

Introduction to Political Theory: Authority and Obedience
UCLA Political Science 10
Summer Session A 2015

Prof. Megan Gallagher
mgallagher@ucla.edu

M-W, 3:15-5:20
Bunche 2209A

Course Description

Political theory asks, and seeks to answer, challenging questions: is there a best form of government? What are political rights and where do they originate? How do we choose between different ideas of justice? What is the relationship between truth and politics? To what degree can or should the state intervene in individuals' lives? Most of us have beliefs and opinions about the best or right answers to these questions. Political theory offers a means of making and evaluating normative claims about politics – and to replace unexamined opinion with reasoned argument.

The readings in this course are oriented around the themes of authority and obedience. What are the grounds for political obedience? To whom, if anyone, do citizens owe their obedience? From what or whom does the state derive its authority? In order to think through these issues, we will read a number of major works in the western canon that propose various answers. These answers will necessarily be incompatible and at odds with one another. Our task is to read the texts critically and judge what we find most and least compelling. The approach of the course is contextual and historical; that is, we will examine how particular authors were motivated and constrained by their circumstances, why they raised the questions they did and gave their specific answers. Nonetheless, one aim of the class is to demonstrate that the analytic skills acquired in engaging these authors and their works can be brought to bear on a wide range of political questions, including those of our own time.

This course assumes no prior knowledge of the subject and is intended as an introduction. It is, however, reading-intensive. Note that the reading is demanding: it will likely take longer than more expository texts to complete and it will often address ideas at a highly conceptual level. Give yourself adequate time to read in advance of class, as that is the primary activity for this course; the purpose of the lectures is to help you unpack and think through what you have read. See “How to Study Political Theory Successfully: Some Suggestions” at the end of the syllabus for further advice.

Reading Schedule

All reading needs to be done before that day's class. Readings marked with an asterisk are either posted on, or linked to via, the course website.

Week 1

Monday, June 22: Sophocles, *Antigone*, pp. 1-28 (lines 1-625)

Wednesday, June 24: Sophocles, *Antigone*, pp. 28-58 (lines 626-1353)

Week 2

Monday, June 29: Plato, *Apology* in *Five Dialogues*, pp. 21-44
Wednesday, July 1: Plato, *Crito* in *Five Dialogues*, pp. 45-57

Week 3

Monday, July 6: Hobbes, *Leviathan*, pp. 81-118 and 183-222 (introduction and chapters 1-5, 13-16)
Wednesday, July 8: Hobbes, *Leviathan*, pp. 223-274 and 363-376 (chapters 17-21, 29) **and in-class midterm**

Week 4

Monday, July 13: Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, pp. 5-51 (preface, chapters 1-7)
Wednesday, July 15: Locke, *Second Treatise*, pp. 52-75, 88-91, 107-124 (chapters 8-11, 15, 19)

Week 5

Monday, July 20: Rousseau, *Social Contract*, pp. 49-78 and 80-93 (Book I, entire, and Book II, chapters 1-4 and 6-9)
Wednesday, July 22: Rousseau, *Social Contract*, pp. 101-123, 129-134, 149-154, 176-188 (Book III, chapters 1-7, 9-10 and Book IV, chapters 1-2, 8-9)

Week 6

Monday, July 27: Martin Luther King, Jr., "Letter from a Birmingham Jail,"* John Lewis, "The Revolution Is at Hand,"* and Malcolm X, "The Ballot or the Bullet"*
Wednesday, July 29: Hannah Arendt, "Civil Disobedience"* **and in-class final exam**

Required Texts

Hobbes, *Leviathan* (978-0140431957)
Locke, *Second Treatise of Government* (978-0915144860)
Plato, *Five Dialogues* (978-0872206335)
Rousseau, *Social Contract* (978-0140442014)
Sophocles, *Antigone* (978-0872205710)

Course Requirements

- Attendance (10%)
- Midterm exam (35%)
- Final exam (55%)

Office Hours

My office hours are Wednesdays from 12 to 2 in Bunche 4258. You are welcome to drop by unannounced! If, however, you'd like to schedule an appointment, please go to mgallagher.youcanbook.me.

General Grading Rubric

- A (100-90): demonstrates careful and thorough reading of the text; answers all parts of the question(s); provides a clearly articulated thesis; outlines the way in which thesis will be explicated; defends and supports thesis in the body of the paper using textual

evidence; considers counter-arguments, if appropriate; argues, does not summarize; structurally elegant; writing is clear and straightforward. Excellent work.

- B (89-80): demonstrates familiarity with the text, though may rely more on class discussion than on own reading, or may demonstrate a cursory reading; provides a solid thesis but may not explain how it will be defended, support it thoroughly with textual references, or develop arguments fully; may make selective use of text to support claims; structurally, individual points may feel disconnected from one another. Writing is clear but with room for improvement. Good, but not excellent, work.
- C (79-70): a weak, if appropriate or topical, thesis that either does not require a strong defense or relate entirely to the original question(s); demonstrates minimal passing acquaintance with the material; evidence may be drawn primarily from discussion; substance of paper may tend toward summary of the text rather than critical engagement; does not attend to counter-arguments; individual paragraphs may be well-crafted but the paper overall lacks a sense of cohesion and attention to detail. Fair, but not good, work.
- D (69-60): does not provide a clear thesis; may not respond to the question(s); does not support claims with evidence; emphasizes opinion or summary over analysis; paper lacks structure; does not otherwise demonstrate mastery of the concepts presented and analyzed in class; lack of organization makes paper difficult to follow; neglect of grammar, style, and writing
- F (59-0): does not provide a thesis or respond to the question(s); may be purely opinion or summary of text(s); no attempt to convey an interpretation of the material; lacking structure, coherence; no attention paid to grammar, style, and writing

Academic Honesty

Integrity is essential to all of the work you do throughout your college career and at UCLA. I take academic honesty very seriously. *Anyone found cheating or plagiarizing will automatically fail the related assignment(s). All issues of cheating and plagiarism will be documented and reported to the Dean of Students.* The best way to avoid any trouble is simply to ask me any questions you have about what does and does not constitute plagiarism – it can seem like a very confusing subject, but we can get a handle on it rather easily. In brief, plagiarism consists in using either the words *or the ideas* of anyone other than yourself without proper credit. Please read the [UCLA Student Guide to Academic Integrity](#) as a primer.

Classroom Decorum

It is to be expected that you will encounter a variety of arguments, opinions, and perspectives over the quarter, a number of which you may disagree with. Polite, reasoned disagreement is welcomed - even encouraged! - but please maintain a respectful tone, particularly when addressing your colleagues.

The Office for Students with Disabilities

If you are registered with the Office for Students with Disabilities (OSD), or are considering registering, and you wish to discuss academic accommodations, please contact me as soon as possible. No accommodations will be granted for the course without notification from OSD. You can find out more about the OSD and the services they provide at their [website](#).

How To Study Political Theory Successfully: Some Suggestions

No highlighters. Mark up your books, but use a pen or pencil instead of a highlighter so you can jot down notes in the margins or on sticky notes; underline key passages; and summarize arguments in your own words. Use page flags to make finding important, confusing or interesting passages easy. If you find an idea recurring through a text that seems important, keep track of the page numbers by creating your own “index,” on a blank page in the book or in your notes. Write a keyword or phrase at the top of the page every so often that will remind you of what’s happening in the text below and allow you to find specific passages more easily during discussion.

Read slowly! These texts cannot be skimmed or breezed through if you really want to understand them. They will likely take longer to read and digest than more expository texts, like textbooks, or something you might read for pleasure outside of class. Be sure to give yourself adequate time. Do not feel compelled to read all of the assigned reading in one sitting – break it up into manageable chunks and give yourself (for example) an hour to work through a fifteen to twenty page section. The only way to read poorly is to read too quickly.

Take notes. After every reading assignment write down its main argument, its strengths and its weaknesses. Note what its “big idea” or concept is. Taking notes will help you understand a text, especially difficult ones, and make it easier to return to a work later. Writing down questions that arise as you’re reading can be especially helpful. If you can include page numbers, do so.

Think big! These texts ask the big questions in order to get a grip on the big picture: are politics and morality incompatible? Why have societies premised on the equality of human beings produced so much inequality? How can we attain knowledge and how will we know if our knowledge is correct? And so on. Your goal in reading these works is to ask and answer these questions as well, using the texts to help you. Ask yourself what question the author is trying to answer and how they are setting about doing so.

Context matters. Who was originally intended to read this work? Do you know anything about its reception? Does the context in which the work was created have any obvious effects on its content? What assumptions, beliefs, and claims underlie it? Why (and how) do we still read it today?

Discuss the texts with others! You will be surprised at the many different interpretations your fellow students will have of the same text. Your understanding of the text – even a text you think you fully understand – will be greatly improved by talking over these interpretations. Use class time, study groups, forums on the class site, and email to discuss the texts.

Comprehension must come before critique. You need to understand an argument before critiquing it. Even if you do ultimately reject an argument, can you think of who might find it persuasive and why? On what grounds do you reject it?

Ask your questions. If you don’t understand a passage or even the main argument of a text, don’t sit in silence. Ask about it in class. Chances are other students have the same question – or they might have an answer. If you understand a text but have a question about its larger historical, political, or social significance, ask that, too. Asking questions always provokes discussion about a text, and therefore helps you understand.