

POSC 204/POSC 204 CTS
Political Thought
Spring 2017
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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 Niccolò Machiavelli, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and Václav Havel. As we explore these works, we will consider such themes as the nature of human beings (and what is good for them), the nature of law and justice, freedom, the relationship between law and conscience, and appropriate forms of government. Throughout the semester, we'll make use of some of the scholarly literature on the major works we read.

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
- generating discussion questions and leading class discussions about those texts
- 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. tools for creating PDFs, [Paperpile](#), [Zotero](#), [Mendeley](#), research databases) for research, writing, and communication.¹

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

¹ 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](#).

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.
- 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.

For those enrolled in the 11:00 section, this course also fulfills the Sophia LO2 outcomes for the Critical Thinking Seminar:

- A Saint Mary's student evaluates and formulates claims about issues, ideas, artifacts, or events using critical thinking methods that are appropriate to the discipline of the seminar.

Students fulfill this outcome through careful reading and discussion of the texts we read, and by thoughtfully engaging those texts in the writing assignments.

- A Saint Mary's student demonstrates basic information literacy skills as listed in the information literacy sub-outcomes. (She is able to determine how much and what kind of information she needs, locate that information, evaluate its suitability, and use it to accomplish her purpose.)

Students fulfill this outcome by completing the annotated bibliography and article review assignments.

- A Saint Mary's student demonstrates effective oral communication in presentational or interactive contexts.

Students fulfill this outcome by preparing questions for and leading off class discussion.

- A Saint Mary's student develops and organizes written arguments.

Students fulfill this outcome by completing the essay assignments and the article review.

When and where we meet

Section 1 meets MWF from 11:00-11:50 in Spes Unica 240.

Section 2 meets MWF from 1:00-1:50 in Spes Unica 140.

Contact information and office hours

The most reliable way to contact me is by email at acavende@saintmarys.edu. I check that account at least twice each day during usual business hours, Monday through Friday. Please note that I do not check email on Sundays — ever. I *occasionally* 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

- 9:00-11:00 on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays

My office is Spes Unica 263.

If those times don't work for you, I'm very 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 King reading, an essay by Václav Havel, and several journal articles, all of which are available on the open web or 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). If you prefer an electronic edition to print, that's fine.

If you already have copies of the works we'll be reading (consult the calendar information below) or wish to obtain copies from online sources, feel free to use them instead of the Morgan anthology.

Assignments and grading

This course has midterm and final assessments, each of which is worth 150 points.

Additionally, students will complete the following assignments designed to help them achieve the course goals (due dates are noted in the course calendar):

- Course survey and initial PDF submission: 25 points
- Essay 1: 150 points
- Essay 2: 150 points
- Article review: 150 points
- Annotated bibliography: 125 points
- Discussion question submission and leadership: 100 points

That makes for a total of 1000 points available 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 = < 600

Please note that no extra credit is available in this course.

The final exam period for the 11:00 section is 10:30 am - 12:30 pm on Friday, May 12.

The final exam period for the 1:00 section is 4:15 - 6:15 pm on Monday, May 8.

Course calendar and assignment schedule

The calendar pages for both sections are linked below. The calendars are public, so if you're a Google Calendar user, you can click the "+GoogleCalendar" button to subscribe.

- [POSC 204 CTS \(11:00 section\)](#)
- [POSC 204 \(1:00 section\)](#)

Attendance

Regular attendance is expected. When you miss class you cheat yourself out of both the material presented and your colleagues' contributions to class discussion. You also cheat your colleagues of *your* contributions to the class. Accordingly, excessive absences (for whatever reason) may result in a lowering of your final grade for the course.

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 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. 48-49 of the 2016-2017 [Academic Guide for First-Year Students](#). Accordingly, I treat incidents of plagiarism very seriously. At minimum, a 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 [Purdue Online Writing Lab \(OWL\)](#) 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.

Accessibility/Students with disabilities

I do my best to make all materials in this course accessible to all students. If you have trouble accessing any course materials, please let me know as soon as possible so we can work together to resolve the situation.

If you have had documented academic adjustments (accommodations) in the past, or think you may be eligible for them presently, you should contact Ms. Iris Giamo in the Disabilities Resource Office (DRO), Madeleva 103C, by email (igiamo@saintmarys.edu) for an appointment to address this matter. The DRO is responsible for coordinating academic adjustments each semester and will issue a letter of documentation to your faculty for the current semester. Requests for such adjustments will not be honored without a letter of eligibility from the DRO. Securing reasonable accommodations requires timely action on the part of the student. Please contact me for an appointment to discuss how we will implement your accommodations.