independently. Acknowledge it if you have derived it from a source outside your own thinking on the subject.

In short, use of acknowledgements and, when necessary, quotation marks is necessary to distinguish clearly between what is yours and what is not. Since the rules have been explained to you, if you fail to make this distinction your instructor very likely will do so for you, and they will be forced to regard your omission as intentional literary theft. Plagiarism is a serious offence which may result in a student's receiving an 'F' in a course or, in extreme cases in their suspension from the University.

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Adopted by the council of the Faculty of Social Science, October, 1970; approved by the Dept. of History August 13, 1991