

## Political Theory 4932: Political Theory and Literature

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Florida Atlantic University, Spring 2017

Course Credits: 3.000

M 2:00-4:50PM, General Classroom South Boca 109

**Professor:** Dr. Rebecca LeMoine

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**Office:** Social Sciences 384C

**Office Hours:** M 11:00AM-1:00PM,  
or by appt.

### Course Description

In Plato's *Republic*, nearly all literature is banned from the ideal city on the grounds that exposing citizens to depictions of gods and other heroes engaging in unjust behavior will encourage citizens to mimic this behavior. Similar concerns about the influence of literature on political life are still raised today, as seen through the banning of certain books in U.S. public schools. This course asks whether such concerns are justified and, if so, what role (if any) the government should play in the censorship of literature. While giving arguments in favor of censorship due consideration, we will also allow literature a chance to speak for itself, exploring how literature might help us address central questions in political theory, such as, "What is justice?" "Why do governments exist?" and "What does it mean to be a good citizen?" Of specific interest is how different genres of literature offer different visions of political life. In "Act I" of the course, we will consider how tragedy approaches political issues, beginning with ancient Greek tragedian Aeschylus' *Oresteia* and turning to two contemporary novels, Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and Tim O'Brien's *The Things They Carried*. In "Act II," we will compare tragedy to comedy by examining two of ancient Greek Aristophanes' comedies, Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice*, and John Kennedy Toole's *A Confederacy of Dunces*.

### Objectives

- 1) Develop a deeper understanding of the role of literature in political life—particularly in democracies—and engage arguments for and against literary censorship.
- 2) Study a selection of literary works for their insights into politics, and consider how the choice of genre affects the presentation of political issues.
- 3) Improve ability to construct persuasive arguments, both verbal and written.
- 4) Practice a more contemplative and self-aware form of citizenship, and consider its effects on political life and personal fulfillment.

### Classroom Expectations

Political theory is an art, not a science. As such, there are no universally accepted "right" answers to be poured into you through pre-packaged lectures. To be sure, lecture style political theory courses abound. This class diverges from that model, favoring reflection over dogma. Since this class brings to life the art of Socratic conversation, the success of the course depends on students having read the assigned material carefully and coming to class prepared to discuss it. Everyone must be present—not just physically, but psychologically. You cannot be present if you are checking email, chatting online, watching ESPN, etc. Accordingly, **use of electronic devices will not be permitted** during class time. Finally, it goes without saying, but must be said that students should demonstrate respect towards everyone in the room at all times. Frequent tardiness, early departures, or other disruptions will not be tolerated and will negatively affect your grade.

**Required Texts**

The following books are available for purchase at the FAU Bookstore. Please purchase hard copies of these exact editions. Throughout each class session, you will be asked to turn to specific pages in the book. If you do not have the same edition or cannot easily turn to a given page, you will be lost and unable to contribute as effectively. Copies of each book will also be available on reserve at the FAU library.

Aeschylus. *The Oresteia: Agamemnon, The Libation Bearers, The Eumenides*. Trans. Robert Fagles. New York: Penguin Books, 1984. ISBN: 9780140443332.

Aristophanes. *The Complete Plays*. Trans. Paul Roche. New York: New American Library, 2005. ISBN: 9780451214096.

Conrad, Joseph. *Heart of Darkness and Selections from the Congo Diary*. New York: Modern House Library, 1999. ISBN: 9780375753770.

O'Brien, Tim. *The Things They Carried*. New York: Broadway Books, 1998. ISBN: 9780767902892.

Shakespeare, William. *The Merchant of Venice*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998. ISBN: 9780192834249.

Toole, John Kennedy. *A Confederacy of Dunces*. New York: Grove Press, 1980. ISBN: 9780802130204.

**Course Requirements**

Participation:	20%
Quizzes:	15%
Oral Report:	10%
Term Paper:	55% (Paper Proposals: 5%; Peer Drafts: 5%; Peer Edits: 10%; Paper #1: 15%; Paper #2: 20%)

**Participation (20%)**

Active attendance and participation in class discussions and activities are crucial to your success in this course, and to the success of the course as a whole. Your participation grade will thus be based on both your attendance and classroom participation.

- Attendance: I will take attendance each time we meet. Everyone is permitted one unexcused absence and one excused absence. For an absence to be excused, you must clear it with me in advance or, in cases of illness or emergency, before the next class meeting. Excused absences require make up work, which is due within a week of the absence. It is up to my discretion whether or not to grant an excused absence. The following generally count as *unexcused* absences: slept through alarm; need to study/work; need to finish an assignment; leaving early/arriving back late from vacation; bad hangover.

If you think you will miss more than one class due to University-approved activities, please see me at the start of the semester. Please note I will abide by *FAU's official attendance policy*: "Students are expected to attend all of their scheduled University classes and to satisfy all academic objectives as outlined by the instructor. The effect of absences upon grades is determined by the instructor, and the University reserves the right to deal at any

time with individual cases of non-attendance. Students are responsible for arranging to make up work missed because of legitimate class absence, such as illness, family emergencies, military obligation, court-imposed legal obligations or participation in University approved activities. Examples of University-approved reasons for absences include participating on an athletic or scholastic team, musical and theatrical performances and debate activities. It is the student's responsibility to give the instructor notice prior to any anticipated absences and within a reasonable amount of time after an unanticipated absence, ordinarily by the next scheduled class meeting. Instructors must allow each student who is absent for a University-approved reason the opportunity to make up work missed without any reduction in the student's final course grade as a direct result of such absence."

- Participation: Physical presence at class meetings is necessary, but not sufficient for earning a good participation grade. The strength of your participation grade will also depend on your performance as a contributor to class discussions. Please note that I value quality over quantity. Speaking frequently does not guarantee you a good participation grade. On the other hand, if you rarely speak, I will have nothing to judge you by. Students who struggle with classroom participation should schedule a meeting with me during the first week of class to discuss strategies for increasing or supplementing classroom participation. Office hour visits, emails demonstrating engagement with the material, Canvas posts, etc. will be considered when determining participation grades.

#### Quizzes (15%)

Each week, a quiz will be administered promptly at the beginning of class. These quizzes will test your comprehension of the text assigned for that day. Please note: if you do not do the reading, you will not pass the quiz. As you will discover, the quizzes will ask about details not found on Sparknotes, Wikipedia, etc. It is therefore essential to do the readings in full. You may only use notes you have handwritten on a separate sheet of paper or in a notebook created for this class. To ensure your quiz grade is not adversely affected by a particularly difficult quiz, I will drop your lowest 3 quiz scores. Please note that there are no make-up quizzes.

#### Oral Report (10%)

Once during the semester, you will deliver an oral report on a scholarly interpretation of the political themes in that day's assigned reading. This will involve finding and reading a relevant scholarly book/article, completing a worksheet on that book/article, and preparing some brief remarks on the book/article to share with the class. Your goal is to bring the insights you learned from reading this book/article to bear on that day's discussion, and to raise questions for the class to consider. You will sign up for an oral report date during the second class meeting. Make-up reports will not be allowed without an excused absence.

#### Term Paper (55%)

The major requirement of the course is an 8-10 page (double-spaced) term paper. Don't let the length fool you. This paper is designed to help you become a better thinker and more persuasive writer, whether you consider yourself to be a "good" writer or not. This class will stress the link between clear, compelling writing and sound thinking. It will advance the view that writing *is*

thinking and that one way to develop your thinking is to work on your writing. As such, we will write, re-write, and re-write some more. The process will be grueling and, if done right, will throw you into existential perplexity (a rarely experienced feeling in our modern age of instantaneous “answers”). However, by breaking it down into smaller pieces and teaching writing as a process at which anyone can excel, I hope you will find the assignment manageable and rewarding.

The term paper will be completed in two cycles. Each cycle will involve writing a paper proposal, a peer draft, and a final paper. You will also edit a peer’s paper for each cycle. For the first cycle, you will work on crafting a 3-4 page paper (hereafter, Paper #1) that examines how one of the tragedies in the course approaches a particular political issue (e.g., war, immigration, religion, gender, etc.). After writing and receiving feedback from me on a 1-page paper proposal, you will write an initial draft of Paper #1, which you will exchange with an assigned peer editor. Based on her or his feedback, you will craft the final version of Paper #1. I will then give you extensive comments on this paper, which you will use to revise the paper as you build on it to create the full, 8-10 page paper (Paper #2). Like Paper #1, Paper #2 will involve writing a 1-page paper proposal, a peer draft, and a final version. Paper #2 will consist of your analysis of the tragic approach to the issue you have chosen (i.e., a revised Paper #1) plus an analysis of how one of the comedies in the course approaches the same issue. In this version, you will be asked to craft a thesis that addresses how the use of genre (tragedy or comedy) alters the vision of politics the literary work offers. By the end of the semester, you will have re-conceptualized and revised your paper numerous times, as well as received feedback from various sources. This is a paper you won’t forget!

Term Paper Due Dates

Proposal #1	Feb. 27 <sup>th</sup>
Peer Draft #1	Mar. 13 <sup>th</sup>
Peer Edit #1 (in class)	Mar. 13 <sup>th</sup>
Paper #1	Mar. 20 <sup>th</sup>
Proposal #2	Apr. 10 <sup>th</sup>
Peer Draft #2	Apr. 24 <sup>th</sup>
Peer Edit #2 (in class)	Apr. 24 <sup>th</sup>
Paper #2	May 1 <sup>st</sup>

### **Grading Policies**

- There are no make up quizzes. If you miss a quiz for an unexcused absence, that quiz will count as one of your 3 dropped scores. If you miss a quiz for an excused absence, then your total number of quizzes will be one fewer than the number of quizzes administered.
- Papers must be submitted to the designated folder on Canvas by midnight on the due date. Papers submitted via email will not be accepted unless there are technical difficulties posting your paper to Canvas. If there are any doubts, please email your paper.
- Late papers will be penalized one full letter grade for every 24-hour period late (e.g. A to A-, A- to B+, etc.). If you are 1 minute late, or 24 hours late, it costs you one letter grade.
- Copy-editing and revision are integral parts of the writing process. Papers that show an unacceptably high level of error or carelessness (for instance, five or more errors in a paragraph) will be returned for you to proofread before resubmitting them. You will have one

week to edit the paper and resubmit it with an automatic penalty of one letter grade (e.g., A to A-). After one week, the grade on the paper will automatically drop to an F.

- I will not discuss grades on any assignments for 24 hours after they have been returned. If, after 24 hours reflection, you believe you deserve a higher grade, contact me and I will re-evaluate your assignment and make the final decision regarding the grade.

**Grading Scale**

A = 94-100	A- = 91-93.99	B+ = 87-90.99	B = 83-86.99
B- = 80-82.99	C+ = 77-79.99	C = 73-76.99	C- = 70-72.99
D+ = 67-69.99	D = 63-66.99	D- = 60-62.99	F = below 60

**Code of Academic Integrity**

Students at Florida Atlantic University are expected to maintain the highest ethical standards. Academic dishonesty is considered a serious breach of these ethical standards, because it interferes with the university mission to provide a high quality education in which no student enjoys an unfair advantage over any other. Academic dishonesty is also destructive of the university community, which is grounded in a system of mutual trust and places high value on personal integrity and individual responsibility. Harsh penalties are associated with academic dishonesty. For more information, see [http://wise.fau.edu/regulations/chapter4/Reg\\_4.001\\_5-26-10\\_FINAL.pdf](http://wise.fau.edu/regulations/chapter4/Reg_4.001_5-26-10_FINAL.pdf).

**Disabilities**

In compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments Act (ADAAA), students who require reasonable accommodations due to a disability to properly execute coursework must register with Student Accessibility Services (SAS)—in Boca Raton, SU 133 (561-297-3880); in Davie, LA 203 (954-236-1222); or in Jupiter, SR 110 (561-799-8585) —and follow all SAS procedures. If you require a special accommodation, please make an appointment at the beginning of the semester to discuss the accommodation with me.

**Course Schedule**

**Act I: Tragedy**

Date	Topic	Readings	Deadlines
09-Jan	Introduction		
16-Jan	<i>MLK Jr. Holiday</i>	<i>No Classes</i>	
23-Jan	Performing Justice?	• Aeschylus, <i>The Oresteia</i>	
30-Jan	Bringing Order?	• Conrad, <i>Heart of Darkness</i> , Part I (pp. 3-37)	
06-Feb	The Dark Side of the Human	• Conrad, <i>Heart of Darkness</i> , Parts II & III (pp. 38-96)	
13-Feb	Friends vs. Enemies	• O’Brien, <i>Things They Carried</i> , pp. 1-85	

20-Feb	War vs. Peace	• O'Brien, <i>Things They Carried</i> , pp. 86-161	
27-Feb	Truth vs. Story Truth	• O'Brien, <i>Things They Carried</i> , pp. 162-246	Proposal #1
06-Mar	<i>Spring Break</i>	<i>No Classes</i>	

### Act II: Comedy

Date	Topic	Readings	Deadlines
13-Mar	Utopian Escapes	• Aristophanes, <i>Acharnians</i> and <i>Birds</i>	Peer Draft & Edit #1
20-Mar	Ties that Bind?	• Shakespeare, <i>The Merchant of Venice</i>	Paper #1
27-Mar	The American Dream?	• Toole, <i>A Confederacy of Dunces</i> , Ch. 1-4 (pp. 1-103)	
03-Apr	Politics as Sausage Making	• Toole, <i>A Confederacy of Dunces</i> , Ch. 5-8 (pp. 104-206)	
10-Apr	Revolution	• Toole, <i>A Confederacy of Dunces</i> , Ch. 9-10 (pp. 207-260)	Proposal #2
17-Apr	Abnormality & Invisibility	• Toole, <i>A Confederacy of Dunces</i> , Ch. 11-12 (pp. 261-335)	
24-Apr	Poetic Justice	• Toole, <i>A Confederacy of Dunces</i> , Ch. 13-14 (pp. 336-394)	Peer Draft & Edit #2
<b>01-May, 1:15-3:45PM</b>	Concluding Remarks	Paper #2 Due	Paper #2