

***Philosophy 301/Political Science 301***  
***Foundations of Political Thought***  
Monday & Wednesday 1:00-2:15

**Teacher Information**

Dr. R. Nicholls  
Office # CC241  
Office Hours: Tuesday & Thursday 1:00-4:00  
Voice Mail/Phone # 563-1268  
Email: Rod\_Nicholls@capebretonu.ca  
<http://faculty.capebretonu.ca/philosophy/301/frontpage.htm>

**Course Description**

This course will introduce students to some of the major issues in political theory in an approach that blends the historical with the topical. The attached study guide will provide details regarding course content.

**Textbook**

*Foundations of Political Thought*, the 301 textbook/course-pack is freely available on the 301 website. You can download the complete text at one time or an individual chapter as you need it. It is available in PDF files so that the printed version will maintain original formatting and page numbers. All you need to access these files is a copy of Adobe Reader. This free software is probably already installed on your computer.

**Evaluation**

Final Exam	40%
Essay #1 due October 23	25%
Essay #2 due November 22	25%
Class participation	10%

There will be no supplementary exam in this course

## *Philosophy 301/Political Science 301: Study Guide*

Classes will be organized under eight very general topics. Each class, however, will have a much more specific focus. In preparation for class you must read the material listed. The questions listed under set of readings for each class will act primarily as essay topics but they also provide a focus for thinking about the readings (as well as discussion in class). Always remember that these questions are *interpretive*. In other words, to respond them adequately (in your own mind, in class or in essays) you not only need to get clear what an *author* actually says but what *you* think about the relevant issue. As a rule of thumb, the final exam will test your basic comprehension of the course material while essays aim to provide practice in working out your own interpretation of specific material. But obviously it is difficult to separate completely the two.

### **Patriotism**

#### **Class 1**

*Patriotism and Cosmopolitanism*, Martha Nussbaum, p.1

*Cosmopolitanism*, Bruce Robbins, p.7

*Why Democracy Needs Patriotism*, Charles Taylor, p.8

⇒ Do you think the idea of being “a citizen of the world” requires the existence of a world-state?

#### **Class 2**

*Letter From The Birmingham City Jail*, Martin Luther King Jr. p.10

⇒ If Martin Luther King Jr. was an American *patriot* does that necessarily mean he couldn't have believed in cosmopolitanism?

⇒ Do you think that King does an adequate job of theoretically distinguishing just from unjust laws?

### **Human Rights**

#### **Class 3**

*Human Nature and Natural Rights*, John Locke, p. 13

⇒ Martin Luther King Jr. says that “an unjust law is a human law that is not rooted in eternal and natural law” Does this essentially sum up John Locke's position?

⇒ Distinguish John Locke's understanding of the “state of nature” from Thomas Hobbes' *or* Jean Jacques Rousseau's understanding of this concept *and* explain why one is more plausible than the other.

#### **Class 4**

*Don't Worry About Theories of Human Rights*, Richard Rorty, p.17

- ⇒ Defend *or* criticize Richard Rorty's key claim that the concept of human rights is a useful invention of Western culture that should be exported globally.

#### **Class 5**

*Human Rights and It's Discontents*, Slavoj Zizek, p.21

- ⇒ Defend *or* criticize Slavoj Zizek's argument that in western liberal democracies the concept of human rights functions according to the "logic of moralistic victimization."

### **Tolerance**

#### **Class 6**

*The Concept of Toleration*, John Locke, p.30

*Separation of Church and State*, Thomas Jefferson, p.30

*First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution: Taking Religion Seriously*, Nathan Oman, p.33

- ⇒ Do you think that the Canadian constitution and charter of rights takes the religious rights seriously enough *or* too seriously?

#### **Class 7**

*Toleration: An Impossible Virtue?* Bernard Williams, p.40

- ⇒ Bernard Williams argues that the political model of "liberal pluralism" cannot be "neutral" with regarding to religious or deep moral issues. Critically assess his argument.

#### **Class 8**

*Is Islam Compatible With Liberal Democracy*, Bernard Lewis, p.40

*No Obstacle to Democracy*, Michael Hirsh, p. 51

- ⇒ Express the most plausible political model in which Islam and liberal democracy are reconciled.
- ⇒ Is a person simply expressing his or her ethnocentrism (or even racism) by claiming that largely Muslim states ought to move toward a liberal democratic form of government?

## **Inequality**

### **Class 9**

*The Right to Private Property*, John Locke, p. 60

- ⇒ Critically assess Locke's account of property rights from a contemporary North American aboriginal point of view.

### **Class 10**

*Natural Equality*, Jean Jacques Rousseau, p.66

- ⇒ Do you agree *or* not with Rousseau's fundamental criticism of Thomas Hobbes' understanding of the "natural state" of human beings?

### **Class 11**

*The Evolution of Inequality*, Jean Jacques Rousseau, p.71

- ⇒ Rousseau's critique of economic and political oppression is shaped by his view of human happiness. According to Rousseau, what does happiness consist in?

## **Marxism**

### **Class 12**

*Alienated Labor*, Karl Marx, p.77

- ⇒ Explore the relationship between between Marx and John Locke *or* Jean Jacques Rousseau on the moral significance of private property.
- ⇒ Do you see any similarity between the views of Marx and Rousseau on the general theme of human alienation?

### **Class 13**

*Society of Spectacles*, Guy Debord

*Consumerism*, Jean Baudrillard

*Neo-Marxism and Consumer Society*, Joseph Heath & Andrew Potter

- ⇒ Do Debord and Baudrillard provide a theoretical background for the recent North American critique of global capitalism (in books such as *No Logo* and *Fast Food Nation* and movies such as *Fight Club* and *American Beauty*)?

## **Social Contract**

### **Class 14**

*Competition*, Joseph Heath & Andrew Potter

*Defining Human Happiness*, Thomas Hobbes

- ⇒ Hobbes thinks his view of human happiness (or “felicity”) is the only realistic view of happiness, but does it amount to a crude theory of consumer materialism?

### **Class 15**

*The State of Nature*, Thomas Hobbes

*Freud versus Hobbes*, Joseph Heath & Andrew Potter

- ⇒ In Hobbes’ analysis of social life, what is the role of aggression?

### **Class 16**

*The Necessity of Sovereign Power*, Thomas Hobbes

*The Problem of Collective Action*, Joseph Heath & Andrew Potter

- ⇒ Defend or criticize Heath & Potter’s argument that a Hobbesian political theory is the only way to solve the problem of “collective action.”

## **Democracy**

### **Class 17**

*Was Democracy Just a Moment?* Robert Kaplan

- ⇒ According to Kaplan, citizens of the United States are “industrious sheep” who “have become voyeurs and escapists.” Defend *or* criticize this claim using the theory of Guy Debord.

### **Class 18**

*Democracy as A Universal Value*, Amartya Sen

- ⇒ Use Sen’s argument to criticize Robert Kaplan’s speculations regarding “the return of oligarchy.”

## **Realpolitik**

### **Class 19**

*Political Necessity*, Niccolo Machiavelli

*Overriding the Rules of War*, Michael Walzer

- ⇒ Michael Walzer argues that politicians who act according to political necessity in an emergency situation are engaging in a “wager.” Is it appropriate to use this metaphor of wagering or gambling?

### **Class 20**

*The Role of Luck in Politics*, Niccolo Machiavelli

*The Midas Touch*, Garry Wills

- ⇒ Given that Machiavelli’s image of “fortune” as a woman is thoroughly sexist, can you develop a better image, concept or metaphor to capture the role of fortune or luck in political life?

## ***Essay Assignments***

The evaluation scheme on page one indicates two essay assignments worth 25% each. The length of each essay is @1200 words. You can choose as a topic one of the above questions listed underneath the readings for each class (where two questions are listed choose only *one*). These essays are intended to be reflective papers not long research papers. You may refer to secondary sources if necessary but it is perfectly possible to write a paper with reference only to one or more readings in the course pack. I encourage you to use examples to illustrate your basic point and to work hard on developing a good logical argument to support your thesis. You are free to customize a topic, but make sure you run your idea run by me. I will be able to give you some advice and you can proceed without worrying about being on the wrong track.