Course Title

Political Theory

Course Number
POL-UA. 9100D01

SAMPLE SYLLABUS

Lecturer Contact Information
Dr. Kerstin Budde
kerstin.budde@nyu.edu

Course Details
Monday: 5:15pm - 8.00 pm

Location
Rooms will be posted in Albert before your first class. Please double check whether your class takes place at the Academic Center (BLAC) or at St. Agnes (SNTA).

Prerequisites
none

Units earned
4

Course Description
This course provides a survey of the intellectual traditions from classical to modern political thought in the West. Our exploration of political theory will proceed from a close reading and analysis of seminal texts that are presented both conceptually and, for the most part, chronologically. The primary focus will be placed on examining the historical antecedents of some of the foundational concepts and practices that distinguish our political behavior and institutions today. While taking account of the historical complexities, the course will highlight the recurrent themes that animate these influential writings and continue to shape our contemporary understanding of politics. Some of the critical issues to be discussed include the divergent views of human nature and the ideal society, the structure of authority and sovereignty, the defense of liberty and equality and justice.

Course Objective
Students should, after having completed this course, be familiar with the arguments of various political theorists and be able to assess their historical and philosophical significance. Furthermore, students will have learned to critically analyze, compare and evaluate those arguments in relation to their coherence and philosophical merit, and to assess the relevance of those arguments for current political problems. Finally, students should be able to argue for and defend their own critical position regarding the political problems that the theorists address.

**Assessment Components**
Students are expected to do the required readings, attend class sessions, participate in discussions and complete written assignments. Overall performance and final grades will be evaluated on the basis of the following components:

1. Participation (10%)  
2. 8 weekly Reading Response Papers of 1 page each (25%)  
3. Midterm Assignment: Relevance of Political Theory, 7 pages (25%)  
4. Final Exam (40%)

1. Attendance and participation in discussions constitute a significant portion of the grade. Please see below for more information on the attendance policy.

2. **Reading Response Paper:** Identify an argument, question or theme in the weekly reading that has interested, perplexed or troubled you, and explain the reasons for your reaction in your response paper. Be prepared to discuss this in class. Reading Response Papers are due by 8pm on the Friday before class. They should be sent by email. You will then receive a confirmation from me that I have received your Response Paper, and then the paper counts as submitted.

3. **Midterm assignment:** Choose one of the philosophers discussed so far, and 1) explain one or two of their key arguments/ideas, then 2) identify a current day political event, problem or development that interests you and 3) show how the philosophers’ arguments or ideas [explained in 1)] can be applied to that event, problem or development to either better understand or to provide a solution to it. Conclude with a discussion on the relevance of political theory today. The midterm assignment should be 7 pages long, double spaced, 12 point Times New Roman font. It has to be submitted as a hardcopy on 15 Oct 2018 at the beginning of the lecture.

4. Students write one end-of-term, closed-book **final exam**, which will be two and a half hours long on Monday the 17 Dec 2018. The exam will cover the topics of the last eight weeks of the term. Students will have to choose two questions from a list of questions and answer them in the style of an analytic essay.

Failure to submit or fulfill any required component may result in failure of the class, regardless of grades achieved in other assignments

**Required Text(s)**
Electronic Resources (via NYU Classes / NYU Library)

All required texts are available as PDF or Word documents on NYU Classes.
Supplemental Text(s) (not required to purchase)

Wolff, Jonathan: An Introduction to Political Philosophy, Oxford University Press. 2006

Boucher, David: Political Thinkers: From Socrates to the Present, Oxford University Press. 2009


Session 1 – 3 Sep 2018


We will discuss the characteristics of political theory as a discipline, distinguish between normative and empirical arguments and discuss the relationship between the two. We will consider the key questions that political theory deals with and reflect on the nature and the limitations of an introductory survey course.

Session 2 – 10 Sep 2018

Plato: Democracy and Philosopher Rule
The Republic, Book II (368-376), Book III-IV (412-423), Book IV (427-443) Book VI (503-509), Book VII (514-521), Book VI (488-9,493)

We will be looking at Plato’s classic critique of democracy and discuss whether Plato’s critique of democracy still applies, what the best form of government might be and whether people need any special skills to be able to rule.

Session 3 – 17 Sep 2018

Aristotle and Citizenship
Politics, Book III-IV

We will discuss Aristotle’s conceptions of citizenship and ask ourselves whether citizens need to be virtuous and what kind of virtues citizens (in a democracy) should have.

Session 4 – 24 Sep 2018

Niccolò Machiavelli: Politics and Morality
The Prince

Machiavelli’s text will be the basis of a discussion about the role of morality in politics: Is politics a domain where moral rules don’t apply? Should the good politician act morally or follow a different set of rules?

Session 5 – 1 Oct 2018

Thomas Hobbes I: The State of Nature
Leviathan, Chapters 13-15
We will discuss Hobbes’s conception of the state of nature and discuss how humans would live if there were no state and whether it is rational for human beings to come together to form a state. Key questions will also be asked about Hobbes’s assumptions about human nature.

**Session 6 – 8 Oct 2018**
Thomas Hobbes II: The Social Contract
*Leviathan, Chapters 16-19, 21*

We will analyze Hobbes’s social contract and his method and arguments regarding the form and legitimacy of governments. Questions such as the following will be the focus of this session: Why are we obliged to follow the law? What kind of liberties can citizens demand? What powers does the government have?

**Session 7 – 15 Oct 2018 – SUBMISSION DATE MIDTERM ASSIGNMENTS**
John Locke I, The State of Nature
*The Second Treatise of Government, Chapters 2-6*

Locke’s text will offer us a different version of the state of nature. We will discuss the alternative interpretations of the human condition and human nature, as well as the implications this has for the question of whether we need a government.

**22 Oct 2018 – FALL BREAK – NO CLASS**

**Session 8 – 29 Oct 2018**
John Locke II, The Social Contract
*The Second Treatise of Government, Chapters 7-9, 19*

We will discuss Locke’s alternative social contract and ask whether he can give us (more) convincing answers regarding the questions of political obligation, government power and citizens’ rights and freedom.

**Session 9 – 5 Nov 2018**
Jean-Jacques Rousseau I, The State of Nature
*A Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*

The final social contract theorist will offer yet a different account of human nature and how it comes to be that human beings live in political societies. We will discuss fundamental questions regarding the nature of freedom and dependency and the corrupting influences of society.

**Session 10 – 12 Nov 2018**
*The Social Contract, Book I Chap. 1,4-9; Book II Chap. 1-7; Book IV Chap. 1-2,7-8*

Can human beings live under government and laws and still be free? Rousseau offers us a distinct version of the social contract which aims to maximize citizens' freedom but
which has often been charged with establishing a tyrannical form of government. Whether this charge is true will be at the center of this session’s discussion.

**Session 11 – 19 Nov 2018**

John Mill, *The Harm Principle and Freedom*

*On Liberty, Chapters 1-3*

Once we have government, what principle should guide the government in law and policymaking? Mill’s “Harm-principle” will give us an answer to this question. We will analyze its merits, its philosophical foundation and the implication it has on the freedom of citizens.

*Students required to attend the Panel Discussion Decolonize Mitte! The Humboldt Forum, Museum Island, and Schloss. will be excused from this class. An individual office hour will be offered.*

**Session 12 – 26 Nov 2018**

Immanuel Kant, *Perpetual Peace*

On the basis of Kant’s text, we will ask whether it is enough to have a just government at a national level or whether we need a just, international order, including a cosmopolitan conception of citizenship. We will discuss Kant’s particular design and ask whether it still has relevance today.

**Session 13 – 3 Dec 2018**

Rawls, *The Original Position and the Principles of Justice*

*A Theory of Justice, §§ 3,4,9,11,13, 20-29*

What principles of justice would we agree on today? Rawls’s modernized version of the social contract theory offers us an original and imaginative method for finding principles of justice in modern times. We will discuss the method that Rawls uses and ask whether the two principles of justice that he advocates really are the ones that we would choose.

**Session 14 – 10 Dec 2018**

Nozick, *Entitlement Theory and Distributive Justice*

*Anarchy, State and Utopia*, pp. 149-182

Does taxing the wealthy to give to the poor amount to slave labor and a violation of freedom? This is what Robert Nozick claims in his libertarian critique of Rawls. We will be looking at his critique of Rawls’s redistributive principles and at Nozick’s alternative entitlement theory.

**Session 15 – 17 Dec 2018**

EXAM

**Classroom Etiquette**

To be discussed in Class
Your Lecturer
Kerstin Budde obtained her PhD in Political Theory from Cardiff University in 2007. Since then, she has been teaching at Cardiff University, Sheffield University, Birmingham University, Dresden University and NYU Berlin. Her research interests are Kantian constructivism, toleration and pluralism, just war theory, human rights theory, the interplay between political theory and economic theory and theories of property.
Academic Policies

Assessment Expectations

**Grade A:** The student makes excellent use of empirical and theoretical material and offers well-structured arguments in their work. The student writes comprehensive essays/answers to exam questions and their work shows strong evidence of critical thought and extensive reading.

**Grade B:** The candidate shows a good understanding of the problem and has demonstrated the ability to formulate and execute a coherent research strategy.

**Grade C:** The work is acceptable and shows a basic grasp of the research problem. However, the work fails to organize findings coherently and is in need of improvement.

**Grade D:** The work passes because some relevant points are made. However, there may be a problem of poor definition, lack of critical awareness, poor research.

**Grade F:** The work shows that the research problem is not understood; there is little or no critical awareness and the research is clearly negligible.

Grade Conversion

Your lecturer may use one of the following scales of numerical equivalents to letter grades:

- **A = 94-100 or 4.0**
- **A- = 90-93 or 3.7**
- **B+ = 87-89 or 3.3**
- **B = 84-86 or 3.0**
- **B- = 80-83 or 2.7**
- **C+ = 77-79 or 2.3**
- **C = 74-76 or 2.0**
- **C- = 70-73 or 1.7**
- **D+ = 67-69 or 1.3**
- **D = 65-66 or 1.0**
- **F = below 65 or 0**

Attendance Policy

Participation in all classes is essential for your academic success, especially in courses that meet only once per week. Your attendance in both content and language courses is required and will be checked at each class meeting. As soon as it becomes clear that you cannot attend a class, you must inform your professor by e-mail immediately (i.e. before the start of your class). Absences are only excused if they are due to illness, religious observance or emergencies. Your professor or NYU Berlin's administration may ask you to present a doctor's note or an exceptional permission from NYU Berlin's Director or Wellness Counselor as proof. Emergencies or other exceptional circumstances must be presented to the Director. Doctor's notes need to be submitted to the Academics Office, who will inform your professors. Doctor's notes need to be from a local doctor and carry a signature and a stamp. If you want the reasons for your absence to be treated confidentially, please approach NYU Berlin's Director or Wellness Counselor.
Unexcused absences affect students' grades: In content courses each unexcused absence (equalling one week's worth of classes) leads to a deduction of 2% of the overall grade and may negatively affect your class participation grade. In German Language classes two or three (consecutive or non-consecutive) unexcused absences (equalling one week's worth of classes) lead to a 2% deduction of the overall grade. Three unexcused absences in one content course and five unexcused absences in your German Language course may lead to a Fail in that course. Being more than 15 minutes late counts as an unexcused absence. Furthermore, your professor is entitled to deduct points for frequent late arrival or late arrival back from in-class breaks. Please note that for classes involving a field trip, transportation difficulties are never grounds for an excused absence. It is the student's responsibility to arrive in time at the announced meeting point.

Exams, tests and quizzes, deadlines, and oral presentations that are missed due to illness always require a doctor's note as documentation. It is the student's responsibility to produce this doctor's note and submit it to the Academics Office; until this doctor's note is produced the missed assessment is graded with an F and no make-up assessment is scheduled. In content classes, an F in one assignment may lead to failure of the entire class.

Regardless of whether an absence is excused or not, it is the student's responsibility to catch up with the work that was missed.

Attendance Rules on Religious Holidays
Members of any religious group may, without penalty, excuse themselves from classes when required in compliance with their religious obligations. Students who anticipate being absent due to religious observance should notify their lecturer AND NYU Berlin's Academics Office in writing via e-mail one week in advance. If examinations or assignment deadlines are scheduled on the day the student will be absent, the Academics Office will schedule a make-up examination or extend the deadline for assignments. Please note that an absence is only excused for the holiday but not for any days of travel that may come before and/or after the holiday. See also University Calendar Policy on Religious Holidays

Late Submission of Work
(1) Written work due in class must be submitted during the class time to the professor.

(2) Late work should be submitted in person to the lecturer or to the Academics Office, who will write on the essay or other work the date and time of submission, in the presence of the student. Another member of the administrative staff may also personally accept the work and will write the date and time of submission on the work, as above.

(3) Work submitted late receives a penalty of 2 points on the 100 point scale for each day it is late (excluding weekends and public or religious holidays), unless an extension has been approved (with a doctor's note or by approval of NYU Berlin's administration), in which case the 2 points per day deductions start counting from the day the extended deadline has passed.

(4) Without an approved extension, written work submitted more than 5 days (excluding weekends and public or religious holidays) following the submission date receives an F.

(5) End of semester essays must be submitted on time.
(6) Students who are late for a written exam have no automatic right to take extra time or to write the exam on another day.

(7) Please remember that university computers do not keep your essays - you must save them elsewhere. Having lost parts of your essay on the university computer is no excuse for a late submission.

Provisions for Students with Disabilities
Academic accommodations are available for students with documented disabilities. Please contact the Moses Center for Students with Disabilities at 212-998-4980 or see their website for further information.

Plagiarism Policy
The presentation of another person’s words, ideas, judgment, images or data as though they were your own, whether intentionally or unintentionally, constitutes an act of plagiarism. Proper referencing of your sources avoids plagiarism (see as one possible help the NYU library guide to referencing styles.

NYU Berlin takes plagiarism very seriously; penalties follow and may exceed those set out by your home school. Your lecturer may ask you to sign a declaration of authorship form.

It is also an offense to submit work for assignments from two different courses that is substantially the same (be it oral presentations or written work). If there is an overlap of the subject of your assignment with one that you produced for another course (either in the current or any previous semester), you MUST inform your professor.

For a summary of NYU Global’s academic policies.