

GEORGE MASON UNIVERSITY  
DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY

**CONTEMPORARY WESTERN POLITICAL THEORY**  
**PHIL/GOVT 327.001**  
Spring 2008

INSTRUCTOR: Professor Roger Paden  
OFFICE: Robinson Hall B 458  
OFFICE HOURS: Tuesdays and Thursdays 12:30-1:30 and by appointment.  
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**Course Description:** The subject of this course is 20<sup>th</sup> Century political philosophy. More narrowly, it will focus on recent developments in Anglo-American political theory that occurred as part of the revival of political theory sparked by the publication of John Rawls's book, *A Theory of Justice*. Thus, in effect, the course will examine the return of "liberal theory" in political philosophy. Although liberalism has become, perhaps, the dominant political ideology in the world today, it is not without its problems and critics. Politically it seems troubled. Philosophically, its precise nature and its "philosophical foundations" are not clear. The focus of our discussion in this class will be on the philosophical justification of liberalism, although we will attempt to relate this to a number of practical problems facing liberal society and liberal governments. We will pay particular attention to the basic concepts and ideas of liberalism, such as "liberty," "equality," "justice," "rights," "property," "the primacy of the right over the good," and "political neutrality." We will also try to understand how these ideas support particular liberal institutions and practices such as limited government, the separation of church and state, privacy, democracy, and capitalism.

Usually, liberals are divided into two camps, those who stress the importance of liberty (libertarian liberals) and those who stress the importance of equality (egalitarian liberals). After a discussion of the pre-history of liberal theory as found in the work of John Locke and John Stuart Mill, we will focus on the debate between these two contemporary branches of liberalism. To do so we will be reading the work of two philosophers who most clearly represent these two positions, John Rawls and Robert Nozick.

In addition to these two liberal theorists, we will examine the work of a number of modern critics of liberalism. These critics are often grouped into several schools of thought. We will examine three such schools, "Communitarianism," "Democratic Theory," and "Multiculturalism."

Our discussions will generally be fairly abstract. However, it is to be hoped that we will be able to apply our discussion to current events and controversies. Students will be encouraged to keep abreast of these issues to facilitate class discussions.

This course satisfies a core requirement of the Interdisciplinary Minor in Political Philosophy, see:

[http://www.gmu.edu/departments/philosophy/inter\\_minor\\_political\\_philosophy.htm/](http://www.gmu.edu/departments/philosophy/inter_minor_political_philosophy.htm/)

**Course Objectives:** Students completing this course should be able to:

- (1) understand and explain the arguments and positions of the central texts of the contemporary Western political tradition.
- (2) understand and explain how the complex relationships between these texts constitute the contemporary Western tradition.
- (3) critically evaluate the arguments and positions advanced in the texts.
- (4) apply these positions and arguments to contemporary political structures and actions.

**Required Texts:**

Locke, *Second Treatise of Justice*

Mill, *On Liberty and Utilitarianism*

Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*

Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*

Course Reader

### **Course Requirements**

- Class participation and in-class assignments: 10%
- Midterm exam: 30%
- Papers: 30% (15% each)
- Final Exam: 30%

Topic Papers: Students will complete two short papers on topics of my choice. Further details will be made available at a later date. For some information on writing a philosophy paper, see:

[http://www.gmu.edu/departments/philosophy//philosophy/standards\\_of\\_good\\_writing.htm](http://www.gmu.edu/departments/philosophy//philosophy/standards_of_good_writing.htm)

### **General Course Policies**

Please do not hesitate to talk to me about the course materials. If you don't understand something, realize that you are probably not alone and feel free to ask me about it in or after class. You are welcome to come see me during my office hours. You may also call me at the office or contact me via e-mail. If you cannot make office hours, we can arrange for an individual appointment.

This is what I expect you to do:

- Conduct yourself, at a minimum, in a civil manner at all times.
- Eating in class is forbidden by University regulations.
- Complete the assigned reading before class.
- Take notes on the main points of the assigned readings.
- Arrive to class on time every day.
- Refrain from side conversations with other students during class.
- Actively participate in the class discussions.
- Ask questions about the material.
- Take thorough notes in class.
- Go back over the readings after class if necessary.
- Turn assignments in on time.
- Call or email me if you have an excused absence (beforehand if possible).
- Fully document all sources you use in your papers; plagiarism violates the Honor Code.
- Abide by standards of academic honesty; cheating violates the Honor Code.
- Call, email, or stop by my office hours if you have any questions or concerns.
- Do not let yourself fall behind.

Attendance and Class Discussion:

This is a lecture/discussion class, so attendance is very important. First, attendance is a necessary prerequisite for class participation which constitutes 10% of your grade. Second, my lectures often provide important contextual information without which you will have a hard time fully understanding the assigned readings. Finally, in class we focus on what is important to know for the exams and papers. In short, if you skip a lot of classes, you probably won't do very well in this class.

The class discussion component of your grade will be based on both the quantity and the quality of your participation. The following can be used as a *baseline* guide: a student who attends class every day but never speaks will get a C for class participation; a student who attends every day and always participates in an intelligent way will get an A. Absences will be excused only for a legitimate reason that can be documented. **Since tardiness and early departures disrupt class, they will count as negative participation, lowering that portion of your grade. Repeated incidents will involve more serious consequences.**

**Cell phones and pagers should be turned off prior to class. Using computers to instant message or surf the web during class is forbidden. Violations of these rules will negatively affect your grade.**

#### Papers and Exams:

Make-up exams will be given only in cases of severe emergency accompanied by adequate documentation. Students must inform me *as soon as possible* of such emergencies, significant delays will result in the loss of the opportunity to take the make up the work. Unexcused late papers will be graded down one grade for each day they are late. **Electronic submissions will not be accepted.** Students must complete all assignments to pass the class.

#### Honor Code:

George Mason has an Honor Code, which requires all members of this community to maintain the highest standards of academic honesty and integrity. Cheating, plagiarism, lying, and stealing are all prohibited. Please consult the Student Handbook for a full definition of these terms. **All violations of the Honor Code will be reported to the Honor Committee.** Violations include but are not limited to the following:

Cheating includes any “willful giving or receiving of an unauthorized, unfair, dishonest, or unscrupulous advantage in academic work over other students,” by any means whatsoever, or the attempt to do so. Examples of cheating include: copying off another student; using notes during a closed-book exam; obtaining an assignment ahead of time from a student who took the class a previous semester; turning in the same work in more than one class (without prior authorization from all professors concerned).

Plagiarism includes “presenting as one’s own the works, the work, or the opinions of someone else without proper acknowledgment” or “borrowing the sequence of ideas, the arrangement of material, or the pattern of thought of someone else without proper acknowledgment.” Examples of plagiarism include: getting your paper off the internet; turning in a paper that was written by somebody else; buying a paper; taking a written piece from someone else but rewording it so that it looks different.

Lying includes “the willful and knowledgeable telling of an untruth, as well as any form of deceit, attempted deceit, or fraud in an oral or written statement relating to academic work.” Examples of lying include: lying to faculty member by saying you were sick when you were not; falsely claiming a death in the family or a personal emergency; falsifying any official documentation.

Stealing encompasses “taking or appropriating without the permission to do so, and with the intent to keep or to make use of wrongfully, property belonging to any member of the George Mason University community or any property located on the University campus.” Examples of stealing include: stealing exams or paper assignments from the professor; selling notes you take in class to an individual or a business.

**Class Schedule:**

- Jan. 22: Introduction to Political Theory
- Jan. 24: Locke Introduction to Liberalism: Its Pre-History, Early History and Fundamental Ideas, Locke, *Two Treatise*, 1.
- Jan 29: Locke, *Two Treatise*, 2, 3, 5.
- Jan. 31: Locke, *Two Treatise*, 7, 8, 9.
- Feb. 5: Mill, *Utilitarianism* (Last day to add a class)
- Feb. 7: Mill, *On Liberty*
- Feb. 12: Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, sections, 1-6.
- Feb. 14: Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, sections, 1-6.
- Feb. 19: Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, sections, 9-26.
- Feb. 21: Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, sections, 9-26. (Last day to drop a class)
- Feb. 26: Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, sections, 31-50.
- Feb. 28: Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, sections, 31-50.
- March 4: Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, sections, 66-67.
- March 6: Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, sections, 78-87.
- March 10-14: **SPRING BREAK**
- March 18: Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, sections, 78-87.
- March 20: **MID-TERM EXAM**
- March 25: Nozick, *Anarchy, State, Utopia*, sections 1-2.
- March 27: Nozick, *Anarchy, State, Utopia*, section 3.
- April 1: Nozick, *Anarchy, State, Utopia*, section 4.
- April 3: Nozick, *Anarchy, State, Utopia*, section 5.
- April 8: Nozick, *Anarchy, State, Utopia*, section 7.
- April 10: Nozick, *Anarchy, State, Utopia*, section 10.
- April 15: Communitarianism: Alasdair MacIntyre: "The Virtues, the Unity of a Human Life, and the Concept of Tradition."

- April 17: Communitarianism: Michael Sandel, "The Procedural Republic and the Unencumbered Self."
- April 22: Democratic Theory: William Sullivan, "A Renewal of Civic Philosophy."
- April 24: Democratic Theory: Benjamin Barber, "Strong Democracy"
- April 29: Multiculturalism: Iris Marion Young, "Polity and Group Difference: A Critique of the Ideal of Universal Citizenship" and Darlene Johnston, "Native Rights as Collective Group Rights: A Question of Group Self-Preservation."
- May 1: *Summary*
- May 8: **FINAL EXAM (1:30-4:15)**