

POLS 1700: Foundations of Political Theory

Professor Ruth Groff
Office: McGannon 148
Office Hours: Wednesdays after class, and by appointment
E-mail: ruth.groff@slu.edu

Course Description

This course will introduce you to the history of Western political philosophy through the question **“What, if anything, is the difference between morally legitimate authority and brute force?”** You may think that the answer is easy: “A government exercises power legitimately if it does what people want and/or if it came to power in a way that people like.” But things are not so simple. Which people (and why)? What if what they want is really bad? Once again you may think that there are obvious answers: “The majority,” and “There is no such thing as ‘bad’ – if someone thinks that something is good, then who are you to say that it’s bad?” I suspect, however, that you don’t actually believe this, especially when it comes to things that you yourself think are bad. So the question about what makes the exercise of power be morally legitimate is harder than it may seem. And it underlies just about every single aspect of political life.

We will look at 5 possible ways to answer the question. You will read original, often-difficult, primary texts. You may not understand what you read at first, and it will be up to you to keep at it until you do. I will support you, but there will be no way for you to side-step this challenging intellectual work. My role is to train you to become good readers of complex material, and to help you to understand the structures of whole theories, whole ways of answering a fundamental question. It is important that you understand that this is what the course involves.

This is a course in political philosophy, which means that our discussion of the topic will be conceptual, rather than applied. We will be talking about ideas, rather than examining concrete cases as you might expect to do in a course on comparative or American politics. Applied political analysis is important, and may even be your main concern in the long run. But applied analysis presupposes underlying theoretical assumptions. Political philosophy is the area of political science in which such assumptions are examined directly.

Course Format

This course is conducted as a discussion-based engagement with primary texts, augmented by presentations by me to frame the material and by the occasional formal lecture.

General Expectations and Policies

The bottom line requirement for this course is that you do the readings very carefully (more than once, in most cases), and come to class prepared (directions below) to talk about the material with others in order to clearly understand and evaluate it. **If, for whatever reason, you are not in a position to take on a very high level of intellectual responsibility, this may not be the course for you to take this semester.** Please think about this carefully. You may have a difficult time keeping up if you aren’t in a position to assume the required stance.

Attendance is mandatory unless you are sick or face an emergency situation; please do not come to class sick. Irregular participation will result in a significant reduction of the final grade or in failure. Cell phones, laptops and other electronic devices **must be turned off** during class. In keeping with the 5 principles of Jesuit education at SLU (detailed below), I take it for granted that comportment in the classroom will be good-natured, considerate and intellectually disciplined; failure to meet this expectation will result in a student being required to leave the room, and will constitute an unexcused absence. I also expect that you will come to class on time.

All written and oral work must be either (a) your own ideas, expressed in your own words, or (b) properly referenced. Plagiarism will result in a failure for the course, at a minimum. Please ask me, if you have any questions about academic integrity; not knowing that you have plagiarized does not make it acceptable to have done so. **See the final page of the syllabus for further information.**

Students with disabilities, or who face other circumstances that may impact their classroom performance, may arrange for appropriate accommodations and/or academic support. **See the final page of the syllabus for further information.** Please let me know if you need any help with this.

The easiest way to contact me is through e-mail, which I check frequently. In most cases I will be able to get back to you within 24 hours; if you haven't heard back, send me another e-mail. I will retrieve phone messages when I am in my office, but I am not on campus every day, so it's not the best way to reach me. I'm also delighted to talk to you in person, during office hours.

Assignments and Grade Breakdown

- Quality of participation & preparation (includes snap quizzes & regular short writing assignments) – 35%
- Midterm – 15%
- Paper - (6-7 pps., due near the end of the term) – 20%
- Final exam – 30%
- Non-graded “benchmark” essay – you will flunk the course if you do not submit the benchmark essay.
- Around mid-semester, you will be required to have a short meeting with me in my office, to check in on your progress in the course and to discuss your benchmark essay. This meeting is mandatory.

Your grade will be based on the factors listed above. There is no extra credit available for the completion of additional work. I give letter grades, corresponding to qualitative assessment criteria.

I do not grade on a distributional curve; your grade is based solely on the quality of your own performance. **I am a very transparent grader, and am happy to talk with you about how to do your best in the course.** Please note that the College of Arts and Sciences' common grading scheme: A=93-100; A-=90-92; B+=87-89; B=83-86; B-=80-82; C+=77-79; C=73-76; C-=70-72; D=60-70;F=below 60. (I am required to tell you this, even though the information does not pertain to our class since I do not give numerical grades.)

I don't accept late papers, unless you have contacted me ahead of time concerning an absolute emergency. Papers are due at the beginning of class on the date that they are due, unless otherwise stipulated.

Relevance to the Five Dimensions of Education at SLU

1. Scholarship and knowledge: students will acquire an understanding of major views concerning political legitimacy in the history of Western political thought.
2. Intellectual inquiry and communication: students will develop their abilities to read and to write analytically; to think conceptually; to pursue clarity; to accept ambiguity, contradiction and uncertainty. See #5 also.
3. Community building: in addition to the inherent relevance of the course topic, students will be required to engage in collective intellectual activity throughout the semester, in the context of classroom-based discussion.
4. Leadership and service: see #3 and 5.
5. Spirituality and values: Students will reflect critically upon the ideal of legitimacy, what it implies and what it potentially enjoins in the way of action. See also #2: collective, non-dogmatic inquiry, aimed at the achievement of insight, cultivates important virtues, including but not limited to: the toleration of ambiguity and uncertainty, intellectual fearlessness, attentiveness to the truth-value of the contributions of others, a desire for clarity rather than for victory or esteem.

Required texts

The following books have been ordered at the SLU Bookstore:

Plato, *The Republic*
Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*
Aristotle, *Politics*
Hobbes, *Leviathan*
Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*
Rousseau, *The Social Contract and Discourses*

Additional University Information

Academic Honesty

The University is a community of learning, whose effectiveness requires an environment of mutual trust and integrity. Academic integrity is violated by any dishonesty such as soliciting, receiving, or providing any unauthorized assistance in the completion of work submitted toward academic credit. While not all forms of academic dishonesty can be listed here, examples include copying from another student, copying from a book or class notes during a closed book exam, submitting materials authored by or revised by another person as the student's own work, copying a passage or text directly from a published source without appropriately citing or recognizing that source, taking a test or doing an assignment or other academic work for another student, securing or supplying in advance a copy of an examination or quiz without the knowledge or consent of the instructor, sharing or receiving the questions from an on-line quiz with another student, taking an on-line quiz with the help of another student, and colluding with another student or students to engage in academic dishonesty.

All clear violations of academic integrity will be met with appropriate sanctions. In this course, academic dishonesty on an assignment will result in failure for the course and a report of academic dishonesty sent to the Academic Honesty Committee of the College of Arts and Sciences. In the case of Class B violations, the Academic Honesty Committee may impose a larger sanction including, but not limited to, assigning a failing grade in the course, disciplinary probation, suspension, and dismissal from the University.

Students should refer to the following SLU website for more information about Class A and B violations and the procedures following a report of academic dishonesty:

<http://www.slu.edu/x12657.xml>

Student Learning

In recognition that people learn in a variety of ways and that learning is influenced by multiple factors (e.g., prior experience, study skills, learning disability), resources to support student success are available on campus. Students who think they might benefit from these resources can find out more about:

- Course-level support (e.g., faculty member, departmental resources, etc.) by asking your course instructor.
- University-level support (e.g., tutoring/writing services, Disability Services) by visiting the Student Success Center (BSC 331) or by going to www.slu.edu/success.

Students who believe that, due to a disability, they could benefit from academic accommodations are encouraged to contact Disability Services at [314-977-8885](tel:314-977-8885) or visit the Student Success Center.

Confidentiality will be observed in all inquiries. Course instructors support student accommodation requests when an approved letter from Disability Services has been received and when students discuss these accommodations with the instructor after receipt of the approved letter.

Title IX Syllabus Statement

Saint Louis University and its faculty are committed to supporting our students and seeking an environment that is free of bias, discrimination, and harassment. If you have encountered any form of sexual misconduct (e.g. sexual assault, sexual harassment, stalking, domestic or dating violence), we encourage you to report this to the University. If you speak with a faculty member about an incident of misconduct, that faculty member must notify SLU's Title IX coordinator, Anna R. Kratky (DuBourg Hall, room 36; akratky@slu.edu; [314-977-3886](tel:314-977-3886)) and share the basic fact of your experience with her. The Title IX coordinator will then be available to assist you in understanding all of your options and in connecting you with all possible resources on and off campus.

If you wish to speak with a confidential source, you may contact the counselors at the University Counseling Center at 314-977-TALK. To view SLU's sexual misconduct policy and for resources, please visit the following web address: <http://www.slu.edu/general-counsel-home/office-of-institutional-equity-and-diversity/sexual-misconduct-policy> www.slu.edu/here4you .

Approximated Reading Schedule

Aug. 26 – Introduction to the course

Plato – Legitimacy from Goodness

Aug. 28 – Setting the stage (*Republic*, read Bk 1)

Aug. 30 – Might makes right: the exchange with Thrasymachus

Sept. 2 – LABOR DAY – no class

Sept. 4 – The make-believe city (read Bks 2-4)

Sept. 6 – Discussion continued; no new reading

Sept. 9 – Moral education (review Bk. 3)

Sept. 11 – Harmony, justice and the love of truth (review Bk. 4)

Sept. 13 – Discussion continued; no new reading

Sept. 16 – Knowledge, politics and the love of goodness (read Bks 5, 6, 7); the Divided Line

Sept. 18 – Discussion continued; the metaphor of the ship (re-read Bk 6)

Sept. 20 – Discussion continued; the metaphor of the cave (re-read Bk 7)

Sept. 23 – Types of illegitimate societies (read Bks 8-9)

Sept. 25 – Goodness and Order (re-read Bk 9)

Sept. 27 – Discussion continued

Aristotle – Legitimacy from Human Nature

Sept. 30 – Living a properly human life (*Ethics*, Bk 1)

Oct. 2 – Excellence of character and of judgment ... (*Ethics*, Bks 2 and 6)

Oct. 4 – ... developed and displayed in & through relationships (*Ethics*, Bks 8 & 9)

Oct. 7 – Flourishing and the ‘polis’ (*Ethics*, Bk 10; *Politics*, Bk 1)

Oct. 9 – Discussion continued – no new reading

Oct. 11 – ‘Poleis’ and their citizens (*Politics*, Bk 3, chs. 6-7; Book 7, ch. 4)

Oct. 14 – Political communities, continued (*Politics*, Bk 3, chs. 1, 4, 5; Bk 7, chs. 4, 9, 10)

Oct. 16 – Discussion continued

October 18 – Midterm

Hobbes – Legitimacy from Force

Oct. 21 – FALL BREAK – No class

Oct. 23 & 25 – The premises: instrumental reason, appetite and moral subjectivism

Leviathan, chs. 1, 4, 5, 6, 8, 11 (for Weds.)

AND

- The logic of a-moral self-interest

Leviathan, chs. 13, 14, 15 (secs. 1-3), 17, 19, 20, 21, 26 (secs. 1-6), 29 (for Fri.)

Oct. 28 – The Laws of Nature; no new reading (re-read chs. 14-15, secs 1-3; ch. 17)
Oct. 30 – The Absolute Sovereign; no new reading (re-read chs. 19, 20, 21, 26, secs. 1-6. 29)
Nov. 1 – Discussion continued

Locke – Legitimacy from God

Nov. 4 – The “State of Nature” metaphor (*2nd Treatise*, chs 1-5; ch 6, paragraph 54)
Nov. 6 – “Slavery” and “the State of War” (re-read chs. 2-4)
Nov. 8 – The inviolability of property (Re-read ch. 5)

Nov. 11 – Discussion continued
Nov. 13 – Property, consent and the terms of political association
(*2nd Treatise*, paragraphs 87; 89; 91-99; 119-122; 138-140; 221-222)
Nov. 15 – Discussion continued

Rousseau – Legitimacy from Collective Participation

Nov. 18 – Chains: The Problem of Legitimacy (*The Social Contract*, Bk 1, chs. 1-8)
Nov. 20 – The Sovereign & Its General Will (*SC*, Bk 1, ch 9; Bk 2, chs. 1-6; Bk 4, chs. 1-2)
Nov. 22– The Nature & Role of the Sovereign, continued; no new reading

Nov. 25 – The Institution of ‘Government’ (*SC*, Book 3, chs. 1-4, 8, 11, 15)
Nov. 27 & 29 THANKSGIVING – No class

Dec. 2 – The General Will, Revisited (*SC*, Bk 2, ch. 7)
Dec. 4 & 6 – Discussion continued

Dec. 9 – In-class review