Fundamental Issues in Political Philosophy

POLS 2700-01, POLS 2700-H01
Spring 2023

Dr. Wynne Moskop
Wynne.moskop@slu.edu
McGannon 136

Office Hours:
T & W 2-3:30pm
& by appointment

Course Description

Catalog Description: This course introduces students to the subfield of political theory by examining fundamental issues in the history of political thought— such as the pursuit of human dignity, equity, justice, and other social, natural, and transcendent goods—through close reading of philosophical texts. Readings include Plato, Aristotle, and historical or contemporary thinkers in the Catholic intellectual tradition.

In Spring 2023, we will address fundamental questions about political friendship and political community: What ties us together in a political community? How do we become political (as opposed to personal) friends? What determines who is included or excluded in a political friendship? How is political friendship related to issues of justice and injustice?

When we look for the roots of tensions and injustices in racially and economically diverse urban political communities such as St. Louis, or national political communities that are becoming diverse through an influx of immigrants, it is clear that traditional nationalist bonds that have sometimes unite a relatively homogeneous citizenry are an inadequate basis for political friendship in contemporary pluralist democracies. Today we need different kinds of bonds for political friendship.

Insights from thinkers in different philosophical traditions, including the Catholic intellectual tradition, will be brought to bear on questions about how to develop political friendship and just relations among citizens and between citizens and noncitizens. You will be asked to think about your own answers to these questions, and how those answers bear on your own relations in various political communities.

Course objectives. At the end of the semester, students should be able to:

- Explain, compare, and identify strengths and weaknesses of different philosophical approaches to questions about political friendship, citizenship, and just political community in different philosophical traditions
- Be in dialog with different philosophical traditions, including the Catholic intellectual tradition, understood as traditions
- Demonstrate facility with close reading and analysis of primary source texts, using the tools and methods of philosophy
- Analyze and evaluate the implications of different philosophical approaches and traditions for how power relations develop and become embedded in political and social

institutions, and how those relations affect persons in different social locations, privileging some and disadvantaging others

- Reflect on their own worldview and actions, in dialog with different philosophic traditions, including the Jesuit Catholic intellectual tradition, to envision changes that would advance human dignity, equity, and social justice in the world

This course satisfies the "Ultimate Questions: Philosophy" requirement for the University Core Curriculum and the political thought requirement for the Political Science major.

The Saint Louis University Core Curriculum

This course is part of the Saint Louis University Core, an integrated intellectual experience completed by all baccalaureate students, regardless of major, program, college, school or campus. The Core offers all SLU students the same unified approach to Jesuit education guided by SLU's institutional mission and identity and our nine undergraduate Core Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs).

Ultimate Questions: Philosophy

Ultimate Questions: Philosophy is one of 19 Core Components. The University Core SLO(s) that this component is designed to intentionally advance are listed below:
University Core Student Learning Outcomes The Core SLO(s) that this component is intentionally designed to advance are:
SLO 1: Examine their actions and vocations in dialogue with the Catholic, Jesuit tradition
SLO 2: Integrate knowledge from multiple disciplines to address complex questions
SLO 3: Assess evidence and draw reasoned conclusions

Additionally, the Core Component-level Student Learning Outcomes are listed below:
Component-level Student Learning Outcomes Students who complete this course will be able to:
• Explain and evaluate arguments for philosophical answers, including those in the Catholic tradition, to ultimate questions concerning the nature of humanity, reality and God, knowledge, and/or the good life
• Apply an array of analytic methods, conceptual tools, logical principles, and other resources to their own inquiry into ultimate questions
• Articulate and reflect on their own worldview and practices in dialogue with different answers to ultimate questions, including answers in the Catholic tradition

Learning Outcomes for the Political Science major

1. Graduates will be able to identify the structure and operation of political systems in the U.S, across a variety of countries, and in multinational organizations.
2. Graduates will be able to distinguish among various approaches to studying political phenomena.

3. Graduates will be able to read carefully and evaluate and construct analytical arguments in clear and logical prose.
4. Graduates will be able to identify and gather information from credible primary and secondary sources.
5. Graduates will be able to design original research to test arguments and hypotheses with qualitative and/or quantitative approaches.
6. Graduates will be able to assess the effects of various social and political structures and public policies to determine which are more likely to promote equality, justice, freedom, or other values important to them.

Class Format. The class format and requirements are intended to serve the learning outcomes above. The general format is a structured discussion that combines short, problem-oriented mini lectures with class discussions and regular written reflections. For most class sessions, a few students will be assigned to serve as "expert" discussants who are tasked with suggesting approaches to assigned study questions or developing questions of their own for the class to consider. You are expected to read primary sources for yourself, critically analyze their implications for political friendship, and ferret out the ways in which they leave room for, or perhaps even foster, injustice. Texts are always available so that you can become accustomed to reading carefully to understand an author's purpose, evidence, and underlying assumptions. On most Fridays, time will be allotted for you to write short journal reflections about what you have learned that week. There may be occasional pop quizzes to learn how well students are keeping up with reading assignments.

Requirements

1) Participation

- Complete reading assignments on time and participate regularly in class discussions.
- Always bring a copy of the assigned text(s) to class for easy reference.
- Periodically serve as an assigned discussant to help guide class discussions.
- There may be occasional pop quizzes over the readings to encourage you to pay close attention to them. Pop quizzes count toward your class participation grade.

2) **Journal reflections**. *Create an individual google doc inside this folder,* SLU Google Drive folder (POLS 2700 student journals). Label it with your last name and share it only with me, giving me "editor" capability so that I can comment occasionally. This will be your space for continuing journal reflections that can help develop your interests and understanding all semester. During most of our Friday classes, there will be a few minutes allotted for you to reflect on what you have learned from the week's readings. Each entry should be dated. Guidelines will be given for different kinds of reflections or responses to study questions, as the need arises.

   Journal reflections do not earn letter grades, but entries are considered as part of your class participation grade. I will comment on these reflections periodically, so that you will know

how you are progressing in light of posted guidelines or specific assignments. I'm always glad to meet with you to discuss your reflections or to think about how to develop one of them into an essay. Your final journal reflection will be retained and used to assess the third Core learning outcome of Ultimate Questions Philosophy: Articulate and reflect on [your] own worldview and practices in dialogue with different answers to ultimate questions, including answers in the Catholic tradition.

3) **Two short essays.** Essays will be evaluated according to criteria explained on the assessment/grading rubric posted on Canvas. The goal is to improve your analytical and writing skills over the course of the semester. A rough draft of each essay will be submitted for in-class peer review, according to guidelines posted on Canvas. After that you'll revise the essay and submit it for a grade. The second essay will be retained and used for purposes of assessing Core Learning Outcomes of Ultimate Questions: Philosophy.

4) **Exams.** There will be a midterm exam and a final exam that include both objective and short answer questions.

5) Attendance at every class is required, because discussing assigned readings and considering the perspectives of others is essential for learning to interpret and evaluate arguments and construct your own arguments. .

6) **Absences.** Absences are excused only if you provide a good reason--e.g. illness, required university activity--preferably in advance, and email me written responses to all study questions for that reading assignment. You are allowed two unexcused absences with no penalty. Each additional unexcused absence will lower your class discussion grade by 1/3 of a letter grade.

7) **Electronics.** Computers/tablets/cell phones are to be used in class only when approved to access assigned readings, work on journal reflections, or take exams. *Most of the time, notes will need to be taken by hand.*

8) Because of the continuing pandemic, we can expect that some of us may experience symptoms, need to quarantine because of exposure, or test positive for COVID. If you have to miss class for these reasons, it is essential to let me know *and to follow the usual policy for making up necessary absences*. That is, you will need to email me responses to all study questions for the week. You may want to meet with me to discuss the readings and your responses to the study questions. *There will be no recording of the class or synchronous online sessions.*

9) All students are expected to fill out both a self evaluation and a course evaluation at the end of the semester.

Grading. Grades will be determined as follows:

Class participation (including attendance, regular class participation, journal reflections, participation as an assigned discussant, and pop quizzes) — 30%
Two short Essays — 30% (including rough drafts that meet guidelines and are submitted on time)
Two peer reviews of essays — 10%

Midterm and Final Exams — 30%

Midterm and final grades will be reported in terms of the College of Arts and Sciences grading scale: A=4.0, A-=3.7, B+=3.3, B=3.0, B-=2.7, C+=2.3, C=2.0, C-=1.7, D=1.0, F=0.0. However, grades given on assignments are up to individual professors; e.g. in this class, it is possible to receive a D+ or D- on a particular assignment. Or sometimes there may be an "in-between" grade (A-/B+), which is averaged 3.5 in the scale above.

Communication. The easiest way to reach me is by email, wynne.moskop@slu.edu. Please do not hesitate to email with questions and concerns. I will answer within 24 to 48 hours. Help is always available, so please do not hesitate to ask.

Civility. Talking about political issues and reading historical texts that employ language no longer in use today can be controversial. Strong opinions are expected and acceptable. Even so, it is crucial to maintain respectful, open conversation that allow us to question how well founded any of our assumptions may be. These guidelines may be helpful. (Modified from https://livingroomconversations.org/topics/talking_politics/)

- Be curious about what we read and seek to understand the author's argument; in the same vein, listen to understand other perspectives in class discussion.
- Show respect to the voices of authors and also to members of our class; suspend judgment. Setting judgement aside opens you up to learning from others and makes them feel respected and appreciated. Try to truly listen, without interruption or crosstalk.
- Note any common ground as well as any differences, among authors and among members of our class. Look for areas of agreement or shared values that may arise and take an interest in the differing beliefs and opinions of others.
- Be authentic and welcome that from others. Share what's important to you based on our texts and your own experience. Be considerate of others who are doing the same.
- Be purposeful and to the point. Do your best to keep your comments concise and relevant to the question you are answering. Be conscious of sharing airtime with other participants.
- Own and guide the conversation. Take responsibility for the quality of your participation and the conversation as a whole. Be proactive in getting yourself and others back on track if needed.

The following university policy statements can be found at the end of this syllabus:

- Student Success Center
- University Writing Services
- Academic Integrity
- Basic Needs Services
- Disability Accommodations
- Title IX

- Facemasks Policy
- Attendance

Required texts available in the campus bookstore

- Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, ed. Terence Irwin (Hacket, 2019)
- Danielle Allen, *Talking to Strangers: Anxieties of Citizenship since Brown v Board of Education* (University of Chicago Press, 2004).
- All other reading assignments listed on the preliminary schedule below are available online or on electronic reserve in Pius Library (ERes). The password for ERes for this class is *friendship*.

Preliminary Schedule. *Detailed assignments for each week are provided on Canvas. Please be sure to check.*

Ancient Political Thought

1/18 **Introduction: Plato, Philosophy in the Unified Community**

Plato (429?–347 BCE; Greek), *The Apology*

1/20 Plato, *Apology* continued

1/23 Plato, *The Republic* (selections)

1/25 Plato, The Republic continued

1/27 Plato*, The Republic* continued. Friday journal reflections.

1/30 **Aristotle: Knowledge and political friendship in a "mixed" constitution**

1/30 Aristotle (384–322 BCE; Greek), *Nicomachean Ethics* (selections)

2/1 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* continued

2/3 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* continued. Friday journal reflections.

Contemporary usefulness of political friendship

2/6 Danielle Allen, *Talking to Strangers* (available in campus bookstore) pp. 3- 36

2/8 **First draft of Essay #1 due on Canvas by noon.** Guidelines will be posted on Canvas. Peer review of Essay #1 in class. Be sure to bring a laptop for the peer review.

Final version of Essay #1 due on Canvas Thursday, 2/9, by 10 pm.

2/10 University Wellness Day. Class will not meet.

2/13 Allen continued, 37-49, 102-118.

2/15 Allen continued, 126 (start with "*Pleonexia*, the problem of….")-159.

Ancient political thinkers, political community before the Greeks

2/17 Ptahotep (c. 24th C. BCE; Egypt), *The Maxims of Ptahhotep*, Translated by Vincent A.Tobin. https://www.ganino.com/files/Ptahhotep.pdf. Friday journal reflection

2/20 Mozi (Mo Zi; 500/468?-425/376? BCE; China), selection (instructor handout)

2/22 Mozi continued

Medieval Political and Religious perspectives on political community

2/24 Abû Nasr al-Fârâbî [870 CE (AH 257)- 951 CE (AH 339); Iraq/Syria; Muslim), *The Political Regime*, selections. ERes. Friday journal reflections.

2/27 Alfarabi continued

3/1 Moses Maimonides (1138–1204; Spain/Morocco; Jewish), *The Guide for the Perplexed*, selections, https://www.sacred-texts.com/jud/gfp/index.htm#contents

3/3 Maimonides continued. Friday journal reflections.

3/6 Thomas Aquinas (1225 – 1274; Italy; Christian), *Summa Theologiae*, selections

3/8 Aquinas continued.

3/10 Class will not meet. **Mid-term exam due on Canvas by 2 pm.**

3/13-17 Spring Break

3/20 Francisco de Vitoria (1483-1546; Spain; Christian), *On the Indians* (instructor handout)

3/22 Christine de Pizan (1364-1430; Italy/France; Christian). *The Book of the City of Ladies* (1405), selections. Eres.

3/24 Christine de Pizan continued. Journal reflections

Modern and Contemporary perspectives on political community

3/27 **The modern liberal state.** Thomas Hobbes, *The Leviathan* (1651), selections, https://www.gutenberg.org/files/3207/3207-h/3207-h.htm

3/29 Hobbes continued. Journal reflections.

3/31 **Women and the modern liberal state.** Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), selection. Journal reflections.

4/3 Wollstonecraft continued

4/5 **Race, gender, and political community in the U.S.** Anna Julia Cooper. *A Voice from the South, by a Black Woman of the South* (1892), selections. Journal reflections

4/7 Good Friday. University Holiday

4/10 Easter Monday. University Holiday

4/12 Anna Julia Cooper continued

4/14 Patricia Hill Collins. Black Feminist Thought (2000), selections. Journal reflections

4/17 Hill Collins continued

Feminist Pragmatism, immigration, and political community.

4/19 *Jane Addams, Democracy and Social Ethics* (1902), selections.

4/21 Jane Addams, *Peace and Bread in Time of War* (1922), selection. Journal reflections.

4/24 **Catholic Worker Movement.** Selections from *Dorothy Day: Selected Writings*, ed. Robert Ellsberg (Orbis, 1992). Eres.

4/26 Maurice Hamington, "Two Leaders, Two Utopias: Jane Addams and Dorothy Day," *NWSA Journal*, 19,2 (Summer): 160-186. Pius Library electronic journals.

Liberation Theologies and political community

4/28 Leonardo Boff, *Ecclesiogenesis The Base Communities Reinvent the Church* (1986), selections. ERes. Journal reflections.

5/1 Leonardo Boff continued

5/3 Lewis Gordon," An Afro-Jewish Critique of Jews Against Liberation" (2021). Journal reflection

Conditions for Political Friendship.

5/5 Martin Luther King, "Letter from a Birmingham Jail" (1963); Allen, *Talking to Strangers*, 161-172.

Final journal Reflection: How have our readings influenced your thinking about how to live as friends in political community?

5/8 Review

5/15 In-class final exam, noon-1:50pm

Mandatory University Policy Statements for all syllabi

Student Success Center
In recognition that people learn in a variety of ways and that learning is influenced by multiple factors (e.g., prior experience, study skills, learning disability), resources to support student success are available. The Student Success Center utilizes Zoom to assist students with academic-related services. Students can visit the Student Success Center website to learn more about Tutoring Services, University Writing Services, Disability Services, and Academic Coaching.
Link: https://www.slu.edu/life-at-slu/student-success-center/index.php

University Writing Services
Students are encouraged to take advantage of University Writing Services in the Student Success Center; getting feedback benefits writers at all skill levels. Trained writing consultants can help with writing projects, multimedia projects, and oral presentations. University Writing Services offers one-on-one consultations that address everything from brainstorming and developing ideas to crafting strong sentences and documenting sources. Students have the option to complete an online submission (for asynchronous

feedback) or to schedule a live video conference. Both can be scheduled through EAB Navigate. For more information, visit the Student Success Center or email writing@slu.edu.
Link: https://www.slu.edu/life-at-slu/student-success-center/academic-support/universitywriting-services/index.php

Basic Needs Security
Students in personal or academic distress and/or who may be specifically experiencing challenges such as securing food or difficulty navigating campus resources, and who believe this may affect their performance in the course, are encouraged to contact the Dean of Students Office (deanofstudents@slu.edu or 314-977-9378) for support. Furthermore, please notify the instructor if you are comfortable in doing so, as this will enable them to assist you with finding the resources you may need.

Academic Integrity policy can be found here.

Title IX policy can be found here.

Disability Accommodations policy can be found here.

Mandatory Syllabus Statement on Face Masks (until further notice), here

ADA Accommodations for Face Mask Requirements
Saint Louis University is committed to maintaining an inclusive and accessible environment. Individuals who are unable to wear a face mask due to medical reasons should contact the Office of Disability Services (students) or Human Resources (instructors) to initiate the accommodation process identified in the University's ADA Policy. Inquiries or concerns may also be directed to the Office of Institutional Equity and Diversity. Notification to instructors of SLU-approved ADA accommodations should be made in writing prior to the first class session in any term (or as soon thereafter as possible).

Mandatory temporary syllabus statement **on In-Person Class Attendance and Participation (until further notice)**