

## ***Politics 2537F: Foundations of Political Theory***

Fall 2021

*Instructors:* Dr Elizabeth Finneron-Burns ([efinnero@uwo.ca](mailto:efinnero@uwo.ca))

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*Office Hours:* During these hours, I am in my office available to meet with you to discuss the course, your progress, questions, the meaning of life, or anything else really. No need to make an appointment; just drop by!

*TAs:* Jacob Allin, Aameena Azeem, Wiley (Moragan) de Paiva,

### **Course Outline**

This course is an introduction to the study of political theory. We will address several big questions: (i) what is the purpose of the state? (ii) what does it mean to be free and what are the limits of liberty? (iii) what is equality and should we pursue it? (iv) what is justice and how is it best achieved? The focus will be on developing an understanding of the different answers to these questions, but also how to develop your own views of these matters: what do *you* think and, more importantly *why*? The emphasis throughout the course will be on critical review of the arguments provided in the readings and by your fellow students.

### **Learning Outcomes**

By the end of the course you will be able to:

- (i) Understand the major concepts, questions, and themes in the area of political theory.
- (ii) Read, understand, analyse, and evaluate academic articles in political theory.
- (iii) Formulate your own considered opinion about various issues in political theory and express it coherently in writing and orally.

### **Readings**

There are two required textbooks for the course:

*Issues in Political Theory* by McKinnon, Jubb, and Tomlin

*Writing Philosophy: A Guide for Canadian Students* by Vaughn & McIntosh

The books are available as a discounted package at the bookstore. They are also available in an electronic format.

### **Course Format**

This course is designated 'blended' meaning there is a mix of online and in person learning. Lecture videos will all be posted on OWL on a weekly basis to help you keep on track. Tutorials are intended to give you an opportunity to discuss that week's material with your peers and Teaching Assistant (TA). You can also ask any clarificatory questions and get advice on assignments, etc. From time to time we will also meet as a large group in the designated class time. These instances are indicated in the schedule below and I will send reminders in advance. If the COVID19 situation deteriorates, all in person learning may switch to Zoom.

The videos do not necessarily cover the same material that is in the readings. In some cases they further explain the reading material, and in others to provide additional information. Each week you should make sure you watch the videos *and* do the readings. The exam will cover all assigned material.

### **Assessment**

**Article Analysis – 15%**

**Term Paper – 35%**

**Tutorial Participation – 10%**

**Exam – 40%**

*Article Analysis (15%) – due **September 30, 2021 at NOON***

*If you use an SRA for this assignment, the new due date is October 3, 2021 at noon.*

*Term Paper (35%)*

Approximately 2500 words due on **November 8 at NOON**. Essay topics will be posted on the course website ('Assignments' tab) but you may also choose your own topic with help (and approval) from your TA. The essays are research projects meaning that you are expected to read beyond the scope of the syllabus. Essays should be submitted electronically through OWL.

*Tutorial Participation (10%):*

Each week, students will be expected to participate in tutorial discussions. Effective participation involves actively contributing to class exercises and discussions generated by both the TA and fellow classmates. Participation will be evaluated according to whether students have thought critically about the weekly readings and lectures, responded critically and respectfully to fellow tutorial members' points, and show an openness and willingness to consider the opinions of others and potentially change their own opinion.

*Exam (40%):*

**December 2021 – date set by Registrar.** The exam will cover material from the readings, videos, and any other content on the course website. At present, it is expected that the exam will be held in person.

### **Late Submission of Work**

Late work will incur a penalty of 5% per day or part thereof<sup>1</sup>. In extenuating circumstances, extensions may be granted, but only if arranged in **advance** of the due date. Please note that computer problems do not constitute extenuating circumstances—you are strongly advised to back up your work. If you think you may need an extension, please be in touch as early as possible.

### **Inclusivity**

The course tackles topics that may be controversial and personal to some students. Members of this class are from a variety of different academic backgrounds, races, religions, etc., so whilst robust debate is encouraged, it must be done respectfully. If there are circumstances

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<sup>1</sup> This means that if the assignment is due at 11:00am on January 1, submitting it at 11:01am January 1 and 10:59 January 2 will receive a 5% penalty. It also means that submitting it at 11:01am January 2 incurs a 10% penalty.

that might affect your performance in this class, please let me know as soon as possible so that we can discuss strategies to accommodate your needs. This includes discussing whether some topics on the syllabus are particularly sensitive for you.

### **Workflow**

Each week's readings, lectures, and other materials will be posted on the OWL site under the Course Content tab and further divided by week. There will also be some optional synchronous Zoom sessions covering topics like essay writing, exam prep, etc. These are highlighted in the schedule below.

### **Schedule**

Video lectures will be posted on OWL. All readings are listed in the relevant week's page on OWL. Links are provided for readings that are not in the textbooks.

#### **Week 1 – What is political theory and how do we do it (well)?**

**\*\*\*no tutorials\*\*\***

Readings: *Issues in Political Theory*, p. 1-5  
*Ethics & World Politics*, ch. 1  
*Writing Philosophy*, p. 6-9 and ch. 2

#### **Week 2 – State legitimacy, political obligation, civil disobedience**

Readings: *Issues in Political Theory*, ch. 1  
Plato, *Crito*  
Martin Luther King Jr, *Letter from a Birmingham Jail*

#### **Week 3 – When can the state punish us? What makes a good citizen?**

Sept 23 12:30pm – optional synchronous Zoom session regarding the Article Analysis assignment

Readings: *Issues in Political Theory*, ch. 3  
Andy Mason, *Living Together as Equals*, ch. 1

#### **Week 4 – What are rights?**

Readings: *Issues in Political Theory*, ch. 11

**\*\*ARTICLE ANALYSIS DUE\*\***

#### **Week 5 – What does it mean to be free?**

Readings: *Issues in Political Theory*, ch. 2  
*Introduction to Political Philosophy*, p. 277-284  
Jeremy Waldron, "Homelessness and the Issue of Freedom"

#### **Week 6 – Free speech and hate speech**

**\*\*\*no tutorials\*\*\***

Readings: J. S. Mill, *On Liberty*, ch. 2

David Boonin, *Should Race Matter?* Ch. 6 and 7

**Week 7 – What should we try to equalise?**

Readings: *Issues in Political Theory*, p. 117-126

Will Kymlicka, *Contemporary Political Philosophy*, p. 75-87

Adam Swift, *Political Philosophy*, part 3

**Week 8 - Reasons for valuing equality; alternatives to egalitarianism**

Oct 28 12:30pm – optional synchronous Zoom session on essay writing

Readings: Elizabeth Anderson, “What’s the Point of Equality?” p. 312-end

Carina Fourie, “What is Enough?” ch. 1

**\*\*\*READING WEEK\*\*\***

**Week 9 – What is justice? Does justice require maximising happiness?**

**\*\*TERM PAPER DUE\*\***

Readings: *Utilitarianism: A Very Short Introduction*, p. 65-74 and ch. 4 and 5

**Week 10 – John Rawls and G.A. Cohen**

Readings: John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, p. 7-22, 60-65, 75-90, 136-142, 150-161

**Week 11 – Feminist and racial critiques of Rawls**

Charles Mills, *Black Rights/White Wrongs*, ch. 9

Susan Moller Okin, *Justice, Gender and the Family*

**Week 12 – Nozick and Libertarianism**

Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State and Utopia*, p. 149-164 and 167-182