

Politics and the Christian Bible

ETH 302 • Fall 2023

Tuesdays and Thursdays, 9:30 am – 10:20 am
Kelsey 105

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Overview of the Course

In this course, we will survey together a number of foundational themes in political theory—e.g., law, legitimacy, rights, gender—and put each theme’s relevant material in dialogue with Biblical passages. The texts we will read will ask and answer questions as: What ought to be the relationship of an individual to her community? Who gets to make decisions in that community, and how are those decisions reached? How are communities constituted and bounded?

In exploring such questions, we will reflect on the ways that modern political arrangements and commitments may or may not conform to Biblical concepts and vice versa. Of course, this is not so straightforward, and there are few easy answers available to us. However, all of us ought to remember as we read and discuss the material that we can and must lean on one another as we try to make sense of how political theory and the Bible might be related. To be clear, no student is expected to be an expert in political theory; in fact, students are not required to have any background in the field whatsoever. The same is the case concerning the Christian Bible. Yet we must also remember that insights don’t always come from experts. We always have something to learn from one another.

Objectives for the Course

Students who successfully complete this course will be able to:

- identify and explain key concepts in political theory like legitimacy, freedom, and rights
- discuss the Biblical implications for key concepts in political theory
- apply key concepts and Biblical passages to issues in contemporary politics
- demonstrate their command of key political theory concepts and related Biblical pass in their writing

Weekly procedure

Students shall have the readings completed for the date on which they are discussed, according to the schedule in this syllabus. Additionally, each student must contribute to a collaborative study chart on Google Docs. Charts will look like this:

Author, Text	1-2 thesis statements (direct quotes; include page numbers)	author’s aims (in your own words, 3-5 sentences)	3-5+ key words/phrases (w/pg#)	lingering questions (clarifying or critical)
Jacobs, “Introduction” in <i>How to Think</i> (bb)	•	•	•	•
Cohen, “Thinking Politically: Introduction” (1-6)	•	•	•	•

Students will be required to fill in 1-2 cells of the collaborative study chart each week, on a first come, first served basis—so you’ll want to make your contributions early if you’d like to have your pick of the cells! Your contributions are due by midnight the night before your precept. Please include your initials at the end of the cell you’ve contributed like this: (MN).

The process of drafting these charts provides students with three valuable opportunities. First, students will be able to absorb the essence of the text by being responsible for outlining and responding to it. Second, students will learn to get in the habit of finding these four key elements of texts as they are reading. Third, students will have at their fingertips, by the end of the semester, an index of all of the theoretical texts that were read for the class.

Furthermore, during the discussion hour of class each week, discussion groups of no more than ten students will discuss the texts. Three roles will be involved in this discussion. **Aides** will be responsible for supporting the class's reading and discussion of the texts. They will do so by doing two things. First, they will be expected to identify, **by the Friday before the class they will aid**, a newspaper or magazine article, podcast, or video essay that connects the themes of the readings to the contemporary climate. If an article, it must be no more than 20 pages (6000 words). If a video or podcast, it must be less than 30 minutes. The professor will circulate the piece, and it will become part of the assigned reading for the week. Aides will also draft a 300-500 word summary of the day's texts and begin the discussion hour by sharing it with their group. **Clerks** will keep minutes of the discussion to be circulated no later than four days after the discussion. **Moderators** will ensure that the discussion proceeds in an orderly fashion.

Essays & exams

In addition to the assessment of their participation, precept leadership, and index entries, students will also be graded according to their performance in four other assignments. First, each student will take two brief quizzes. The first quiz will cover the material considered in the first four weeks of the course. The second quiz, however, will be comprehensive. There is no study guide; students' charts should facilitate their review of the material. Further details will be offered nearer to the dates of the quizzes. Furthermore, two essays will be required of each student. The first will be an **evaluative** paper that presents a claim made by an author discussed in the course and evaluates its strengths and weaknesses. The second will be a **constructive** paper that develops an original claim in light of the theoretical and Biblical texts discussed in the class. After submitting each essay, students will receive feedback from a peer and from the professor and will be required to submit a revised draft of their essay. Further details, as well as rubrics, will be available to students as the paper due dates approach.

Academic integrity & plagiarism

Plagiarism is theft. This institution, and this course's professor, take theft extremely seriously. Students who plagiarize will receive a failing grade on their assignment and, in most cases, a failing grade in the course. In addition, such students will be referred to the Academic Integrity Committee, as per to §6.3 in the University's student handbook, and will face further disciplinary action, including expulsion. We will discuss the issue more specifically in a later class session.

A note about language

Scripture repeatedly attests to the power of words. The Christian Bible attests that the world was created with a word, and that the Savior who came into the world **was** the Word. Language is force. The words you choose matter. As such, I urge each student to reflect carefully in speaking and writing about God. This is of acute concern in the case of the gender pronouns used to refer to God. To be clear: by no means do I require one or another approach. *I do*, however, require thoughtfulness.

Grading

It should be noted that it is not difficult to pass this course. At the same time, every student should not expect to ace it. Grading for the class shall be calculated as follows:

Assignment	Date	Points
Analytic Essay	10/14	150 points
Analytic Essay rewrite	11/4	200 points
Constructive Essay	11/18	150 points
Constructive Essay rewrite	12/16	200 points
First quiz	10/7	100 points
Second quiz	12/1	100 points
Precept leadership		50 points
Participation		30 points
Charts		20 points
Total		1000 points

The grading scale is as follows:

Total Points	Grade
965+	A+
935-964	A
895-934	A-
865-894	B+
835-864	B
795-834	B-
765-794	C+
735-764	C
695-734	C-
665-694	D+
635-664	D
595-634	D-

Reading assignments

Required Texts

The only required text for the class is the anthology *Princeton Readings in Political Thought*. Most of the political theory selections are found in that textbook, and page numbers noted below refer to that text. All of the remaining political texts are available on Blackboard, as indicated by the notation (bb).

Regarding questions about Biblical translations, I recommend the New Revised Standard Version to students; however, I stringently encourage students to regularly consult multiple translations when possible.

As a note: the readings are listed in the order by which I recommend that you read the texts. You certainly are not required to read in a certain order, but I have tried to order the readings such that they build upon one another. I recommend that you begin with the Biblical texts, and keep them in mind as you consider the political theory. I also highly recommend that you consider the Biblical texts, if not the political theory, multiple times before attending class.

	Theme	Biblical texts	Political theory texts
Week 1: meeting us	9/14: introduction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Job 12:11-22 ● John 14:26 ● Rom. 11:33-34 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Jacobs, "Introduction" in <i>How to Think</i> (bb) ● Cohen, "Thinking Politically: Introduction" (1-6) ● Brueggemann, "Reading the Bible Politically: Introduction" (bb)
	9/16: human nature	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Gen. 1-3 ● Romans 3:23 ● Ps. 51 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Plato, "The Ring of Gyges" (bb) ● Augustine, <i>City of God</i> (133-143)
Week 2: Free agents	9/21: liberty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Psalm 118:5 ● 1 Cor. 6:12 ● 2 Cor. 3:17 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Rousseau, <i>On the Social Contract</i> (280-292) ● Mill, <i>On Liberty</i> (375-388)
	9/23: freedom	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Isaiah 61:1 ● Galatians 5:1-13 ● 1 Peter 2:16 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Berlin, "Two Concepts of Liberty" (bb) ● Pettit, <i>Just Freedom</i> (bb) ● Combahee River Collective, "Statement" (bb)
Week 3: The rules of the	9/28: justice & judgment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 2 Chr. 19:5-10 ● Ps. 119 ● Is. 33:22 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Rawls, <i>A Theory of Justice</i> (669-697) ● Coates, "Case for Reparations" (bb)
	9/30: law	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Ex. 20:1-17 ● Mt. 5:17-48, 7:12 ● Rm. 7:1-8:17 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Aquinas, <i>Summa Theologica</i> (144-152) ● King, "Letter from a Birmingham Jail" (623-635)
Week 4: Battle Royal	10/5: authority: monarchism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Rm. 13:1-3 ● 1 Pet. 2:13-17 ● Acts 5:27-29 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Macchiavelli, <i>The Prince</i> (167-187) ● Hobbes, <i>Leviathan</i> (205-242)
	10/7: authority: republicanism → <i>first quiz</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Ps. 47, 93, 96 ● 1 Samuel 8 ● Jn. 19:1-19 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Publius, <i>The Federalist Papers</i> (335-346) ● Locke, <i>Second Treatise</i> (243-279)
Week 5: Fair enough	10/12: equality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● James 2:1-9 ● Gal. 3:26-29 ● Deuteronomy 10:17 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Rousseau, <i>Discourse on the Origin and Foundations of Inequality</i> (293-313) ● Walzer, <i>In Defense of Equality</i> (656-668) ● Sen, "Equality of What?" (bb)
	10/14: rights and citizenship → <i>first paper due</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Gen. 12:1-9 ● Lev. 19:33-34 ● Phil. 3:20 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Aristotle, <i>Politics</i> (107-123) ● Fanon, <i>The Wretched of the Earth</i> (615-622) ● Truth, "Ain't I a Woman?" (bb)

Week 6: What is it good for?	10/19: war, violence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Josh. 11:12-20 ● Ps. 137 ● Mt. 10:34-36 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Freud, "Why War?" (556-565) ● Elshstain, "Just War and Humanitarian Intervention" (bb)
	10/21: pacifism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Isaiah 2:4 ● Ps. 37 ● Mt. 26:47-56 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Day, "Our Stand" (bb) ● Gandhi, "Non-violence as political action" (bb)
10/26 & 28: No class; fall break			
Week 7: That 's rich!	11/2: wealth distribution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Deut. 15:7-11 ● Mt. 19:16-30 ● Luke 16:19-31 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Smith, <i>The Wealth of Nations</i> (314-334) ● Marx, <i>The Communist Manifesto</i> (448-463) ● Nozick, <i>Anarchy, State, and Utopia</i> (698-708)
	11/4: class and power → first paper revisions due	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Isaiah 1:17 ● Proverbs 22:2 ● Mt. 22:15-22; 26:6-13 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Lenin, "What is to be done?" (530-533) ● Foucault, <i>Discipline & Punish</i> (715-740)
Week 8: liberty & justice for some	11/9: racial domination, colonization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Gn. 9:18-27 ● Mal. 2:10 ● Mt. 15:21-28 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● DuBois, "Of Our Spiritual Strivings" (bb) ● Mills, <i>The Racial Contract</i> (bb) ● Baldwin, "White Man's Guilt" (bb)
	11/11: reparations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Lev. 6:4-7 ● Ezra 6 ● Lk. 19:1-10 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Malcolm X, "The Ballot or the Bullet" (636-641) ● Lorde, "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House" (bb)
Week 9: Ms. Represented	11/16: sex discrimination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Gen. 1:26-3:24; 16:1-16; 21:1-21 ● Lk. 1:26-56 ● Eph. 5:21-33 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Wollstonecraft, "Vindication of the Rights of Woman" (362-370) ● Mackinnon, "Difference and Dominance" (bb)
	11/18: social construction → second paper due	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Prov. 31:10-31 ● 1 Cor. 11:2-16 ● 1 Tim. 2:8-15 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● de Beauvoir, <i>The Second Sex</i> (601-614) ● Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe" (bb)
11/23 & 25: No Class; Thanksgiving			
Week 10: We, the people	11/30: pluralism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Isaiah 2:1-4 ● Acts 10:27-28 ● Philippians 2: 5-7 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Luther, "The Christian in Society" (167-171) ● Nussbaum, "Patriotism and Cosmopolitanism" (738-745) ● Marciel-Lacoste, "The Paradoxes of Pluralism" (bb)
	12/1: deliberative democratic theory → second quiz	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Prov. 3:5 ● Acts 2:1-21 ● 1 Cor. 14 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Habermas, <i>The Public Sphere</i> (709-714) ● Young, "Justice and the Politics of Difference" (729-737) ● Iris Young, "Communication and the Other: Beyond Deliberative Democracy" (bb)
Week 11: We're in this together	12/7: systemic injustice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Psalm 19:12 ● Daniel 9 ● Romans 8:19-22 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Townes, "Everydayness: Beginning Notes on Dismantling the Cultural Production of Evil" (bb) ● Arendt, <i>The Origins of Totalitarianism</i> (575-590)
	12/9: systemic injustice part 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Phil. 4:5 ● 1 Cor. 12 ● Eph 4:1-16 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (bb) ● Rothstein, "The Color of Law" (bb)
Week 12: Review	12/14: TBA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● TBA ● TBA 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● TBA ● TBA
	12/16: Review → second paper revisions due	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Psalm 103:19 ● Revelation 7:15-17 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Dewey, "Search for the Great Community" (bb) ● West, "Putting on Our Democratic Armor" (bb)