

## POSC204: Political Thought

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### Course description and goals

This course is designed to further your ability to think critically about fundamental issues in political thought. We will examine a wide variety of texts, from the works of Sophocles, Plato, and Aristotle to the works of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and Karl Marx, and Vaclav Havel. As we explore these works, we will consider such themes as the nature of law and justice, the nature of human beings, freedom, the relationship between law and conscience, and appropriate forms of government.

In addition to gaining a working familiarity with key texts in the Western tradition of political philosophy, students will have the opportunity to develop the following skills throughout the semester:

- asking good questions about the texts we read
- writing clear, thoughtful essays exploring various aspects of our readings
- locating and evaluating sources to increase understanding of our texts
- making use of appropriate tools (e.g., [Google Documents](#), [Zotero](#)) for research, writing, and communication<sup>1</sup>

This course fulfills Sophia LO1 outcomes for Philosophical Worldviews:

- A Saint Mary's student identifies and understands significant features of and developments in philosophical traditions concerning the nature of knowledge, the nature of reality, and the nature of the good.
- A Saint Mary's student analyzes and compares philosophical views.

Students fulfill these outcomes through close reading of, discussion of, and writing about the texts we read during the course of the semester. As we move through these texts, it will become clear that Plato, Aristotle, and Aquinas (for example) have views about the nature of human beings and the limits of human knowledge that differ significantly from those of Machiavelli or Rousseau. Together we will explore the underlying assumptions that, at least in part, to these differing views.

- A Saint Mary's student thinks philosophically about her interactions in the world.

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<sup>1</sup>Those interested in why I ask students to make use of digital tools in what is in many ways a very traditional course might wish to read [this post](#) from [ProfHacker](#).

- A Saint Mary's student raises questions on philosophical issues pertaining to the development of her own worldview.

Students fulfill these outcomes by actively engaging with the texts we read together. They have the opportunity to do this in a formal way through writing assignments which encourage them to consider their own views on important issues in political philosophy in light of the readings.

## **When and where we meet**

We meet every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday in Madeleva 211A. Section 1 meets from 11:00-11:50, and Section 2 meets from 10:00 – 10:50. (Please note that Section 2 is actually the *earlier* section.)

## **Contact information and office hours**

The most reliable way to contact me is by email at [acavende \[at\] saintmarys.edu](mailto:acavende@stmarys.edu). Please note that I do not check email on Sundays — ever. I sometimes check on Saturdays, but not regularly. With those exceptions, I make every effort to respond to within 48 hours. If it's been longer than that and you haven't heard back, please don't hesitate to check with me to be sure I received your message.

I'm also reachable by phone. My office phone is 574-284-4430.

My usual office hours are MWF 9:00 - 10:00 and MW 1:00 - 2:00 in Spes Unica 263. If those times don't work for you, I'm happy to make alternate arrangements. Feel free to stop by the office to see if I'm in and it's a good time; if it isn't, we'll arrange a time that works for both of us. Alternately, bring your calendar to class and we'll set something up. If you use Google Calendar, my free/busy times are visible to everyone at Saint Mary's, and you're welcome to make an appointment on your calendar and invite me to the meeting.

## **Books needed**

You need only one book for this course:

Morgan, Michael L, ed. 2011. *Classics of Moral and Political Theory*. 5th ed. Indianapolis: Hackett Pub. Co.

This book contains all of the readings you'll need for the semester, with the exception of the Melian Dialogue, the essay by Vaclav Havel, and several journal articles. The Havel essay and the journal articles are listed in our class Zotero library and available in the College's electronic holdings.

Paperback copies of Morgan's anthology are available in the campus bookstore. The book is also available in electronic formats (e.g., Kindle, Nook). It's important to have the fifth edition, so that we all have the same materials available to us, but if you prefer an electronic edition to print, that's fine.

## Assignments and grading

There are two exams in this course: a midterm and a final, each of which is worth 150 points.

In addition to the two exams, there are five major assignments:

- Two essays (approx. 1250 – 1750 words): **150 points** each (the first is due Friday, February 13, the second April 17).
- An article review: **150 points** (March 6 if you opt to do this assignment first, otherwise April 24)
- An entry in an annotated bibliography created by the entire class (this will be a joint effort between the two sections): **150 points** (March 6 if you opt to do this assignment first, otherwise April 24)
- Submitting discussion questions on the day's readings to the course site in advance of the day's class (students will take turns, so everyone will have the opportunity to post regularly without needing to do it every week) and commenting on the questions others post: **100 points**

That makes for a total of 1000 points for the semester. Final grades will be calculated as follows:

A = 930 – 1000 A- = 900 – 929 B+ = 880 – 899 B = 830 – 879 B- = 800 – 829  
C+ = 780 – 799 C = 730 – 779 C- = 700 – 729 D = 600 – 699 F = below 600

Due dates

Exams will be given on the dates indicated on the course calendar. In the case of the midterm, that's in class on Monday, March 2. The final will be given at the time scheduled by the registrar, which is 7:30 on the evening of Tuesday, May 5.

All assignments are due on the date indicated on the course calendar and as noted above (I'll distribute a schedule for discussion question responsibilities).

A note about the article review and annotated bibliography contribution: Over the course of the semester, you'll need to read two journal articles in addition to the ones we read together. (As you look for articles, I suggest you take the bibliographies of the articles we read in common as a starting point.) For one of the articles, you'll write an annotation for the annotated bibliography; for the other, you'll write an article review (we'll discuss approaches to both in class). Which you do first is entirely up to you. However you choose, the first of these assignments is due no later than February 28, and the second no later than April 28. You may, of course, submit either ahead of time if you wish.

## **Extra credit opportunity**

You may have noticed a Twitter feed in the course site's sidebar. Yes, this class has a Twitter feed. Twitter can be a fun and interesting way to engage with other scholars about items of common interest.

Your participation in Twitter discussions is optional, but I hope you'll choose to try it. If you'd like to participate, just go to [Twitter](#), create an account, and let me know your username. You're free to raise questions about our readings and/or to raise questions or make comments about general matters of interest in political philosophy. Let us know what you think and/or what your questions are, and respond to the ideas of others.

Up to 25 points of extra credit are available for engaging in Twitter conversations related to this course. To receive credit for your participation, be sure to use the hashtag #posc204s2015 for your tweets.

## **Attendance**

Regular attendance is expected. When you miss class, you not only miss out on your colleagues' contributions to class — you also deprive them of yours. Excessive absences may have an adverse impact on your final grade for the course.

If you are ill or have some other serious reason for missing class, please let me know ahead of class time if possible, but in any case as soon as you reasonably can.

## **Class cancellation**

If I need to cancel a class due to illness or some other serious reason, I will make every effort to notify you prior to class time. I will email the class and post a notice to this site, if at all possible, and I will also try to arrange to have a notice of the cancellation posted outside the classroom.

If I am not in the classroom and you have received no notice of a cancellation, please wait ten minutes before concluding that something has happened and I've been unable to inform you.

## **Technology in the classroom**

### *Electronic devices*

I do not ordinarily police your gadget use in class, even when those gadgets aren't needed for a specific class activity. They can, after all, be very useful for taking notes, looking up information related to the class discussion, and the

like. I do, however, ask that you be courteous. Please be sure that your cell phone is set to *silent* (*not* vibrate, which can actually be quite loud, especially if the phone happens to be in the same bag as your books) and is put away<sup>2</sup>, and that your use of any devices does not become a distraction to yourself or others. (Bear in mind that anyone sitting near you can probably see what's on your computer or tablet screen. Also, remember that multitasking while maintaining focus is *really* difficult. If you're shopping or catching up on email, Twitter, or Facebook, you're missing a lot of what's going on in class.)

I reserve the right to request that you put your device(s) away if I get the sense that you're not paying attention or that you're distracting those around you.

### *Email*

Email is the official means of communication at Saint Mary's College, and all official communications from the College will be sent to your saintmarys.edu address. It is therefore essential that you check that address on a regular basis (I would strongly recommend you check it daily during the work week). If you fail to do so, you may miss vital information.

Please use your saintmarys.edu address for all communications regarding this course. (If you have other email addresses and would like to be able to check them all in one central location, please see me. I can make a few suggestions about ways to do that.)

## **Academic honesty**

Academic inquiry always involves conversation. Sometimes that conversation is verbal; at other times, it takes written form. Whatever form it takes, academic conversation at its best enables us all to learn from each other. The proper citation of one's sources is an important way of engaging conversation partners who aren't physically present. Plagiarism makes use of our conversation partners' ideas without acknowledging their contribution; it robs them of their voice.

It is this failure to acknowledge and involve conversation partners that makes plagiarism the most serious academic offense a student or faculty member can commit. It is the passing off of another's ideas or words as one's own; in effect, it is theft. It also undercuts the trust that is essential in any community of learning. The plagiarist shows disrespect not only for those from whom she steals and for those to whom she presents the plagiarized work, but also for herself. She is, in effect, saying that she is incapable of doing her own work, or that she is too lazy to acknowledge others involved in the conversation.

For all of these reasons, Saint Mary's College maintains an academic honesty policy, which can be found on pp. 65-67 of the 2014-2015 [College Bulletin](#). Accordingly, I treat incidents of plagiarism very seriously. At minimum, a

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<sup>2</sup>If you have an unusual situation that requires that you be able to monitor your phone during class, please see me so we can determine how best to make any necessary accommodations.

student whose work is discovered to be plagiarized will fail the assignment in question. Truly egregious or repeated instances of plagiarism may result in failure for the course, not just the assignment. In keeping with the College's policy, I will report instances of plagiarism to Academic Affairs.

We will be working together this semester to ensure that everyone in the class is aware of what plagiarism is and is familiar with how to document sources correctly. (Problems with citation style and/or formatting do not constitute plagiarism. I will point out such problems and help you correct them, but as long as, when you've borrowed words or ideas from someone else, you indicate that and point to the source from which you've borrowed, you have not plagiarized.) Both our own Writing Center and the OWL at Purdue are excellent resources, and can provide you with assistance in developing your writing skills as well as assistance with proper documentation. If ever you are in doubt as to whether your paper contains plagiarized elements, please ask prior to submitting it. Given reasonable advance notice, I am always happy to go over a draft with you, and to answer any questions you might have about how to cite your sources properly. Never let the pressures of academia lead you into dishonesty. Character, self-respect, and the enjoyment of good conversation are far more important than what may seem more immediately obvious measures of success.

## **Students with disabilities**

Any student who is eligible for accommodations to complete the requirements and expectations of this course because of a disability is invited to make her needs known to me and should also contact Iris Giamo, in the Disability Resource Office located in Madeleva Hall Room 103C (x4262) or e-mail [igiamo@saintmarys.edu](mailto:igiamo@saintmarys.edu) for an appointment to review documentation and arrange for appropriate and legal accommodations. Students who suspect they may have a disability are also encouraged to contact the Disabilities Resource Office.