

# Politics and Literature

## PSC 409F

Spring 2007

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Office Hours: Wednesday 1:30-3; Thursday 9:00-10:30; or by appointment

### Course Description:

This course starts with one fundamental question (perhaps the most important in politics): How ought we properly constitute a good political regime? Political theorists have spent centuries attempting to answer this question and their answers diverge widely. But the question is why? In part (and only in part), political theory contains assumptions about the way people naturally (or, perhaps instinctually) behave. Such starting assumptions have dramatic import for the conclusions political theorists reach regarding how best to create the good society. Moreover, contemporary political theorists address many of the problems wrought by modernity and the human condition within our “enlightened” time.

Similarly, if separately, a sizable amount of modern and contemporary literature addresses the same fundamental questions: What is the human condition? What structures constrain the individual within society and what happens when the individual transgresses those structures? What structures would better serve the individual and society? However, literature is not constrained in the same way as political theory as factuality is no limit on fictional themes, which gives us a unique conduit through which to study politics. As Jerzy Kosinski wrote, “Unlike politics, which offered only extravagant promises of a utopian future, I knew fiction could present lives as they are truly lived.” Kosinski’s statement is marred by the same over breadth that mares much political fiction but the general point is meritorious. Literature provides us a unique means of evaluating politics. This course will use literature as a conduit to examine classic and contemporary problems in politics and address through political theory.

As should be obvious from the title of the course, the class is reading and writing intensive. If you are not interested in reading several hundred pages a week, please do not take the course. I have designed course requirements with an eye toward future graduate study. My expectations for your scholarly work will be in line with preparation for higher study.

### Required Books:

Bellemy, *Looking Backward*  
Caldwell, *Tobacco Road*  
Doctorow, *Ragtime*  
Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*  
Gilman, *Herland*

Golding, *Lord of the Flies*  
Hemingway, *The Sun Also Rises*  
Huxley, *Brave New World*  
Kosinski, *The Painted Bird*  
Orwell, *1984*  
Rand, *Anthem*  
Wright, *Native Son*  
Love, *Dogma and Dreams*

## **Academic Misconduct:**

Academic integrity is a legitimate concern for every member of the campus community; all share in upholding the fundamental values of honesty, trust, respect, fairness, responsibility and professionalism. By choosing to join the UNLV community, students accept the expectations of the Academic Misconduct Policy and are encouraged when faced with choices to always take the ethical path. Students enrolling in UNLV assume the obligation to conduct themselves in a manner compatible with UNLV's function as an educational institution.

An example of academic misconduct is plagiarism (i.e., using the words or ideas of another, from the internet or any source without proper citation of the sources).

## **Classroom Policies/Rules:**

It is a faculty member's discretion and prerogative to determine what is and is not acceptable behavior in his or her classroom (i.e., late arrival, wearing hats). Also, classroom occupants are at the discretion of the instructor (per UNLV General Counsel). See:  
<http://studentlife.unlv.edu/judicial/student.html>

## **Consensual Relationships:**

The University of Nevada, Las Vegas prohibits romantic or sexual relationships between members of the university community when one of the individuals involved has direct professional influence or direct authority over the other.

## **Copyright:**

The University requires all members of the University Community to familiarize themselves and to follow copyright and fair use requirements. YOU ARE INDIVIDUALLY AND SOLELY RESPONSIBLE FOR VIOLATIONS OF COPYRIGHT AND FAIR USE LAWS. THE UNIVERSITY WILL NEITHER PROTECT NOR DEFEND YOU NOR ASSUME ANY RESPONSIBILITY FOR EMPLOYEE OR STUDENT VIOLATIONS OF FAIR USE LAWS. Violations of copyright laws could subject you to federal and state civil penalties and criminal liability as well as disciplinary action under University policies. To familiarize yourself with copyright and fair use policies, the University encourages you to visit its copyright website at: <http://www.unlv.edu/committees/copyright/>

## **Accommodations:**

Disability Resource Center—If you have a documented disability that may require assistance, you will need to contact DRC for coordination in your academic accommodations. DRC is located in the Reynolds Student Services Complex, suite 137. The phone number is 702-895-0866, or TTD 702-895-0652. You may also visit our website at [www.unlv.edu/studentlinf/les](http://www.unlv.edu/studentlinf/les)

As a general rule, a student missing a class assignment because of observance of a religious holiday shall have the opportunity to make up missed work. Students must provide notice of anticipated absences by the last day of late registration (January 22) to be assured of this opportunity.

Also, students who represent UNLV at any official extracurricular activity shall have the opportunity to make up assignments, but the student must provide official written notification no less than one week prior to the missed class(es).

Missing deadlines or exams due to illness requires documentation from a doctor. Please refer to University policy if you have any questions or contact me directly.

## **Course Requirements:**

Response Paper 1	20%
Response Paper 2	20%
Response Paper 3	20%
Final Paper	30%
Class Participation	10%

*Response Papers*—You are responsible for three response papers throughout the course of the semester. You must write one paper for each of the three sections of the course. (So, this means one paper for Section I, one paper for Section II, and one paper for Section III.) The paper must be approximately 5 pages in length. Papers must be double-spaced, using 12-point Times New Roman font. Long quotations must be off-set and single spaced. Response papers will not be accepted following the class in which we discuss the reading.

*Final Paper*—The final paper for the course should address the following question: What is the nature of humanity and how ought we best structure political society in order to achieve a good society? Papers should marshal evidence and support for their positions from the assigned (and suggested) readings for the course. A minimum of seven different sources should be used in the course of the paper. Paper should be approximately 10-15 pages in length.

*Class Participation*—As mentioned above, this class is designed with an eye toward graduate training. Whether you consider more training in political science, public policy, law, or, yes, even life outside of the university, dialogue is a vital aspect of learning. Participation means participating meaningfully in class discussion. Mere attendance is not sufficient to warrant credit for participation.

## Course Outline:

January 18—Course Introduction and Preliminaries

### SECTION I—HUMAN NATURE AND ITS CONDITION

January 25—*The Painted Bird*

- Hobbes, Thomas. *The Leviathan*. Chapters 13 and 14.
- Suggested:
  - Hobbes, *Leviathan*. Chapter 6
  - Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, Book I

February 1—*Lord of the Flies*

- Rawls, John. “Justice as Fairness” *The Journal of Philosophy* (1957)
- Suggested:
  - Elkin, Stephen. 2001. “The Constitutional Theory of the Commercial Republic.” 69 *Fordham Law Review* 1933.

February 8—*Anthem*

- Goldman, *Anarchism: What It Really Stands For* (353-364)
- Suggested:
  - (For more on Rand’s Objectivism) *Atlas Shrugged*
  - Aristotle, *Organon*

### SECTION II—UTOPIAS AND DISUTOPIAS

February 15—*Looking Backward*

- Marx, *Estranged Labor* (236-248)

February 22—*Herland*

- Hartmann, *The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism: towards a More Progressive Union* (497-516)
- Suggested:
  - Seneca Falls Declaration
  - Friedan, *Our Revolution is Unique* (489-496)
  - MacKinnon, Catharine. 1982. "Feminism, Marxism, Method, and the State: An Agenda for Theory." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*. Vol. 7.

March 1—1984

- Arendt, Selection from *Eichmann in Jerusalem*
- Suggested:
  - Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*

March 8—*Brave New World*

- Mazzini, *The Duties of Man*

March 15—SPRING BREAK

### SECTION III—CRITIQUES OF MODERNITY AND MARKET DEMOCRACIES

March 22— *The Great Gatsby*

- Marx, *A Contribution to a Critique of Political Economy* (Preface)
- Suggested:
  - Smith, *Wealth of Nations, Volume One*
  - Marx, *Capital, Volume One*

March 29—*Tobacco Road*

- Dewey, *Democracy and Education, Section 2: Education as a Social Function*
- Suggested:
  - Rousseau, *Emile*
  - Locke, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*

April 5—*Ragtime*

- Jefferson, *Letter to Samuel Kercheval, June 12, 1816*
- Suggested:
  - Aristotle, *Politics, Book V*
  - Orren and Skowronek, *The Search for American Political Development*
  - Pierson, *Politics in Time: History, Institutions, and Social Analysis*

April 12—No Assignment

April 19—*The Sun Also Rises*

- Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*

April 26—*Native Son, Book I and II*

- Smith, “Beyond Tocqueville, Myrdal, and Hartz: The Multiple Traditions in America.” *American Political Science Review* (1993)
- Suggested:
  - Myrdal, *An American Problem: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy*
  - Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition in America*

May 3—*Native Son, Book III*

- Barber, *Jihad v. McWorld*
- Suggested:
  - Moser, *Age of Rage* (467-470)