

PSC 356-001:

Contemporary Political Theory
Spring 2021 | TR 12:45 pm – 2:15 pm
Classroom: Brewer Hall B100

Professor: Dr. Benjamin Gross

Office: Brewer Hall 220B

Office Hours:

T: 11:00 am-12:30 pm & 2:30-4:00 pm

R: 11:00 am-12:30 pm & 3:30-4:00 pm

Virtual: M/W/F: 3:00-5:00 pm

And by appointment

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“Liberal education is education in culture or toward culture...“Culture” (*cultura*) means primarily agriculture: the cultivation of the soil and its products, taking care of the soil, improving the soil in accordance with its nature. “Culture” means derivatively and today chiefly the cultivation of the mind, the taking care and improving of the native faculties of the mind in accordance with the nature of the mind. Just as the soil needs cultivators of the soil, the mind needs teachers. But teachers are not as easy to come by as farmer. The teachers themselves are pupils and must be pupils. But there cannot be an infinite regress: ultimately there must be teachers who are not in turn pupils...For all practical purposes, pupils, of whatever degree of proficiency, have access to the teachers who are not in turn pupils, to the greatest minds, only through the great books.”

- Leo Strauss, “What is Liberal Education?”

Course Rationale:

In 2016, Oxford Dictionaries named “post-truth” as its [word of the year](#). The word means shaping public opinion via appeals to emotion and personal opinion instead of reality. Created in 1992, the term seeds from [postmodernism](#). This philosophy argues there are no universal truths. Instead, everything is a value, belief, or interpretation.

If everything is a value, belief, or interpretation, what does this mean for political life? Can we have shared ideas of legitimacy, justice, or the good? To put it more bluntly, if we know there are no universal truths, is a common political life only possible when one [ideology](#) dominates all others? But would this be tyranny? Furthermore, if enough members of society know values are created, is it possible for one ideology to dominate?

While post-truth is a new word the phenomenon is not novel. Socrates lived in Athens where the [sophists](#) questioned truth. These rhetoricians used emotional and personal appeals to win legal cases, shape politics, and change culture. A major question for us then is, is our contemporary situation revolutionary or reactionary? By studying contemporary political theory, we will gain insight into this question.

We start the semester by introducing ourselves to what political theory and philosophy is. [Leo Strauss](#), a 20th-century student of political philosophy, thought the highest goal of education is to cultivate the mind. To do this, we need to turn to the great books. Before we can do so, however, it helps to have our bearing. By reading some of his essays, we will gain a better understanding of what political philosophy is, and how the classical, modern, and contemporary periods differ from each other.

We then turn to a great book – *Beyond Good & Evil*. A prelude to the philosophy of the future, [Friedrich Nietzsche](#) describes this work as, “a critique of modernity, not excluding the modern sciences, the modern arts, and even modern politics – along with pointers to a contrary type that is as little modern as possible– a noble, Yes-saying type.” While not the only cause, Nietzsche’s ideas are part of the contemporary moment.

Finally, we examine contemporary political theories that hinge on different values. This is not to say that all these theories must rest on the contemporary moment. It is only to say that many of the “isms” we will examine accept Nietzsche’s ideas and attempt to build their political theory upon a foundation of values. Thus, we will examine these “isms” to see if they offer possible avenues for a shared political life.

Course Goals:

By the end of the course, you will be able to:

- Read a great book, thoughtful speeches; and research articles;
- Explain what political philosophy is and why it is part of political science;
- Describe the difference between classical, modern, and contemporary political theory;
- Recognize why Nietzsche's thought represents the third wave of modernity;
- Clarify why Nietzsche thinks values are central to the philosophy of the future;
- Understand the core principles of different political ideologies/frameworks/values;
- Comprehend the shared and competing ideas of political ideologies/frameworks/values;
- Formulate and ask questions; and make, analyze, and criticize an argument;
- Clearly and concisely communicate arguments both verbally and written, which will develop and progress your critical-thinking and problem-solving skills.

Required Texts:

- * Strauss, Leo. *An Introduction to Political Philosophy: Ten Essays by Leo Straus*. Hilail Gildin (Ed.) Wayne State University Press. ISBN: [978-0814319024](#).
- * Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Beyond Good & Evil*. Walter Kaufmann (Ed.) Random House. ISBN: [978-0679724650](#).
- * *Twentieth Century Political Theory: A Reader*. 2nd Edition. Stephen Eric Bronner (Ed.) Routledge Press. ISBN: [978-0415948999](#).

Assignments and Grading:

Weekly Reading Quizzes	20%
Class Participation	20%
Short Papers	15%
Ideology Paper	5%
Interpretive Essay	20%
Final Exam	20%

Grading Scale:

A = 90-100
B = 80-89
C = 70-79
D = 60-69
F = <60

Assignment Details:

Weekly Reading Quizzes:

To facilitate students with readings, there are weekly reading quizzes. These quizzes are five multiple-choice questions, untimed, and accessible via Canvas. Quizzes open at 5 pm on Thursday prior to the weekly readings. Quizzes are due by 10 am of the Thursday for that week's readings. Thus, the reading quiz for Week 7 opens at 5 pm on the Thursday of Week 6 and is due by 10 am on the Thursday of Week 7. There are 12 quizzes. Students have their two lowest quiz grades dropped from this assessment area.

I use these quizzes to help guide your readings. I am evaluating you in this area to develop your ability to extract information when reading content.

Class Participation:

We come to best understand political thought through examination, questions, and conversations. As such, this course demands active participation from all students. We all have some insights regarding questions of what is democracy, what is good, and what is justice. Reading, analyzing, and interpreting will not only show us how our authors understand these questions but also force us to confront our own understanding.

The professor includes this assessment to develop your critical thinking, communication skills, and confidence in public speaking.

Short Papers:

During the semester, you will compose three short papers. These offer students low-stake assignments to develop their interpretation skills. Interpreting political thought is a different type of writing, which many students find unfamiliar. Instead of assigning multiple large papers, we will use these small papers as a way to practice, improve, and develop our skills of communicating our interpretations clearly and concisely.

To achieve this intent, the assignment is **limited to a one-page**, double-spaced, 12-point Times New Roman font, 1-inch margins, and one-sided document. Students will put their identification information in the header of their document. The professor will not grade any material going beyond one-page to maintain fairness for all students. Each short paper has a rubric explaining the grading criteria, which is on our Canvas page.

Below is information on the topic and dates for these assignments:

Short Paper Topic:	Paper Opens:	Paper Due:
Leo Strauss	Tuesday, February 9 at 3:00 pm	Tuesday, February 16 at noon
Friedrich Nietzsche	Thursday, March 4 at 3:00 pm	Thursday, March 11 at noon
Political ideologies	Thursday, March 18 at 3:00 pm	Tuesday, March 30 at noon

I include this assessment to improve your critical thinking, analytical ability, and communication skills.

Ideology Paper:

All students have a special one-page paper to complete prior to class on Tuesday, January 19. Students will write a one-page paper answering the prompt: “What ideology is the best for political life?” Students should provide their own thoughts and reflections to answer this question. There should be **NO** outside reading, sourcing, or materials. The short paper is asking students to provide their opinion in response to the question through reflecting on their own observations, experiences, and insights.

I include this assignment to see what ideas you have about this topic prior to our class, if you can follow directions, and to help correct any major errors before our short paper concerning the thought of Leo Strauss.

Interpretive Essay:

Students will complete one 1,000-1,500 word essay. The interpretive essay is due Tuesday, April 20. The essay is a longer version of a short paper. I will provide more information regarding the essay in a handout and rubric on Tuesday, March 16.

I evaluate students through this essay to determine their ability to clearly, to concisely, and to coherently communicate complex information to reasonable individuals. This is the hallmark of a liberal education, which will develop your critical thinking, problem solving, and critical analysis skills.

Final Exam:

The final exam consists of several questions in different formats. Due to current world dynamics, the professor will create the final exam. Students will receive a study guide with possible final exam questions on Thursday, April 8.

The professor includes this assessment to evaluate if students have mastered the content of the course.

Classroom Behavior:

Courtesy and regard for one another will guide classroom behavior. Since this is a course concerning politics, discussion can be passionate at times. We will always treat everyone with respect, especially during debates. This means listening and letting a classmate finish their thought before responding, debating ideas (not people), speaking to each other in a civil tone, and refusing to engage in personal attacks.

During these discussions, I ask you all to respect the ideas of your fellow students. This does not mean, however, that you must agree with these ideas. Political philosophy challenges ideas and ideals; thus, you are welcome to ask your classmates to explain their ideas, to ask them questions you see in their ideals, and so forth.

Students must be attentive during all aspects of class. I will remove students who sleep, read the newspaper, persistently talk with other students, text, use their cell phones, surf the internet, use computers for any other use than note taking (although due to [findings](#), I strongly suggest against this), or are otherwise inattentive/disruptive from the class session. Students that engage in these behaviors repeatedly are subject to dismissal from the course, at the professor's request.

Other Policies:

Late Work:

I only accept written assignments (ideology paper, short papers, and the interpretive essay) after their due date. Every business day a written assignment is late, the assignment loses three-percentage points (e.g., 89% to 86%). One week after its due date, the professor will no longer accept late written assignments. Any student, who does not submit their written assignments on time, or within one week after its due date, will receive a zero for that assignment.

Make-up Quizzes & Exams:

Since students drop their two lowest quiz scores, there are no make-up quizzes. If you are unable to attend the final exam period for a religious observation, university approved reason, or emergency, please inform the professor immediately. Students must have proper documentation for a make-up exam. Make-up exams must be scheduled at a date and time mutually agreed upon. Make-up exams will be comprised of different questions that evaluates students on the same material as the final exam.

Academic Integrity:

This course does not tolerate academic dishonesty. The professor adheres to and enforces JSU's policy on academic honesty (e.g. cheating, plagiarism, forgery, fabrication, facilitating academic dishonesty, and sabotage). I address violations of academic integrity in compliance with the procedures laid out in JSU's [student handbook](#) (see page 93).

Accommodations:

I am more than happy to accommodate any student with a documented disability. If you have a disability that affects your work in this class, and for which you require adjustments or accommodations, please see a staff member in [Disability Support Services](#) (139 Doughty Hall // (256) 782.8380 // dss@jsu.edu) so your accommodations can be considered.

Please speak with Disability Support Services (DSS) and the professor, as early in the semester as possible. Students that receive accommodation letters or

Individualized Post-Secondary Plans (IPP's) should meet with me to discuss the provisions of those accommodations as early in the semester as possible. All discussions will remain confidential.

Religious Observances:

If assigned work conflicts with your religious holidays, please tell me in advance so we can make alternative plans. Informing me of religious obligations after the fact, however, does not count as an excuse.

Military-Connected Student Statement:

The Office of Veteran Services serves all active duty, guard, reserve, veteran, and dependent students at JSU. If you have any questions about Veteran Services please contact them at (256) 782-8838, veterans@jsu.edu, or at the physical location in the basement of Daugette Hall.

If you are a student currently serving in the military (Active Duty, Guard, or Reserves) with the potential of being called to military service or training during the course of the semester, you are encouraged to contact me no later than the first week of class to discuss the class attendance policy. I may make accommodations for this absence or suggest that you take the course at another time.

Title IX

JSU does not discriminate on the basis of sex in the educational programs or activities that it operates. JSU is required, by Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 and the Department of Education regulations to implement Title IX, not to discriminate in such a manner. This requirement to not discriminate in educational programs and activities extends to employment by the university and to admission thereto. This may include sexual harassment, sexual misconduct, domestic violence, dating violence, stalking and other conduct that is addressed in our ["Sex-Based Harassment and Misconduct Policy."](#)

Anyone with knowledge of this type of conduct is asked to immediately report such incidents to the University Police Department at (256) 782-5050 or the Title IX Coordinator at (256) 782-5769. If an individual wishes to keep the information confidential, the individual speak with a counselor at the Counseling Services office at (256) 782-5475 or a medical provider at JSU's Health Center (256) 782-5310.

For more information about Title IX or to report a concern, please visit the JSU Title IX webpage at <http://www.jsu.edu/titleix>.

Questions About Your Grades:

I am more than happy to take questions about your grade in-person during my office hours/appointments. I, however, do not discuss grades over e-mail or phone due to FERPA regulations and protecting your privacy. See [here](#) for more information.

Tutoring resources at JSU:

All JSU students can access online tutoring assistance through tutor.com. To access tutor.com, log into Canvas and click the tutor.com link in the navigation pane.

For more information about tutor.com contact Debra James at dmjames@jsu.edu. For assistance with writing, The Writing Center is available through online appointments: <http://www.jsu.edu/english/jsu-writing-clinic.html>

Withdraws:

Please be advised, the last date to withdraw from the course without academic penalty is Friday, April 2. There are other important dates regarding withdrawing from the course concerning refunding your tuition and if you receive an academic penalty, which you can find [here](#). If you choose to stop attending the course, it is your responsibility to withdraw from the course. If you do not withdraw from the course, the professor will enter the grade you have earned as your final grade.

Student Notifications:

I post all notifications on Canvas via the Announcements section of our course. Be sure to check these for all notifications.

E-mail Policy:

I will do my best to respond to all e-mails within 24 hours. **All e-mails that can be answered via the syllabus will receive the response: “Please refer to your syllabus.” and a picture of Alf.**

To ensure you have read the syllabus prior to e-mailing me, the first e-mail you send me must include a picture of a **platypus**. If your first e-mail does not have a picture of a platypus, I will respond to your e-mail with: “Please review the syllabus.” This policy ensures that you have helped yourself by using the tools I have provided you.

In order to help response time, please include an appropriate subject line in your e-mail. Furthermore, please take time to construct a formal e-mail with proper etiquette and language. **E-mails constructed in a manner like, “Yo, Dr B i will b 18 4 clas 2day” or using emojis to represent words/ideas will receive the response, “Please refer to your syllabus.” and a picture of Godzilla.**

How to be Successful in this Class:

The best way to be successful is to be prepared. Being prepared means reading all of the assignment carefully and, most likely, reread the assignment prior to class. These texts are carefully constructed arguments, which sometimes only become visible after multiple interactions. By reading the assignments prior to class, you will be able to fully participate and get the most out of our classroom experience.

Furthermore, good note taking is vital. Take [physical notes](#). Learn to listen carefully. I find students who write down the questions being asked, and then the responses to these questions, are the most successful. If you only write down the answer the note is meaningless, as it lacks the context of the question.

After class, review your notes to see if they make sense. By reviewing them sooner than later you will be able to remember things from class to sort out any points of confusion in your notes.

Finally, get together with other students to form study groups. If you get together periodically and go over notes, you are more likely to have a complete set of notes. You will not only be able to go over your notes together to fill in the gaps, but by discussing with each other the topics of the class you might come to new insights.

Tentative Class Schedule:

LS = *An Introduction to Political Philosophy*

BGE = *Beyond Good & Evil*

20th = *Twentieth Century Political Theory: A Reader*

Date	Topic	Reading
T-1/12	Introduction & Approach	NO READING
What is Political Philosophy?		
R-1/14	Introduction	LS: vii-xxiv
T-1/19	What is Political Philosophy? (Introduction)	LS: 2-24
R-1/21	What is Political Philosophy? (Classical)	LS: 24-39
T-1/26	What is Political Philosophy? (Modern)	LS: 39-57
R-1/28	The Three Waves of Modernity	LS: 81-98
T-2/2	Progress or Return?	LS: 249-267
R-2/4	Progress or Return?	LS: 267-289
T-2/9	Progress or Return?	LS: 289-310
What is Contemporary Political Philosophy?		
R-2/11	Preface	BGE: 1-3
T-2/16	On the Prejudices of Philosophers	BGE: 9-32
R-2/18	Natural History of Morals	BGE: 97-118
T-2/23	We Scholars	BGE: 121-141
R-2/25	Our Virtues	BGE: 145-170
T-3/2	Peoples and Fatherlands	BGE: 173-198
R-3/4	What is Noble	BGE: 201-237
What are the Values of Contemporary Political Philosophy?		
T-3/9	Liberalism	20th: 3-35
R-3/11	Conservatism	20th: 75-89; 109-116
T-3/16	Anarchism	20th: 117-137
R-3/18	Communitarianism	20th: 37; 43-62
T-3/23	SPRING BREAK	NO READING
R-3/25	SPRING BREAK	NO READING
T-3/30	Socialism	20th: 169-176; 183-188
R-4/1	Communism	20th: 199-215
T-4/6	Nationalism/Fascism	20th: 141-144; 153-167; 217-222; 233-247
R-4/8	Religion and Politics	20th: 249-256; 261-270
T-4/13	Racism	20th: 321-328; 349-355

R-4/15	Feminism	20th : 357-395
T-4/20	Postmodernism	20th : 397-416
R-4/22	Final Exam Review	NO READING
T-5/4	FINAL EXAM (10:30 am – 12:30 pm)	NO READING