

Politics and Moral Vision

Colgate University

Instructor

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Office Hours:

T/Th 10:00-11:30 and
by appointment.



Class

FSEM 198 A
Fall 2021

Room:

Persson Hall 6

Time: T/Th 8:30-9:45

Class Description

Politics is often disparaged as nothing more than grasping after and exercising power. Is that true? Is political life only about individuals or groups ruthlessly seeking physical or ideological dominance over one another? Or is it possible that beneath all the disagreement and competition there is a quest for true justice taking place? In that case, the aim of politics would be to exercise power *rightly* – in accordance with what is just. The meaning of true justice, however, is deeply disputed. How do different moral visions, or different conceptions of human happiness and purpose, shape our understanding of what true justice is and the ultimate end of politics? What, after all, can we know about ourselves and the best kind of life?

To begin answering these important questions, we will read and discuss together a selection of major works from across the ages, mixing our own thoughts with those of Plato, Aristotle, Thomas Hobbes, John Stuart Mill, Friedrich Nietzsche, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and others.

Required Texts

The following books are required for the class:

Plato. *Gorgias*. Translated by James Nichols. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998.

Aristotle. *Nicomachean Ethics*. Translated by Robert C. Bartlett and Susan D. Collins. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011.

Boethius. *The Consolation of Philosophy*. Translated by Victor Watts. New York: Penguin Classics, 1999.

Mill, John Stuart. *On Liberty*. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1978.

Reading Packet

Class Methodology and Requirements

The class will be a combination of lecture and discussion.

Prior to every class session, it is mandatory that each student has read the assigned readings listed for that day.

- **Participation and Attendance (5%).** Do all assigned readings listed for each day and be ready to contribute to the discussion. Unexplained absences will result in the loss of a point.
- **Two Response Papers (50%, 25% each).** These are two response papers on specific class readings.
- **Midterm Exam (20%).** A midterm exam on the materials from the first part of the class.
- **Final Exam (25%).** A final written exam focusing on the major themes of the course.

Late work will be accepted with a penalty of one grade level per day. If there is an unforeseen emergency that conflicts with your progress in the course, please contact the professor.

Grading Scale

| | |
|--------|--------|
| 93% A | 73% C |
| 90% A- | 70% C- |
| 87% B+ | 67% D+ |
| 83% B | 63% D |
| 80% B- | 60% D- |
| 77% C+ | <60% F |

Please contact the teacher at any time to discuss your progress in the course. Grades for each assignment will be posted on Moodle as they are returned.

Academic Integrity

Needless to say, plagiarism (the use of someone else's work—a couple of sentences or a whole paper—without giving them explicit credit) will not be tolerated and will result in a grade of F on any piece of class work. See the Student Handbook for details. Similarly, cheating on an exam will receive an immediate F and a referral to the Dean. Avoid the temptation to cheat by contacting the professor for help ahead of time.

Classroom Etiquette

At all times, please act with respect toward the professor and toward your classmates. *Mentally set aside the entire class period as a time for pursuing greater knowledge of this subject.* Please no talking during lectures, no cell phones or other nifty electronic devices.

Other Services of Note:

Learning Services

If you have a disability that prevents you from doing as well as you could in this class, be sure to contact Evelyn Lester, Director of Academic Support and Disability Services, to discuss your specific needs and set up arrangements with the professor. Lynn's office is in the Center for Learning, Teaching and Research, and you can email her at elester@colgate.edu, or call her at 315 228 7375.

The Writing and Speaking Center

All writers and public speakers can benefit from constructive feedback on their essays or presentations. At the Writing and Speaking Center, a free service for all students, peer writing consultants can help you with a draft's focus, organization, grammar, style, citations, and many other aspects. If you're preparing a speech or oral presentation, peer speaking consultants can help you organize your content or practice your delivery to an audience. All meetings are private, and you may visit at any stage of your process, from clarifying your initial ideas to reviewing a final draft or practicing a presentation. See <http://www.colgate.edu/writingcenter> for more information or to reserve an appointment. The center is located in 208 Lathrop Hall. Phone: (315) 228-6085.

WEEKLY READING SCHEDULE

Week 1 – What is the Good Life?

August 25

Plato, *Republic* Book VII, The Cave

August 27 (*Friday)

Plato, *Republic*, Book II, The Ring of Gyges

Week 2 – What does the Teacher Teach?

August 31

Plato, *Gorgias*

September 2

Plato, *Gorgias*

Week 3 – Does Power make Right?

September 7

Plato, *Gorgias*

September 9

Plato, *Gorgias*

Week 4 – What is Happiness?

September 14

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book I

September 16

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book II

Week 5 – What Makes a Good Person?

September 21

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book III

September 23

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book IV

Essay I Due Friday, September 24

Week 6 – What Makes a Bad Person?

September 28

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book VI

September 30

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book VII

Week 7 – What is a Friend?

October 5

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book VIII-IX

October 7

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book X

Week 8

October 14

Exam on Weeks 1-7

Midterm on October 14

Week 9 – What does God Have to Say?

October 19

Bible – Old Testament Readings

October 21

Bible – New Testament Readings

Week 10 – Why do Good People Suffer?

October 26

Boethius, *Consolation of Philosophy*

October 28

Boethius, *Consolation of Philosophy*

Week 11 – Why Have Hope?

November 2

Boethius, *Consolation of Philosophy*

November 4

Boethius, *Consolation of Philosophy*

Week 12 – Why be Virtuous when we can be Safe?

November 9

Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Chapters XI and XIII

November 11

John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*, Chapters 1-2

Week 13 – What is Freedom?

November 16

John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*, Chapter 3

November 18

John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*, Chapter 4

Week 14 – Is there a “Good Life” at All?

November 30

Elizabeth Cady Stanton, “Solitude of the Self” (1892); Fredrick Nietzsche, “On Truth and Lying in the Nonmoral Sense” (1896)

December 2

Bertrand Russell, “The Free Man’s Worship” (1903)

Essay II Due Friday, December 3

Week 15 – Discussion and Review

December 7

Discussion

December 10

Discussion

Final Exam Monday, December 13, 9-11am