POL 280: INTRODUCTION TO POLITICAL THEORY

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Class hours: T/Th S01: 10:30; S02: 12:00, E414

Course Moodle

QUESTIONS and FIELD OF INQUIRY

"How should we live together?" "Is that just?" "What is political freedom? What does it require? What threatens it?" "Is democracy a desirable – maybe, the best – political form? Why or why not?" If you've ever asked any of these questions, then you are a budding political theorist. This course aims to educate and empower that part of you. It does so by bringing you into dialogue with a selection of thinkers – from within and beyond the tradition of so-called western political thought – who reflect philosophically on these questions. Over the course of the semester, you will hone your practice of political theorizing – thinking systematically, creatively, and critically about politics or the political – in dialogue with these thinkers and your classmates.

All of these questions presume ideas about how we *do* live together. Which, in turn, means we need to think about power, i.e. how power operates, and history, i.e. how forces in and of history – language, ideas, technologies and economies, geologies and climates, beliefs – structure the current "conditions of possibility" (Kant, 1781; Foucault, 1966). Because power(s) are often most acutely felt and, arguably, understood by those at the margins, on these matters, we pay special attention to the insights of those who are diminished, excluded, and silenced in the tradition of western political thought. These voices are especially valuable not only for the critique, but also for the reconstructive, expanding and reimagining of politics/how we might/should live together, and how we might do so, what it would require.

We do all of this with the help of contemporary scholarship, and, while we emphasize the philosophical, we also keep the historical contexts in which our texts were produced in mind: the intense political instability of Renaissance Italy; the English civil wars and democratic revolutions of Europe and North America; the development of industrial capitalism and growth of individual

rights, in tandem with the consolidation of racialized slavery, expansion of empire, and the dominance of the private, patriarchal family.

GOALS, PROMISES, PRACTICES and EXPECTATIONS¹

My big goal with this course is to feed, train, and empower your inner political theorist, and to help you learn how to do the art and science of political theorizing well, that is with care, creativity, curiosity, enthusiasm, and skill – on your own and with others.

A second related goal is that your participation in this course energizes, replenishes, and fills you – rather than leaving you depleted and exhausted. To this end, a third goal is that we join in the inquiry together, with imagination, creativity, honesty, respect, and openness through earnest inquiry and adventuresome speculation.

I aim to support these goals by supplying the scaffolding, the container – most of the materials, the discussion formats, and writing prompts – but each of you will need to bring your energy, attention, playfulness, curiosity, and a willingness to try things that I hope will take you to new visions of individual and collective possibility.

A bit more concretely, in this <u>course</u> students will:

- 1. Fulfill all three <u>learning outcomes</u> for Group II of the Distribution Requirement;
- 2. Closely read and interpret texts in the so-called western tradition of political thought;
- 3. Identify, reconstruct, and critically analyze key concepts, arguments, values, and assumptions in these texts:
- 4. Develop and deploy a theoretical vocabulary to explore and respond to core political questions;
- 5. Formulate compelling questions and arguments using central concepts and approaches of political theory;
- 6. Recognize perspectives and experiences excluded from dominant theoretical frameworks and assess what is gained or lost by attending to those exclusions;
- 7. Engage with care and generosity arguments that challenge your settled assumptions and even considered judgements;
- 8. Apply theoretical ideas to concrete political issues and reflect critically on your own assumptions;

¹ I have been much aided in articulating these goals, promises, practices, and expectations by looking at the syllabuses of my colleague, <u>Joel Schlosser</u>.

9. Communicate ideas clearly and persuasively in discussion and writing, with imagination, rigor, and precision.

Everyone has a place in this classroom; everyone has something valuable and unique to contribute. It is up to all of us, as a group, to cultivate the kind of safety and trust within the classroom that open, rigorous, creative, earnest inquiry and playful speculation require. Perhaps above all else, our classroom should be a place where "error" and confusion are valued as starting points for real understanding. Furthermore, we are aided by the fact that we come to this material with different experiences, perspectives, and backgrounds; different vantage points often reveal different data. I ask you to bring to class a willingness to engage with the material and one another with respect, integrity, sincerity, and generosity.

Some of our discussions in class will involve sensitive issues and you may find some of the material upsetting. I hope that together we can foster an environment of respect, generosity and openness conducive to everyone's full and honest participation. In situations where I foresee a particularly sensitive issue, I will do my best to let everyone know ahead of time. However, it is impossible to predict person to person what might be upsetting. Therefore, I ask you to review the syllabus and speak with me if you see something that seems potentially concerning. If something arises during class, I encourage you to leave if needed, contact support resources, and come speak to me afterward about what happened. If you do not feel comfortable sharing details about your reaction to the content, that is fine; just let me know you are okay.

ACTIVITIES and ASSESSMENT

I have designed the course to promote serious, playful, and inclusive intellectual engagement with texts, ideas and each other. In addition to facilitating productive in-class discussion, the assignments are designed to help you develop your skills as a reader, researcher, writer and broad, critical and reflective thinker.

1. Reading and Contributions to Discussions

Consistent and careful preparation for class activities and thoughtful, engaged contributions to class discussions are essential steps to realizing the promises of this course.

• Reading

Disciplined but imaginative reading. This is a reading-intensive course. Readings include texts listed on this syllabus as well as one another's work. This course seeks to develop you as thoughtful, patient, imaginative, and critical readers capable of identifying multiple possible readings, examining

assumptions, and ready to interpret different kinds of arguments. Your first task is to **read** the materials with care. We will talk about reading strategies in class, but if nothing else, I strongly recommend that you use the reading questions listed on the syllabus to focus your reading. Other strategies: highlight, underline, take notes in margins or in a dedicated notebook, and always, go into the text with a question, or a concept to get your head around, or a comparison in mind. Your basic goal? To develop a "feel" for the text with concrete evidence to fuel it. From here, you can engage with the texts critically and playfully. Many of our texts are dense and multi-layered. You may need to read them more than once. I have limited the amount of reading accordingly.

Class Discussion

Engaged discussion. We will hone our practice as political philosophers by doing, which is to say, discussing and thinking about politics philosophically. To learn the tools of the tradition, the approaches to questions, the concepts and claims, you need to practice putting them into your own words, explaining them to others, and listening to others' explanations. My aim is to ensure that we are all able to participate in multiple ways in a serious (but playful) discussion.

In any case, excellent discussion -- oral or written -- requires preparation: reviewing previous class discussions, taking notes in advance of class meetings, and being present and alert as much as possible during every class meeting. Productive discussion also depends on shared commitment to norms of exchange. We will spend some time developing a statement of our shared norms in the first week of class. A starting draft can be found here for Section 1 (10:30) and here for Section 2 (12:00). Contributing to the oral discussion is particularly important as it provides an opportunity to practice (and not to perform perfected) speaking and the art of persuasion, as well as listening to and developing the arguments and analyses of your peers. I expect everyone to make at least one oral contribution to discussion in every class. Hearing all voices benefits both speakers and listeners. If speaking in class is a challenge for you, please let me know. We can work together to address the matter.

- Shared norms
 - Section F01 (affirmed)
 - Section F02 (affirmed)
- Weekly Moodle Posts (9 total*)

For 9 of 13 weeks of class – and at least once in each of Parts II through VI - I ask you to post a response to the reading to the Moodle by **8:30 am the day of class.** This is meant to be a very

low-stakes, relatively informal exercise! Try out an interpretation. Respond to a reading question from the syllabus. Identify what you think of as a key quote. Tell us how you're reading it and why you think it is important. (Never let a quote speak for itself!) Did I mention that this is a low-stakes exercise? It really is. A great place to stumble around and be playful. Try out ideas, ask the question you think is "stupid," (no such thing!), work on identifying what rubs you the right or wrong way about the material, etc. You might offer a bullet point summary of what you think of as the three most important claims of the text, or identify what you take to be a particularly perplexing line. Draw connections to other readings, the real world, or our on-going discussion. Questions for discussion or clarification are welcome. Respond to your peers' observations or questions. The aim of this exercise is to help you collect and develop your thoughts about the material, to prepare you for and to stimulate class discussion. It is also an excellent opportunity to develop ideas for your more sustained writing (and other modes of expression) projects.

*Afterthought

In lieu of 5 of the reading responses (but still spread across Parts II-VI), you may submit a brief (~150-200 words) low-stakes, only semi-formal reflection on what you learned in class that day (must be submitted by midnight, the day of class). Post these to the Reading Response thread for the day. What ideas solidified or expanded or got undone by the discussion? What strikes you as the key insight(s) of the day? What concepts or claims did you encounter for the first time or get a better grasp of or see in a new light? Maybe use this space to collect your thoughts on a particular topic. Or spell out questions you still have. Did you see connections to earlier discussions or texts or other classes? What about the real world? How/did the discussion shed light on concerns you have about the real world? Or, is there something in the real world that you think sheds important light on the ideas we're discussing?

The **goals** of this exercise: a) to support a practice of collecting and organizing your thoughts on our topic as they develop in response to our inquiry. This has many benefits. One is that it sets you up for actively engaging whatever comes next. Another is that it can help you identify a focus for, e.g. your next writing assignment or final project. Another goal: b) to help me track where your thinking is going, so that I can respond to it in facilitating class.

2. Sustained Writing and Presentation Exercises

Frequent and varied writing. This course begins from the premise that reading and writing (and potentially other modes of disciplined expression) are deeply intertwined; because writing cements understanding, this course asks that you write in response to most of the assigned readings. This

writing comes in the form of your weekly reading responses, feedback on peers' writing, and your own essays.

The writing assignments are designed to enable you to:

- o build your writing and analytical skills one step at a time;
- o demonstrate close reading and understanding of assigned texts;
- o practice the arts of rational reconstruction, critical analysis, and sustained argument;
- improve your own writing and thinking through giving and receiving feedback and revising drafts.

In addition to the uber-low stakes writing of the weekly Moodle Posts (see above), chief among your writing projects are three short essays* that you will prepare during the course of the semester: a critical summary (500-750 words), a critical analysis and application (750-1000 words) and a final presentation and paper (1000-1500). Each of these assignments involves at least two steps, some peer-work, and a personal reflection. We will discuss each in detail at least a week before the first step is due. *For the last two assignments, alternatives to the essay format are invited.

- a. Critical Summary instructions
- b. Critical Analysis instructions
- c. Final Project instructions

These are my general criteria for assessing writing in this class.

Please use the <u>Chicago Manual of Style "author-date"</u> style as the guide for your citations and works cited.

I provide substantial written and oral feedback on all aspects of your participation in this course (outlined above). I have built this feedback and your ongoing engagement with it into the assignments. I strongly encourage you to visit me IRL, in my office. No better way to deepen our collaboration in thinking about how to live well together. On this note, you may choose one of the first two substantial written assignments for a "paper conference." In lieu of written feedback. Just indicate that you are choosing this option in your reflection and sign up for 30 minutes in my next office hours.

POLICIES and RESOURCES

<u>Academic Support</u>: I strongly encourage all students to take advantage of the resources available through the Office of Academic Support, and especially if you need extra help with study habits, note-taking, or time and stress management strategies that are essential to success in this course and

college life. You may also want to take advantage of the weekly free hour of tutoring available upon request.

Access and Accommodations: I aim to create a learning experience that is as accessible as possible. If you anticipate any issues related to the format, materials, or requirements of this course, please meet with me outside of class so we can explore potential options. Students with disabilities may also wish to work with Disability and Accessibility Resources to discuss a range of options to removing barriers in this course, including official accommodations. If you have already been approved for accommodations through Disability & Accessibility Resources for the current semester, please meet with me so we can develop an implementation plan together.

AI in Class. See here for my evolving guidelines and expectations on use of this emerging technology. I welcome feedback.

Attendance. Class is where most of our work as a community of learners happens, so it's important that you attend regularly and arrive on time. Bluntly, attendance is an essential, mandatory, required component of this course.

That said, I understand that on occasion it is necessary to miss a conference due to illness, family emergency, or other obligations. Everyone gets three misses to use as you wish. Those with more than three absences in a semester risk failing the course.

Communication: I will use email (often via Moodle) to post important announcements about the course. Please be sure to check your Reed email at least once a day so that you will see these messages. You can reach me via email for all sorts of questions, but I also strongly encourage you to come talk with me during office hours to discuss your work in progress (if you can't make my posted office hours, just email me and suggest a few alternative times for an appointment). Doing political theory well can be hard. If you find yourself frustrated or struggling, please don't despair, and please don't keep your struggles to yourself. A quick (or long) conversation can often be the best way out of a research quagmire, so please keep me informed of what you're up to. (You are also welcome to drop by if you have made a particularly exciting discovery or lit upon an especially interesting idea that you just have to share with someone.)

Comportment. A productive learning community, like -- I venture -- democratic politics, depends on shared norms. We will spend some time in class developing a statement of those norms, or, if you prefer, the terms of our social contract. You can see here what I've drafted to get us started. I ask you to be generous with yourself, your classmates, and me as we work through challenging material together; productive conversations are always based in language that is imperfect and wander

through ideas that are not yet refined. The best conference is one in which we listen to and support each other as we together seek to articulate our ideas, uncover new questions, and try out new thoughts. If you have any concerns or questions about conference conversations, please talk to me.

Electronic devices. They should be used only for class purposes. Please keep laptops closed and tablets down when they are not actively being used for note-taking or consultation of readings/notes. Phones should not be used to consult course readings and should remain in silent/do not disturb modes.

English Language Statement: Reed welcomes students from around the country and the world, and their unique perspectives enrich our learning community. To support students whose primary language is not English, the College offers an array of support services. For more information, check out this webpage or contact Dustin Simpson (dsimpson@reed.edu) directly.

Deadlines. Deadlines are a practical tool for both students and faculty: they help you plan your semester and manage your time, and they help me ensure timely feedback across all assignments for all students. They also help with a kind of parity: everyone has the same amount of time to complete assignments. Most importantly, perhaps, they comport with a core fact about writing: it is about practicing the art of the possible, not about perfection or comprehensiveness. Writing is a matter of putting together your best attempt to state your claims and back them up, in the context of finite amounts of time, limited information, constraints on length, and imperfect understanding. This is a crucial skill that you will practice in Pol 280. Finally, the writing exercises for this course are carefully sequenced and often involve peer exchange. For these reasons, meeting deadlines – though arbitrary in some sense – is an important part of succeeding in this class. I expect that you use this syllabus, which you have been provided ahead of time, to plan effectively so that you can complete all assignments and turn them in on time.

That said, I know that life sometimes gets in the way. To accommodate this, each of you may request one 48-hour or two 24 hour-extensions on any writing assignment that is not due in class on a particular day during the term, no questions asked (e.g., you don't have to have a "good" reason for requesting one). To request an extension simply send me an email at least one day before the assignment is due.

Beyond this standard extension, if you are unable to turn in an assignment on time, I'd like to meet with you to understand what's going on and how I can best support you. Because every exercise is an important aspect of your learning in this class, we will discuss when you will turn in the assignment as well as decide upon an acceptable consequence for your turning it in late.

Library: Ann Matsushima Chiu (chiua@reed.edu) the Social Science Librarian, can help with questions about research and technology. She is extremely helpful and knowledgeable. Do not hesitate to turn to her!

Honor and Integrity. I am committed to adhering to the standards regarding academic honesty contained in the honor principle and the values of mutual trust, concern, and respect for oneself and for others upon which the Reed community depends. In class, give your undivided attention to others. If you don't agree with what someone else has to say, you are encouraged to express your point of view, but do so respectfully, and support your claims with textual evidence. In your written work, follow the conventions of appropriate citation for the humanities/social sciences. For my courses, I ask you to use *The Chicago Manual of Style* author-date style.

Reading. Please have the day's texts available to you during conference in either hardcopy or on a laptop or tablet as well as your notes and any questions or ideas you may have from reading it. You should follow our <u>conference Moodle</u> as your guide to our readings. Please note that required texts are all available on reserve at the library, and the bookstore also offers the option of renting books for the semester.

Social Media. Ah, social media. There appears to be an increasing tendency at Reed, and surely other colleges and universities, toward "meta-conference"—that is, commentary, often critical in tone, about class discussion or class members via social media platforms—particularly in courses that deal explicitly with politics and race, gender, sexuality, or other social identity issues. This can have a chilling effect on class discussion. After numerous conversations with students, colleagues and staff at Reed and beyond, I have decided against imposing any policy per se, but my hope is that we keep our discussion off of social media. Our goal is a classroom environment where we are able to talk to, listen to, respond to, and learn from each other face-to-face and with a spirit of generosity, especially when honestly, if at times clumsily, engaging difficult topics.

Writing Center. The Writing Center offers free appointments and experienced peer tutors who are there to help you at any stage of the writing process. I strongly encourage even experienced writers to take advantage of these services. For more information, start here:

http://www.reed.edu/writing/. Also, I can make specific recommendations for tutors who have taken classes with me before and thus are likely to be especially helpful.

LAND ACKNOWLEDGMENT

In line with the themes of this course, I wish to acknowledge that Reed College sits on the traditional homelands of the Clackamas and Cowlitz peoples. The history of this present is, of course, littered with unmitigated injustice and brutality.

TEXTS

In my ideal world, we'd be fully analog, hardcopy with the texts for this course. Ah, but the world is not my ideal. So, much of what we'll read is available online via the library e-reserves, all linked to this syllabus and to the course Moodle.

You should have the day's texts available to you during conference either in hardcopy or on a laptop or tablet as well as your notes and any questions or ideas you may have from reading it. Follow our <u>conference Moodle</u> as your guide to our readings.

Required books, for purchase or rent at the bookstore and on reserve at the library:

- Niccolo Machiavelli, Machiavelli: Selected Political Writings, Hackett, Wootton, ed.
- John Locke, Second Treatise of Government, Hackett, Macpherson, ed.
- Jean Jacque Rousseau, The Social Contract, Hackett, Cress, trans., Wootton, ed.

Readings from these books are marked with an asterisk (*) below.

SCHEDULE: THEMES & READINGS

Part I	Introduction	
T, 9/2	How should we live – and learn – together?	 The US Declaration of Independence Frederick Douglass, "The Meaning of July Fourth for the Negro"

- Elizabeth Stanton, <u>Declaration of Sentiments</u>
 Sojourner Truth, "<u>Ain't I A Woman?</u>" performed by
- Kerry Washington

 Meghan O'Rourke "I Teach Creative Writing This is
- Meghan O'Rourke, "<u>I Teach Creative Writing. This is</u> <u>What A.I. is Doing.</u>"
- Draft social contract (<u>S01</u>) or (<u>S02</u>)

Questions:

 How do you think we should live together? How/do these texts help spell out that vision? Or fall short? Why? What is political freedom (according to you and to these texts)? What does it require? What threatens

- political freedom? What do these different theories assume, miss, misunderstand, over/understate?
- What do you want to get out of our precious time together? What would support this goal? What would interfere with it?

Activities:

- Start annotating your syllabus (<u>instructions</u>). Final version due via Moodle at 10am Friday, 9/5.
- Sign up for your (free) subscription to the New York Times, Wall Street Journal, and Financial Times through the Reed library.

*Discourses on Livy, Book I: Preface; Chapters 1–13, 32,

Th, 9/4	What is political theory?	 Sheldon Wolin, Politics and Vision: Political Philosophy and Philosophy (4-26). John Dryzek, Bonnie Honig, Anne Phillips, "What is Political Theory?" (4-11). bell hooks, "Theory as Liberatory Practice."
		Activities:
		• Contribute to our social contract (<u>S01</u>) or (<u>S02</u>)
Part II	Machiavelli and Modern Freedom	
T, 9/9	Fortuna, Virtu, and the New Science of Politics	• *Niccolo Machiavelli, <i>The Prince</i> , Chapters 1-14 (5-47).
Th, 9/11	Gender, In/Justice, and the Responsibility of Politics	 *The Prince, Chapters 15-26 (47-77) (optional) Hanna Fenichel Pitkin, "Meditations on Machiavelli," (49-93)

34, 55, 58.

T, 9/16

Republican Liberty

Th, 9/18	Corruption, Conflict, and Institutions	• *Discourses on Livy, Book II: Preface; Chapters 3, 19, 27, 29; Book III: Chapters 1, 3, 9, 31, 34.
T, 9/23	Digest and Write Day	• <u>Instructions</u>
Friday, 9/26	Critical Summary due via Moodle at 12pm	• Critical Summary (<u>instructions</u>)
Part III	Consent and the Political Freedom of Possessive Individuals	
Th, 9/25		• *John Locke, Second Treatise of Government, Chapters. I-VI (7-42)
T, 9/30	Critical Analysis of Locke	 Re-read Second Treatise of Government, chapter V. Barbara Arneil, "The Wild Indian's Venison: Locke's Theory of Property and English Colonialism in America."
Th, 10/2	Research and Citation Day	• <u>Instructions</u>
Friday, 10/3	Mini Annotated Bibliography due via Moodle at 12pm	• MAB (<u>instructions</u>)
T, 10/7		• *Second Treatise of Government, Chapters VII-XII
Th, 10/9		 *Second Treatise of Government, XIII-XIV, XVII-XIX The US Declaration of Independence
S, 10/12	Proposal for Critical Analysis due at 5pm on Moodle.	Critical Analysis, including proposal (<u>instructions</u>)
T, 10/14	Commentary on the Social Contract Tradition	 Charles Mills, <i>The Racial Contract</i>, <u>Introduction; Chapter 1</u> Carole Pateman, <u>The Sexual Contract</u>, Chapter 3 NOTE: Half of you have been assigned to read each reading. For assignments, see here: <u>Section 01</u> and <u>Section 02</u>.

Th, 10/16	Digest and Write Day	• <u>Instructions</u>
S, 10/18	Critical Analysis due at 5pm	
10/18-26	FALL BREAK	
Part IV	Democratic Sovereignty, Active Citizens, and the General Will	
T, 10/28		• *Jean Jacques Rousseau, On the Social Contract, Book I
Th, 10/30		• *On the Social Contract, Book II
T, 11/4		• *On the Social Contract, Book III.i-iv, vi.paragraphs 1-5; ix-xviii.
		 Activities: Be prepared to a) share (in a small group) a visual representation of the argument or some part of itin III.i, and b) connect the argument in that chapter to one other in Book III. Review instructions for final project.
Th, 11/6		• *On the Social Contract, Book IV.i-iii, vii-ix
Part V	Constitutional Democracy in the Afterlives of Slavery	
T, 11/11		 W.E.B. DuBois, Souls of Black Folk, (1903) Forethought, Chapters 1 and 2. Optional: Cornel West, "The Historical Philosophy of W.E.B. DuBois," Dartmouth College, Summer 2017, lectures (especially, 1 and 2).

		Useful (but painful) context: Equal Justice Initiative, <u>Reconstruction in America: Racial Violence After the Civil War.</u>
Th, 11/13, 5-6:30 PM	Attendance expected. No class at regular time.	 Danielle Allen, Greenberg Distinguished Scholar Lecture: "Renovating Democracy for the 21st Century" Allen, "Bear Trap Essays" (with reading questions)
S, 11/15	Proposals for final project due at 5pm	Details of final project, including proposal
T, 11/18		 Darkwater: Voices From Within the Veil, "Of the Ruling of Men." Optional: Robert Gooding-Williams, "Abolition Democracy: On DuBois and Davis," Columbia University, October 2020.
Th, 11/20		 Darkwater: Voices From Within the Veil, "Souls of White Folk," "Damnation of Women." Optional: "W.E.B. Du Bois and Intersectionality: Reiland Rabaka in conversation with Elvira Basevich," On Philosophy Lecture Series, Spring 2021.
T, 11/25	Digest and Write Day	• <u>Details</u>
Th, 11/27	THANKSGIVING	
T, 12/2	Abolition Democracy	 Angela Davis, "Abolition Democracy." Re-read Douglass, "<u>The Meaning of 4th of July</u>" <u>The US Declaration of Independence</u>

•	Optional: "Abolition Democracy: On DuBois and
	Davis," Columbia University, October 2020.

Th, 12/4	Class Symposium	• <u>Details</u>
T, 12/9	Class Symposium	• <u>Details</u>
F, 12/12	Final Project due at 5pm	• <u>Details</u>