

# POLS 228: INTRODUCTION TO ANCIENT AND EARLY MODERN POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

## COURSE INFO

Instructor: Joel Alden Schlosser

Classroom: Dalton 119 (Bryn Mawr College)

Meeting Times: Tu & Th 1:10 - 2:30 pm

Office hours: Wednesdays & Fridays, 2 – 4 pm (Dalton Hall 100C)

## COURSE DESCRIPTION AND GOALS

What is justice? How do we learn what is just? How do we learn to act justly? What is worth dying for? What is the best possible political society? Are some human beings born to serve while others are born to rule? Is truth necessary for a just society? In what form or fashion? Is democracy a desirable political form? Why might we want to limit democracy? What political form might we embrace other than democracy? Why? Is society in danger of corruption? By whom? If not, how do you know? Should we praise excellent speakers such as successful politicians or distrust them? Can we live well while living in an unjust or corrupt society?

These are a few of the questions we will pose and explore as we read and consider some of great works of ancient and early modern political philosophy. Over the course of the semester, you will develop a theoretical vocabulary with which to explore and respond to these questions; you will, moreover, develop concepts and ideas through their use, analyzing how they function within ancient and early modern political thought. At the conclusion of the course, you will be able to speak and write with imagination, intelligence, and precision about these topics, drawing on the tradition we have studied as well as contributing to contemporary thought on political life more generally.

## PROMISES & PRACTICES

My goal for this course is that your participation energizes, replenishes, and fills you— rather than leaving you depleted and exhausted. Alongside this overarching aim this course seeks to help you to join others as we develop our imagination, creativity, honesty, and openness through earnest inquiry and adventuresome speculation. This will involve discussion, reading, and writing in virtual as well as actual formats. But you will also need to bring playfulness, enthusiasm, and a willingness to try things that I hope will take you to new visions of individual and collective possibility.

Given the subject matter of this course, many of our discussions in class will involve sensitive issues. You may find some of this material upsetting. My hope is that together we can foster an environment of respect and openness conducive to everyone's full and honest participation. Whatever success or pleasure the course might occasion depends in large part on what all of us bring and contribute.

To develop the habits of mind described above as well as to bring the aspirations listed into being, this course will consist in a number of activities:

1. **Energetic and involved discussion.** We will learn political theory by speaking political theory. To learn the difficult concepts and arguments, you need to practice putting them into your own words, explaining them to others, and listening to others' explanations. Excellent discussion requires preparation: review of previous class discussions, taking notes in advance of class meetings, and being present and alert as much as possible during every class meeting. Through our discussions you will develop the essential speaking and listening skills necessary for developing and using the theories and applications of the theories we study.
2. **Disciplined and careful reading.** The readings for this course will require time, energy, and concentration. This course seeks to develop you as thoughtful, patient, imaginative, and critical readers capable of identifying multiple possible readings, examining assumptions, and ready to interpret different kinds of arguments.
3. **Frequent and varied writing.** This course begins from the premise that reading and writing are deeply intertwined; because writing and understanding develop together, this course asks that you write regularly in conversation with the readings.

## ACTIVITIES

Because this course seeks to develop you as a speaker and a listener, a writer and a reader, and a critical thinker, we will focus our work in several areas.

1. **Contributions to class activities.** Consistent preparation for class as well as quality and appropriate contributions to class activities form an essential part for realizing the promises of this course. Enrolling in this course signifies your agreement to contribute to the education of your fellow students and to learn from them and your professor in turn. Contributing during class sessions provides an opportunity to practice speaking and the skills of persuasion, as well to listen to, critique, and develop the arguments and analyses of your peers.
2. **Collective Note Taking.** Once during the first half of the semester and once during the second half you will prepare notes on the reading and take notes during class in a collective notes GoogleDoc. I will give you a sample and instructions in the notetaking document. Please post your notes on the reading no later than 8 pm on the night before class. During class, you can take notes in the GoogleDoc directly. (You are of course welcome to comment, add, or link to your own separate notes from within this collective document too!)
3. **Writing Projects.** As the schedule below outlines, you will write and bring to class four writing projects across the course of the term: a dialogue, a curriculum, a myth, and a letter. Each of these should be double-spaced with standard formatting (one inch margins, 12 point font, etc.) We will workshop the first three of these projects in class in a variety of ways; after these workshops I will ask you to draft a brief revision plan to use for revisions of the essay prior to your submitting it to me for credit. I will distribute prompts and criteria that we will discuss in class prior to the first essay.

## TEXTS

To quote Sarah Ahmed, these are our "companion texts" for the collective inquiry of the course. These books are available for purchase at the Bryn Mawr Bookshop and for checkout at

the Bryn Mawr Library. Please acquire permanent copies of these books in the specific editions indicated; we will be making extensive use of the texts in the course. If you are having trouble acquiring these books, please let me know well in advance of our discussion.

1. Robert Fagles, trans. *Sophocles: Theban Plays* (Penguin)
2. G.R.F. Ferrari, ed. *Plato: Republic* (Cambridge)
3. P. Bonadella, ed. *The Portable Machiavelli* (Viking)

## EVALUATION

We will use a Grading Contract for this course. You can access the complete contract on the course Moodle page.

## RESOURCES AND POLICIES

### Overview

I am committed to creating and supporting a classroom community that is inclusive, equitable, and conducive to learning for all students, as well as sensitive to the specific, unique, and unpredictable challenges we will each and all encounter this semester. To this end, I have designed course activities and assignments meant to help you gain and demonstrate understanding of key course content in ways that are flexible and personally meaningful. Our class meetings will include time for group check-ins, and the syllabus includes structured occasions for one on one and small group conferences with me as well.

### Academic Support.

Academic Support exists to help you do and feel your best! I encourage you to reach out to the Academic Support and Learning Resources Specialist to explore effective learning, studying, test-taking, note-taking and time and stress management strategies that are essential to success in this course and college life. Bryn Mawr students can schedule a meeting with Rachel Heiser, the Academic Support and Learning Resources Specialist by calling the Dean's Office at 610.526.5375 or emailing Rachel at [rheiser@brynmawr.edu](mailto:rheiser@brynmawr.edu). For more information, please visit [the Academic Support Website](#).

### Accommodations.

I encourage any students who think they may need accommodations in this course because of the impact of a learning difference to meet with me early in the semester. Students who attend Bryn Mawr should also contact the Access Services Coordinator as soon as possible, to verify their eligibility for reasonable accommodations.

### AI.<sup>1</sup>

I ask that you complete your work without using AI tools to develop your thinking or revise your writing. Other than spell checking, the only exception to the rule is if your instructor gives explicit instructions and parameters for the use of AI tools. If you submit work that appears to

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<sup>1</sup> The following is the policy developed by the Political Science Department at Bryn Mawr College.

have been written using AI sources, I will ask you to meet with me to discuss your thinking and writing process. If, after this conversation, I conclude it's likelier than not that you did not personally complete an assignment you submitted under your name, I will refer you to the Honor Board in accordance with normal procedures.

The Political Science Department seeks to develop essential skills of inquiry, analysis, argument, and imagination. These skills require practice and reflection without the assistance of AI. While AI can be a useful tool, I believe that a liberal arts education requires learning how to think, research, write, and revise independently and my courses focus on helping students develop these skills themselves.

If you have questions about AI use and/or proper attribution of other people's work, please talk to me.

### Due Dates and Extensions.

If you are unable to attend class or complete an assignment by the due date, I ask that whenever possible you let me know ahead of time and work with me to determine when you will complete the work (from class or assigned). In this situation there will be no grade penalty for late work. If it is not possible to ask ahead of time, I ask that you maintain communication with me as much as possible so that we can work together to determine a good course of action. I encourage those of you who need more than a one-week extension to talk with your Dean to arrive at a practical and workable plan for completing the work.

### Integrity.

I am committed to adhering to the standards regarding academic honesty contained in the Bryn Mawr and Haverford honor codes and the values of mutual trust, concern, and respect for oneself and for others upon which the bi-co community depends; I invite all of you to continue the conversation with me and with one another about how we can create the best intellectual community possible.

### Library

I encourage you to use the library resources. If you're curious about a topic, you can always schedule an appointment by emailing [library@brynmawr.edu](mailto:library@brynmawr.edu)

### Moodle.

On our course Moodle site you can find electronic copies of course readings (excepting those in the three books for purchase), a copy of the syllabus, and other useful information. Here all of our communications with the entire class will be archived under "Announcements" and course discussions conducted electronically will be archived.

### Religious Observance.

While Bryn Mawr does not cancel classes for any religious holidays, it does respect the right of its students to observe holidays that are important to them. Absences around a religious holiday will be excused. I am committed to help you make up work missed because of such absences. If you foresee a conflict with a scheduled activity, please let me know so we can adjust accordingly.

### Writing Center.

The Writing Center offers free appointments and experienced peer tutors who are there to help you at any stage of the writing process. The Writing Center is located on the first floor of Canaday Library. You can get more information at [The Writing Center's Website](#).

### Your Fellow Classmates

Your fellow classmates are your best and most available resource for making sure you get the most out of this course. I encourage you to exchange information and contact one another if logistical questions arise, if you have to miss a class and want to know what happened in your absence, or if you want to discuss readings or course topics outside of class. We will be creating an intellectual community together over the course of the semester, and you can contribute to this project by building relationships with one another just as you seek to build a relationship with your professor.

### Your Dean.

In case of serious illness, family emergency, or any other situation that requires you to miss class and fall behind on coursework, please contact your dean as soon as possible.

### Your Professor.

In addition to scheduled meetings, you are welcome to meet with me during office hours or at an alternative time if necessary. The best way to contact me outside of class is via email.

### Zoom.

If it becomes necessary to pivot to online, we will be using Zoom for our synchronous class discussion. Please review the [Zoom Norms](#) for this course.

## SCHEDULE

<u>DATE</u>	<u>Topic</u>	<u>To be prepared before class:</u>
1/21	What does ancient and early modern political philosophy have to do with me?	Read syllabus and bring any questions to class
1/23	Justice in Ancient Athens	Sophocles, <i>Antigone</i>
1/28	Plato's <i>Republic</i>	Plato, <i>Republic</i> , Book I – until Thrasymachus enters
1/30		<i>Republic</i> , Book I – Thrasymachus and Socrates sections
2/4	Dialogue: What is a justice?	Join the conversation of <i>Republic</i> 1 with your own contribution to the question about what justice is.  Revised version submitted via Moodle by 8 pm Friday, 2/7
2/6	No class (Joel on jury duty!)	
2/11	Socrates' "Second Sailing"	<i>Republic</i> , Book II
2/13		<i>Republic</i> , Book III
2/18		<i>Republic</i> , Book IV
2/20		<i>Republic</i> , Book V
2/25	Curriculum: How can we learn to be just?	What do we need to learn – both knowledge and skills – to be just? Drawing on the arguments in the <i>Republic</i> , propose your own curriculum for becoming just.  Revised version submitted via Moodle by 8 pm Friday, 2/28
2/27	Turning Toward the Good	<i>Republic</i> , Book VI

<u>DATE</u>	<u>Topic</u>	<u>To be prepared before class:</u>
3/4		<i>Republic</i> , Book VII
3/6	Library Session: Receptions of Plato	
SPRING BREAK: Friday, March 7 - Friday, March 14		
3/18	The Politeia	<i>Republic</i> , Book VIII
3/20		Jacques Rancière, <i>Disagreement</i> (on Moodle)
3/25	Tyranny	<i>Republic</i> , Book IX
3/27		Sophocles, <i>Oedipus Tyrannos</i>
4/1	Mimesis and the Work of the <i>Republic</i>	<i>Republic</i> , Book X
4/3		Alexander Nehamas, "Plato and Mass Media" (on Moodle)
4/8	Myth: What stories do we need to tell?	Socrates describes the conversation of the <i>Republic</i> as a story that can help us thrive in an unkind world. What stories do we need to tell now? Write one that reflects your engagement with Plato.  Revised version submitted via Moodle by 8 pm on Sunday, April 13
4/10	No class (Joel away)  Library Session on Receptions of Plato	Meet in Canaday 315
4/15	Reflections on Reading Plato	Please bring your favorite passage from Plato's <i>Republic</i> to class as well as a brief explanation of how it speaks to one of the big questions of the course.

<u>DATE</u>	<u>Topic</u>	<u>To be prepared before class:</u>
4/17	No class (Joel at conference)	
4/22	Machiavelli's Response to Plato	Machiavelli, <i>The Prince</i> (77 - 107)
4/24		Machiavelli, <i>The Prince</i> (107 - 136)
4/29		Machiavelli, <i>The Prince</i> (136 - 166)
5/1	Where Do We Stand?	Letter to Vettori (pp 67 - 71 in Reader).
<p>Letter: How do you now practice political theory? What big questions have become important to you and how do you now think about them differently?</p>		<p>Prompt for WP4 distributed on last day of classes. Final version to be submitted via Moodle by end of finals.</p>