

POLS 2700: Basic Issues in Political Philosophy: The Idea of Democracy

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Course Description

This class will involve you in a careful examination of a seemingly simple idea: rule by the *demos*, or “the people.” We will wrestle with a number of fundamental questions related to this idea. Who counts as “the people”? Why should this group be entrusted with political power? What does “ruling” involve and/or require of citizens? (E.g., Is democracy more than just voting?) Over what areas of life is it proper for “the people” to rule? (E.g., Should the economic forces that largely shape our lives come under democratic control?) With these questions in mind, we will explore key positions on the topic as they have appeared in the history of Western political thought.

This is a course in political philosophy, which means that our discussion 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 democracy in comparative politics or in American politics. Applied thinking is important, and may even be your preferred approach. But empirical analysis presupposes underlying theoretical assumptions. Political philosophy is the area of political science in which such assumptions are examined directly.

You will be required to read complicated, challenging, original texts. It is likely that you will not understand what you read at first - serious philosophy is like that - and ***it will be up to you to keep at it until you do***. I will not spoon-feed you information, either through a text-book or in the form of Powerpoint slides. One of the benefits of political theory courses is that they require you to track complex lines of argument for yourself. Make sure that you are aware that you having to make your way through difficult material is an integral part of the course.

General Expectations and Policies

The bottom line requirement for this course is that you do the reading very, very carefully (more than once, in most cases), and come to class prepared to talk about the material with others in order to understand and evaluate it. ***If, for whatever reason, you are not in a position to take on a high level of intellectual responsibility, you should think hard about whether or not you will be able to meet this expectation;*** this may not be the course for you to take this semester.

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 values of Jesuit education at SLU, I take it for granted that comportment in the classroom will be good-natured, considerate and intellectually serious; 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.

Learning Outcomes

In order to pass POLS 2700, you will have to have acquired a basic grasp of the course material, allowing you to (a) articulate all of the views about democracy covered in class; (b) articulate the answers given by proponents of different views to the framing questions of the course; (c) identify strengths and weaknesses of the different positions, each from the perspective(s) of the others; (d) write an analytic paper in which you defend an abstract thesis pertaining to the content of the course.

Demonstrated ability to do these things will indicate that you have gained an introductory level understanding of key texts in the history of Western political thought and that you are able to engage in introductory level critical analysis of the concept of democracy.

Access to me

The easiest way to contact me is through e-mail, which I check regularly. In most cases I will be able to get back to you within a few hours; if you haven't heard back within 12 hrs, send me another e-mail. I retrieve phone messages when I am in my office, but I am not on campus every day; e-mail is much more reliable. I'm also delighted to talk to you in person, during office hours.

Assignments, Feedback and Grades

Participation - 30%

- Includes regular quizzes and reading questions; quizzes will be "graded" but only for the purpose of feedback; these grades will not be calculated. Reading questions will not be graded, except insofar as doing them in good faith is bound to enhance all aspects of your grade by making it more likely that you will do well.

"Benchmark" essay (5 pps.) – Ungraded, but you cannot pass the class if you do not do it.

Midterm Exam – 20%

Essay (6-7 pps.) – 20%

Final exam – 30%

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 review your benchmark essay. This meeting is mandatory.

Your grade will be based on your performance on the assignments listed above. There is no extra credit available for the completion of additional work. Make-up exams will be offered only under the most extraordinary of circumstances. 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 I am happy to talk with you about how to do your best in the course and to develop intellectually. While it is not relevant to this class, please note 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.

Note

In this class, final grades designate the following:

A-range = Excellent at political philosophy;

B+ = Very good at political philosophy;

B = Good, solid work in political philosophy;

B- = Acceptable degree of competence in political philosophy;

C-range = Weak in the area of political philosophy;

D-range = Poor in the area of political philosophy.

Please be sure that you understand these criteria. If you have any questions, feel free to ask me.

If you receive a split grade on an assignment (B/B+, for example), it means that a case could have been made for either grade, and that I want to be able to take all of your grades into consideration when I assign your final grade.

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.

Additional University Information

Academic Integrity Syllabus Statement

Academic integrity is honest, truthful and responsible conduct in all academic endeavors. The mission of Saint Louis University is "the pursuit of truth for the greater glory of God and for the service of humanity." Accordingly, all acts of falsehood demean and compromise the corporate endeavors of teaching, research, health care, and community service via which SLU embodies its mission. The University strives to prepare students for lives of personal and professional integrity, and therefore regards all breaches of academic integrity as matters of serious concern.

The governing University-level Academic Integrity Policy was adopted in Spring 2015, and can be accessed on the Provost's Office website at:

http://www.slu.edu/Documents/provost/academic_affairs/University-wide%20Academic%20Integrity%20Policy%20FINAL%20%206-26-15.pdf

Additionally, each SLU College, School, and Center has adopted its own academic integrity policies, available on their respective websites. All SLU students are expected to know and abide by these policies, which detail definitions of violations, processes for reporting violations, sanctions, and appeals. Please direct questions about any facet of academic integrity to your faculty, the chair of the department of your academic program, or the Dean/Director of the College, School or Center in which your program is housed.

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) 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 .

Student Success Center Syllabus Statement:

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. The Student Success Center, a one-stop shop, which assists students with academic and career related services, is located in the Busch Student Center (Suite, 331) and the School of Nursing (Suite, 114). 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 services, university writing services, disability services, academic coaching, career services, and/or facets of curriculum planning) by visiting the Student Success Center or by going to www.slu.edu/success.

Disability Services Academic Accommodations Syllabus Statement

Students with a documented disability who wish to request academic accommodations are encouraged to contact Disability Services to discuss accommodation requests and eligibility requirements. Please contact Disability Services, located within the Student Success Center, at Disability_services@slu.edu or [314.977.3484](tel:314.977.3484) to schedule an appointment. Confidentiality will be observed in all inquiries. Once approved, information about academic accommodations will be shared with course instructors via email from Disability Services and viewed within Banner via the instructor's course roster.

Required texts

The following books have been ordered, and should be available at the SLU Bookstore:

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics, Politics*
Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*
Rousseau, *The Social Contract and Discourses*
Mill, *Utilitarianism, On Liberty, and Representative Government*

Additional readings will be available electronically.

Approximated Reading and Discussion Schedule

Introduction

Jan 16 – Explanation of the course

Jan 18 – Background lecture

Classical Anti-Democratic Republicanism (Aristotle)

Jan. 23 Virtue, human nature & political life
Ethics, Bk 1-2, 6; *Politics*, Bk 1 chs 1-2;

Jan. 25 *Ethics*, Bks 8-9
Politics, Bk 3, chs 6-7, 9; Book 7, ch 4

Jan. 30/Feb. 1 The activity of citizenship
Politics, Bk 3, chs 1, 4, 5; Bk 7, chs. 4, 9, 10

Feb. 6 & 8 On democracy
Politics, Bk 3, chs 5, 8; Bk 4, chs 4-9; Bk 6, chs 1-5

Property, Natural Law and the State - Non-Democratic Constitutionalism (Locke)

Feb. 13 The Debate at Putney Church
<http://oll.libertyfund.org/pages/1647-the-putney-debates>

Feb. 15 The “State of Nature” metaphor
2nd Treatise, chs 1-4; ch 6, paragraph 54;

Feb. 20 & 22 The inviolability of property
2nd Treatise, ch. 5

Feb. 27 Citizenship and the terms of political association
2nd Treatise, paragraphs 87; 89; 91-99; 119-122; 138-140; 221-222

March 1 Democracy and Economic Forces
Wood, “The *demos* versus ‘We the People’”

March 6 Mid-term prep

March 8 Mid-term exam

Universality, Participation, Legitimacy – Modern Democratic Republicanism (Rousseau)

March 20 & 22 On the Basis of a Distinction Between Force and Right
The Social Contract, Bk 1, chs 1-6

March 27 Universality and the formation of a “We”

2nd Treatise, Bk 1 chs 7-9; Bk 2

April 3 & 5 Popular Sovereignty and the Institutions of Government
2nd Treatise, Bk 3, Bk 4, chs 1-2

April 10 & 12 Reaction -- Managing Majorities
Federalist Papers, selections

Progress and the Franchise – Perfectionist Representative Government (Mill)

April 17 & 19 The Value of Political Participation
On Representative Government, chs. 1-3
On Liberty, chs. 2-3

April 24 & 26 Citizenship and The Viability of Representative Government
On Representative Government, chs 4-8
Utilitarianism, chs. 2-3

May 1 Mill, discussion continued

May 3 Review