

**POLS V1013. 01 – POLITICAL THEORY**

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POLS V1013. 01  
M W 10:35-11:50 am  
328 Milbank Hall

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**INTRODUCTION**

This introductory political theory course is designed to help us become more critical political thinkers and more reflective political actors by addressing some of the most fundamental questions about politics: What do we mean when we invoke terms such as “politics” and “political action”? How can democratic citizens make informed judgments about the problems that confront them? What is the impact of socioeconomic inequality on political equality? In what ways can individual liberties work not only as guarantees of freedom but also as obstacles to it? How can we understand the persistence of gender inequalities despite all the historic transformations regarding women’s rights?

The course is divided into five thematic sections, each addressing an enduring political question or issue and centered on a key text in the history of political thought:

1. Meaning of Political Action – Sophocles, *Antigone*
2. Challenges of Democratic Citizenship – Plato, *Republic*
3. Origins and Effects of Inequality – John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*
4. Paradoxes of Freedom – Jean Jacques Rousseau, *On the Social Contract*
5. The “Woman Question” – John Stuart Mill, *The Subjection of Women*

Although these are our key texts, we will be working on them with a set of other required texts, including selections from the works of other canonical figures in the history of political thought as well as contributions from some contemporary theorists (e.g. Hannah Arendt, Simone de Beauvoir, Benjamin Constant, Robert Dahl, Karl Marx, Joan Scott).

Our goal is to read and assess these texts as political interventions – i.e. texts that have grappled with and changed the terms of the debate at the time of their writing *and* can help us understand, rethink and rearticulate the terms of our contemporary debates. In other words, as we develop our own interpretations and critical assessments of these works, we will be aiming at seeking meaningful connections to the most challenging questions and pressing problems of our own time regarding political action, democracy, equality, freedom, and gender.



## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

This course aims to develop students' capacity to think, discuss, and write knowledgeably about some of the most challenging problems or issues addressed by a range of political thinkers. It also aims to help students become more reflective and conversant citizens by inquiring into and contextualizing their own political views and values. We will achieve these objectives by close reading, intensive writing, and active learning.

### Close reading:

We will be reading some of the most challenging texts of political theory. The workload of the class is structured to allow you enough time to read them carefully. You should do the reading assignment for each class session on time; and after each class session, please go over the assigned text again especially by focusing on the sections discussed in class.

### Intensive writing:

This course is structured around several writing assignments that support the close study of texts, create opportunities for structured classroom discussion, and enhance skills of critical thinking and clear, concise, cogent writing. Compared to exams, these writing assignments equip students better with interpretative and deliberative skills. If you are having trouble with writing, please do not hesitate to contact the staff at the Erica Mann Jong Writing Center (currently in 18 Milbank); you can sign up for an appointment at <http://www.barnard.columbia.edu/writing/writingcenter.html>. Columbia students are welcome to use the Writing Center for papers assigned in this course. For further information on writing resources at Barnard College and helpful strategies for writing assignments, please check <http://www.barnard.columbia.edu/english/writing.html>.

### Active learning:

The course attributes a crucial significance to students' active engagement in the success of the learning process. To enable active learning in this large class (approximately 80 students), we will have several activities that will provide you with opportunities to clarify, question, and consolidate new knowledge on a regular basis. Participatory learning strategies in this class will range from spontaneous activities, including in-class writing, to structured group discussions before and after writing assignments. You will be given details about the goals and guidelines of each of these activities in advance.



## READINGS

The required readings include five books and some additional materials that will be available online.

### Books:

📖 Sophocles, *The Three Theban Plays: Antigone, Oedipus the King, Oedipus at Colonus*, trans. Robert Fagles (Penguin, 1984)

📖 Plato, *Republic*, trans. G.M.A. Grube (Hackett, 1992)

📖 John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, ed. C. B. Macpherson (Hackett, 1980)

📖 Jean Jacques Rousseau, *On the Social Contract*, trans. Donald A. Cress (Hackett, 1988)

📖 John Stuart Mill, *The Subjection of Women*, ed. Susan Moller Okin (Hackett, 1988)

These books can be purchased at **Book Culture** (536 W. 112<sup>th</sup> St., 212-865-1588). They are also available on reserve at Barnard Library.

I strongly encourage you to buy the books; the editions I ordered are very affordable. There are several other editions of these well-known texts; however, you should read these editions. Since we will be engaging in close textual reading, you should bring the assigned reading to class. One advantage of buying the editions listed here is that they are very light and easy to carry around. It is extremely important for all of us to have the listed editions of these works; this will help us follow references to these texts during lectures and discussions and to be on the same page. In addition, you are required to use these editions for your citations in your writing assignments.

### **Online readings:**

Additional required readings, which are marked as “CW” in the Course Calendar below, will be available for download on Courseworks – please check <https://courseworks.columbia.edu/> for regular updates.



### **OFFICE HOURS**

Monday, 1-3 pm  
416-A Lehman Hall  
Phone: 212-854-4036

I strongly encourage you to make use of these office hours for purposes of discussing all matters pertaining to the course. If you can't make my office hours, please do not hesitate to e-mail me to set up an appointment.

We have two teaching assistants who look forward to working with you: Julia Maskivker and Yaël Hirsch. They will be holding regular office hours. Please see their contact information and office hours at the top of the first page of this syllabus, and I strongly encourage you to make use of their office hours as well. Please e-mail them if you can't make their office hours to set up an appointment.



### **ACCESSIBILITY**

Students with disabilities who will be taking this course and may need disability-related accommodations are encouraged to make an appointment to see me as soon as possible. Disabled

students who need accommodations related to assignments and/or classroom must be registered in advance with the Office of Disability Services (ODS) in 105 Hewitt.



## COURSE EXPECTATIONS

1. Read the syllabus thoroughly; you are responsible for all of its contents.
2. Read assigned texts in time for their presentation in class; lectures will complement, not substitute for, the assigned readings. Come prepared with questions or issues to discuss.
3. Regular class attendance is imperative. Attend class and participate actively, in ways that are constructive and respectful of me as well as your classmates.
4. Attend all the required discussion sessions that are indicated on your syllabus and will be held during the regular class time. I also encourage you to attend the optional sessions on writing assignments; they will significantly improve your writing.
5. Come to class on time and remain for the entire session; if for some reason you have to be late one day or must leave early, please tell me in advance, and then arrive/depart as unobtrusively as possible.
6. Please turn off all electronic and other modes of communication before the class starts. Because of extreme potential for distraction, no laptops are allowed in class. Exceptions can be made only if you have notified me of an individual need to be accommodated due to a disability.
7. Complete three microthemes on time.
8. Complete two persuasive essays on time.
9. Submit in-class writing assignments to demonstrate your attendance and participation.



## ASSIGNMENTS

You will have several different types of writing assignments, and I have structured them in ways progressing from simple to more complex forms of critical reasoning. Hence, each writing assignment will be building on the previous one.

### **Microthemes:**

A microtheme is a short writing assignment (400-500 word – approximately 1 ½ - 2 pages, double spaced) that develops students' skills of reading comprehension and interpretive analysis, gives practice in understanding and formulating arguments, and prepares students to write critical essays of their own. There will be three microtheme assignments in this course, and each of these assignments is geared towards a specific purpose.

Your first assignment is a “summary-writing microtheme,” which aims to develop your ability to understand a complex text, identify its central arguments, and communicate them clearly and accurately. This assignment will prepare you for the next two assignments, which can be described as “thesis-support microthemes.”

The second assignment will provide you with a specific thesis statement and ask you to either defend or criticize it. The goal here is to develop your analytical skills of defending or criticizing a position clearly and persuasively by providing textual evidence and support.

The third microtheme assignment will pose you a question and ask you to formulate and support your own thesis statement. This third assignment shares the goals of the second. In addition, it aims to develop your skills of formulating a clearly and cogently articulated thesis or argument and prepares you for writing a persuasive essay.

### **Persuasive Essays:**

You will have two persuasive essay assignments that aim at developing your skills of close reading, argumentation and critical thinking. These persuasive essays are 4 or 5 pages long (double spaced). They build on the skills that you develop by working on your microtheme assignments; yet, they are also different from microthemes in certain respects. In a persuasive essay you are expected to take a position on an assigned question by articulating a clear and cogent thesis or argument and defending your position with specific references to assigned texts. In other words, as you are making a persuasive case for your position in your own words, you will be drawing on and critically engaging with the authors we read. These essays are not merely summaries of assigned readings. In addition to skills of reading comprehension, you need to demonstrate your analytical skills especially by anticipating probable counter-arguments that challenge your position and giving reasons to support your argument. You are expected to engage with more than one author in these persuasive essays, oftentimes comparing different theoretical works and critically assessing their relative strengths and weaknesses.

### **In-class Writing:**

We will regularly have in-class writing assignments for the purposes of clarifying concepts and issues, summarizing main points, stimulating discussion, and brainstorming. You will be given a question relevant to that day's reading and/or lecture and will be provided with index cards to write your answers. These in-class writing exercises are the indicators of your attendance and participation. If you just put down your name on the index card, you will get points for attendance; if you provide a meaningful answer to the question asked you will also get participation points. Your answer should show that you have been attentive in class and that you are prepared to effectively participate in class discussions.



## **GRADING**

Grades will be based on Barnard College's grade definitions, which establish the qualities of performance expected at different grade levels. Please see the section on grading system in Academic Policies and Procedures, available online at <http://www.barnard.columbia.edu/catalog/pol/grades.php>

For each assignment you will have a letter grade; however, in calculating your final grade, I add up the points that you received from each assignment. Thus the letter grades assigned to your assignments do not cancel out the point-grades assigned.

All the assignments, attendance, and participation add up to **1000 points total**, and below you can find a more detailed account of the grading distribution according to each assignment.

**1<sup>st</sup> microtheme: 100 points (10 %)**

**2<sup>nd</sup> microtheme: 150 points (15 %)**

**3<sup>rd</sup> microtheme: 150 points (15 %)**

**1<sup>st</sup> persuasive essay: 200 points (20 %)**

**2<sup>nd</sup> persuasive essay: 250 points (25 %)**

**Attendance and participation: 150 points (15 %)**

\* There are ten in-class writing assignments. Each in-class writing assignment is worth 10 points (you will get 5 points for putting down your name and 5 points for providing a meaningful answer to the question).

\* You will have 50 points for attending and participating in all of the required discussion sessions listed on the syllabus; there are five of them throughout the semester, each qualifying you for 10 attendance/participation point.

[NOTE: There will be some additional but optional discussion sessions that you will have with your TAs. You will be notified of the date and time of these optional sessions in advance; please check the Courseworks regularly for updates. These optional discussion sessions will not have a direct effect on your grade since they do not aim to evaluate your attendance or participation; instead, they aim to help you with your writing assignments. Although you will not be penalized for not attending these sessions, I strongly encourage you to attend them since we will not be discussing issues specifically related to writing in class. These sessions will improve your writing significantly and help you get a better grade on the assignment].

\* **20 bonus points:** You will have 2 extra in-class writing assignments. The purpose is to give an opportunity to those of you who miss an in-class assignment to make up for the points lost and to reward those students who attend and participate on a regular basis (i.e. not missing a single in-class assignment or discussion). Please notice that there are only two extra in-class assignments, which means you should not miss more than two class sessions if you want to make sure that you qualify for full attendance and participation points.



## **COURSE POLICIES**

### **Extensions and Absences:**

Completion of all assignments on time is a necessary condition for passing this course. I urge you to check the due dates on the weekly schedule and submit all assignments on time to avoid late penalties. Please note that all the assignments need to be submitted at the beginning of the class session that they are due. Since these assignments will provide us with the basis for our in-class discussion, they are of little use if you do not submit them on time and attend class the day they are due. Your microthemes will lose 10 points if you missed the class on the assigned day, or did not

come to class with the finished paper in hand; they will lose 5 points for every additional day (including weekend) they are late. Your persuasive essays will lose 20 points if you missed the class on the assigned day, or did not come to class with the finished paper in hand; they will lose 10 points for every additional day (including weekend) they are late.

Extensions will be given only in the case of documented illness, family emergency, or other crisis situation (please bring any form of documentation available). Should you run into problems regarding your ability to complete any particular course requirements during the semester, you should contact me or your TAs before the assignment is due. Please note, however, that extensions and incompletes are neither automatic nor presumed to be options in this course.

### **Incompletes:**

I do not grant incompletes except under the most extraordinary of circumstances; please manage your schedule to hand in all assignments on time.

### **Grade Disputes:**

I will be supervising all the grading in this class, and I will be working with your TAs cooperatively to determine a set of standardized grading guidelines. There will be written comments on your assignment as well as an attached grading rubric to give you a clear idea about these standardized guidelines and to clarify the reasons why you were given a particular grade.

However, if you have any problems with the grade that you are assigned and believe that you indeed deserve a better grade, you need to write down why you think so, and send or bring this to the TA that graded your assignment as soon as possible (no later than 48 hours after you receive your graded assignment). Please do not forget to bring the graded assignment with you and the attached grading rubric as you come to discuss your grade with your TA. If you remain unsatisfied, you are welcome to discuss the matter with me; please do not forget to bring your written request, graded assignment, and the attached grading rubric. You should be aware that a change in grade is very unlikely precisely because I will be supervising the grading of your assignments very closely.

I think the students should have a right to discuss their grade with the instructor, and should not be punished for doing so. Thus your grade will not go down in case you cannot provide your TAs or me with a good reason for why you deserve a better grade.

### **Academic Honesty:**

All students taking this course must adhere to the Barnard College honor code, regardless of their academic affiliation. The honor code considers it “dishonest to ask for, give, or receive help in examinations or quizzes, to use any papers or books not authorized by the instructor in examinations, or to present oral work or written work which is not entirely our own, unless otherwise approved by the instructor.” If in doubt about any of these provisions or you would like to discuss these matters further, please seek help from me and your TAs.



## COURSE CALENDAR AND SCHEDULE OF ASSIGNMENTS

9/3 Introduction to POLS V1013. 01 (No reading)

### I. Meaning of Political Action

9/8 Sophocles, *Antigone* (read the entire play)

9/10 Sophocles, *Antigone* (cont.)

9/15 Hannah Arendt, "Civil Disobedience," pp. 51-81. [In *Crises of the Republic*, New York: Harcourt Brace Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1972]. \*CW

9/17 Arendt, "Civil Disobedience," pp. 82-102.

Martin Luther King, "Letter from Birmingham Jail." Available online at [http://www.stanford.edu/group/King/popular\\_requests/frequentdocs/birmingham.pdf](http://www.stanford.edu/group/King/popular_requests/frequentdocs/birmingham.pdf)

9/22 🍄 **Discussion:** How and why do we describe certain forms of action as "political"? In what ways does *Antigone* help us understand how certain forms of action become "political"? Why is "civil disobedience," as defined by Arendt and illustrated by Martin Luther King's "Letter from Birmingham Jail," important for politics, and what does it tell us about "political action"?

📅 **First microtheme due 9/22, 10:35 am.**

### II. Challenges of Democratic Citizenship

9/24 Plato, *Republic*, Book I and II (pp. 1-59)

9/29 Plato, *Republic*, Book III (pp. 88-93 → 412b-417b\*), Book IV (pp. 94-121), Book V (pp. 122-149 → 449a-474c)  
[\*Stephanus Number in the margin of the text]

10/1 Plato, *Republic*, Book VI (pp. 157-176 → 484b-502e), Book VII (pp. 186-193 → 514a-521c), Book VIII (pp. 213-240)

10/6 Robert Dahl, selections from *Democracy and Its Critics*, pp. 52-79 [New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989]. \*CW

Gianpaolo Baiocchi, "The Citizens of Porto Alegre," *Boston Review*, vol. 31, no. 2 (March/April 2006), pp. 7-9. \*CW

10/8 🍄 **Discussion:** What can we learn from Plato's critique of democracy about the challenges of democratic citizenship? What are some of the political possibilities of addressing these challenges and becoming more engaged citizens in contemporary democracies? Does Plato help us come up with or imagine some of these political possibilities? If so, how?

📖 **Second microtheme due 10/8, 10:35 am.**

### III. Origins and Effects of Inequality

10/13 John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, Preface and Chapters 1-6 (pp. 5-42)

10/15 Locke, *Second Treatise*, Chapters 7-14 (pp. 42-88)

10/20 Locke, *Second Treatise*, Chapters 15-19 (pp. 88-124)

10/22 Karl Marx, selections from *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*, pp. 322-334 and 345-358 [In *Early Writings*, trans. Rodney Livingstone and Gregor Benton, New York: Penguin, 1975]  
\*CW

10/27 Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*, pp. 358-379.

Task Force on Inequality and American Democracy, “American Democracy in an Age of Rising Inequality” (American Political Science Association, 2004). \*CW

10/29 🗨️ **Discussion:** What is the impact of socioeconomic inequality on political equality? What are some of the challenges posed by embedded socioeconomic inequalities to the actualization of the political ideal of equal rights? To what extent can Locke and/or Marx help us understand, and respond to, some of these challenges in the contemporary political context?

📖 **Third microtheme due 10/29, 10:35 am.**

### IV. Paradoxes of Freedom

11/3 No class – Academic holiday

11/5 Rousseau, *On the Social Contract*, Books I and II (pp. 17-48)

11/10 Rousseau, *On the Social Contract*, Book III (Chapters 1, 3-6, 10-15 → pp. 49-52, 54-62, 68-76) and Book IV (Chapters 1-3, 8-9 → pp. 79-84, 96-103).

11/12 Rousseau (cont.)

Benjamin Constant, “The Liberty of the Ancients Compared with that of the Moderns,” pp. 307-328 [In *Political Writings*, ed. and tr. Biancamaria Fontana, Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988]. \*CW

11/ 17 Constant (cont.)

Dana Villa, “Introduction: Public Freedom Today,” pp. 1-20  
[In *Public Freedom*, Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2008]. \*CW

**11/19** 🗨️ **Discussion:** What are some of the tensions between individual liberties and public freedom? In what ways can individual liberties work not only as guarantees of public freedom but also as obstacles to it? Do Rousseau, Constant, and Villa help us navigate, if not reconcile, the tensions between individual liberties and public freedom, and if so, how?

📄 **First persuasive essay due 11/19, 10:35 am.**

## V. The “Woman Question”

**11/24** John Stuart Mill, *The Subjection of Women*, Chapters 1 and 2

**11/26** Mill, *The Subjection of Women*, Chapters 3 and 4

**12/1** Simone de Beauvoir, selections from *The Second Sex*, pp. 597-628 (trans. and ed. H. M. Parshley, New York: Vintage, 1989; reprint of the 1953 ed.) \*CW

Joan W. Scott, “Sears Case,” pp. 167-177 [In *Gender and the Politics of History*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1988]. \*CW

**12/3** 🗨️ **Discussion:** In what ways does gender inequality continue to be an enduring problem despite all the historic transformations regarding women’s rights? How do Mill, de Beauvoir, and Scott help us understand this enduring problem? What are some of the relative strengths and weaknesses of their arguments especially when critically assessed in the light of contemporary problems and questions related to gender inequalities?

📄 **Second persuasive essay due 12/3, 10:35 am.**

**12/8** Conclusion (No reading)

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