Course Title

Political Theory

Course Number
POL-UA. 9100001

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

Course Details
Monday: 5:15pm to 8:00pm
Room: "Charlottenburg"

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. In particular, the lectures and discussions will be geared towards tracing the conceptual underpinnings of current forms of political organization, such as the nation-state and liberal democracy, and their effects on the concerns of law, justice and morality. 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) Attendance and Participation (10%)
(2) Weekly Written Questions (20%)
(3) Midterm Essay (30%)
(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) Weekly written questions: Students will have to submit two written questions via email on the weekly readings, due latest at 10am on the day of the seminar. The questions should deal with issues/problems/ideas you want to discuss in class – either because you found them particularly interesting, inspiring or indeed troubling. The questions must be accompanied by an explanatory paragraph in which the student explains why he/she has chosen the question and how the question relates to the text. Questions and explanations should in total be around 1 page.

(3) Students will have to write one critical essay (8-10 pages, double spaced, 12 point Times New Roman font), which has to be submitted as a hardcopy on 12 Oct 2015 at the beginning of the lecture. The student can either choose from previously provided essay questions or make up his/her own essay question in consultation with the instructor. Essays will cover a chosen topic from the first seven weeks of the term.

(4) Students write one end-of-term, closed-book final exam, which will be two and a half hours long. The exam will cover the topics of the last seven weeks of the term. Students will have to choose two questions from a list of questions and answer them in 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

Assessment Expectations

Grade A: The student makes excellent use of empirical and theoretical material and offers well-structured arguments in his/her work. The student writes comprehensive essays / answers to exam questions and his/her 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 instructor may choose to use one of the following scales of numerical equivalents to letter grades:

$$\begin{align*}
B+ &= 87-89 \\
C+ &= 77-79 \\
D+ &= 67-69 \\
F &= \text{below 65}
\end{align*}$$

$$\begin{align*}
A &= 94-100 \\
B &= 84-86 \\
C &= 74-76 \\
D &= 65-66
\end{align*}$$

$$\begin{align*}
A- &= 90-93 \\
B- &= 80-83 \\
C- &= 70-73
\end{align*}$$

Alternatively:

$$\begin{align*}
A &= 4.0 \\
A- &= 3.7 \\
B+ &= 3.3 \\
B &= 3.0 \\
B- &= 2.7 \\
C+ &= 2.3 \\
C &= 2.0 \\
C- &= 1.7 \\
D+ &= 1.3 \\
D &= 1.0 \\
F &= 0.0.
\end{align*}$$

Attendance Policy
Participation in all classes is essential for your academic success, especially in NYU Berlin’s content courses that, unlike most courses at NYU NY, meet only once per week in a double-session for three hours. 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. If you want the reasons for your absence to be treated confidentially and not shared with your professor, please approach NYUB’s Director or Wellness Counselor. Your professor or NYUB’s administration may ask you to present a doctor's note or an exceptional permission from the Director or Wellness Counselor.

Unexcused absences affect students' grades: In content courses each unexcused absence (equaling one week's worth of classes) leads to a deduction of 2% of the overall grade and may negatively affect your class participation grade. Three unexcused absences in one course may lead to a Fail in that course. In German Language classes three (consecutive or non-consecutive) unexcused absences (equaling one week's worth of classes) lead to a 2% deduction of the overall grade. Five unexcused absences in your German language course may lead to a Fail in that course. Furthermore, faculty is also entitled to deduct points for frequent late arrival to class or late arrival back from in-class breaks. Being more than 15 minutes late for class counts as an unexcused absence. Please note that for classes involving a field trip or other external visit, transportation difficulties are never grounds for an excused absence. It is the student's responsibility to arrive at the announced meeting point in a punctual and timely fashion.

Exams, tests, 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;
until this doctor's note is produced the missed assessment is graded with an F. In content classes, an F in one assignment may lead to failure of the entire class.

**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 because of any religious observance should notify the Director or Assistant Director for Academics in advance of the anticipated absence. If examinations or assignment deadlines are scheduled on the day the student will be absent, the Director or Assistant Director will reschedule a make-up examination or extend the deadline for assignments.

**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 instructor or to the Assistant Director for Academics, 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) Unless an extension has been approved (with a doctor's note or by approval of the Director or Assistant Director), work submitted late receives a penalty of 2 points on the 100 point scale for each day it is late.

(4) Without an approved extension, written work submitted more than 5 weekdays following the session date fails and is given a zero.

(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.

**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: [http://nyu.libguides.com/citations](http://nyu.libguides.com/citations)).

NYUB takes plagiarism very seriously; penalties follow and may exceed those set out by your home school. All your written work must be submitted as a hard copy AND in electronic form to the instructor. Your instructor 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 please see: www.nyu.edu/global/academic-policies

Required Text(s)

Unless otherwise specified, all readings are available on NYU Classes.

Books can be bought at Saint Georges in Wörther Straße 27 near NYUB.

Internet Research Guidelines
To be discussed in class.

Additional Required Equipment
None

Session 1 – 31 Aug 2015

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 – 7 Sep 2015
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 – 14 Sep 2015
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 – 21 Sep 2015
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 – 28 Sep 2015
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 – 5 Oct 2015
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 – 12 Oct 2015 - ESSAY DEADLINE
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.

19 Oct 2015 – Fall Break – No Class

Session 8 – 26 Oct 2015
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 – 2 Nov 2015
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 – 9 Nov 2015
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 – 16 Nov 2015
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.

Session 12 – 23 Nov 2015
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 – 30 Nov 2015
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 – 7 Dec 2015
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 – 14 Dec     FINAL IN-CLASS EXAM

Classroom Etiquette
To be discussed in class.

Required Co-Curricular Activities
None

Suggested Co-Curricular Activities
None

Your Instructor
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 and theories of property. At the moment, she is working on a project that investigates the justification of ownership in land and natural resources.