

Truth and Progress

POLS 386
Fall 2013
Mon, Wed, and Fri, 10:30-11:20am
309 Oldfather Hall
Office Hours: Mondays and Wednesdays, 11:30a-12:30pm

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Required Texts

Bloom, <i>The Closing of the American Mind</i>	Nozick, <i>Anarchy, State, and Utopia</i>
Foucault, <i>The Order of Things</i>	Rawls, <i>Justice as Fairness</i>
Habermas, <i>Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere</i>	Rorty, <i>Philosophy as Cultural Politics</i>

Purpose of the Course

This course surveys the landscape of contemporary political thought, addressing some of the major debates of the past sixty years. In particular, we will consider whether our current American version of liberal democracy is the best form of government available today or whether it might be improved upon. If the former, have we arrived at what some theorists have called “The End of History”? If the latter, what sorts of changes might be in the offing for us and for our society?

In addition to examining the virtues and vices of democratic life, of course, we will also spend time pondering what it means to be a human being in the 21st Century. With post-modern political theorists to guide (and occasionally confuse) us, we will explore whether what we know – or *can* know – is expanding or shrinking and, indeed, whether humanity itself is progressing or regressing.

This semester-long discussion, then, will force us to think critically about the very nature of truth and progress; what remains to be seen is what the future holds for these important concepts.

Design of the Course

Students will write two papers of between six and eight pages over the course of the semester. In addition, there will be an hour-long midterm examination and a two-hour final examination.

Late papers will be penalized one letter grade each day. Make-up exams will not be given, except in the event of a medical emergency; a note from a doctor is required before a make-up can be scheduled and the note must say more than simply that you saw a doctor on the day of the missed quiz or exam. Further, an illness that prevents you from using the time that you set aside to study will not be considered a legitimate excuse.

The success of the each class meeting depends upon both your active involvement in the day’s discussion and upon your careful assessment and critique of the daily reading assignment. Because of the importance of these activities, the quality of your class involvement will be evaluated daily.

To assist us in our discussions, our class has a dedicated Twitter account that will broadcast questions to all followers in advance of each class meeting. You must create a Twitter account and follow @POLS386 in order to ensure that you don’t miss any of

these broadcasts; I recommend that you make use of a desktop client like TweetDeck or HootSuite, which will allow you to run on-going searches so that you'll be able to follow the discussion as it happens. You are not required to respond to the questions, but you are very much encouraged to do so; contributions to the discussion via Twitter are seen as a valid method of class involvement. In order to ensure that your contribution to the discussion can be seen (and responded to by others), make sure that you add the hashtag #pols386 to each relevant post (which is then searchable). At the end of the first week of classes, I will create a Twitter list of the students in our class so that you can also follow one another and/or the list.

Grading

Paper #1	20%
Paper #2	25%
Midterm Exam	20%
Final Exam	25%
Quality of Class Involvement	10%

Each assignment for this course is graded on the same four-point scale that is used to calculate student grade point averages. An A is a 4 and an F is a 0. There are gradations for A, B, C, and D grades; for example, a B+ is a 3.3 and a C- is a 1.7. There are no gradations for an F. What this means is that if you receive a 38% on your midterm, you get a 0 as the grade for your midterm. If you receive a 52% on your midterm, you get a 0 as the grade for your midterm. An F signifies that you failed to meet the minimum standards for the assignment; I award no points for failing to meet the minimum standards.

Class Absences

The work of this course demands regular attendance. Excessive absence, therefore, will be reflected both in the kinds of grades you likely will receive on written work, and – of course – in my evaluation of your class participation. Arriving approximately ten minutes late or leaving early on three occasions will be counted as one absence. Missing roughly 1/4 (10) the total number of classes will result in automatic failure of the course.

Plagiarism / Academic Dishonesty

I consider academic integrity essential to teaching, learning, and research – in short, to the entire academic enterprise and I take very seriously the Student Code of Conduct. I hope you will talk to and learn from one another both inside and outside the classroom. You must provide appropriate citations whenever you incorporate someone else's words or ideas into your writing and you may not turn in the same work for multiple classes. Plagiarism or academic dishonesty will result in an automatic F on the assignment in question and, at my discretion, referral to the relevant university officials. If you have any questions about academic integrity, don't hesitate to ask. I ask that you write out and sign an Honor Pledge on all written work done outside of the classroom; I will not read papers that are handed in without an Honor Pledge.

Other Important Notes

Mobile phones, MP3 players, and all other electronic devices should be turned off and put away before class begins. If your cell phone rings during class, I reserve the right to deal with the interruption in a manner of my choosing. If you are awaiting an important telephone call, please set your phone to “vibrate” and then take the call outside. Using any electronic device during an examination will result in automatic failure of the exam, no questions asked.

If for any reason you need to leave class early or arrive late, please do so quietly and without ceremony. I will not be offended or disturbed – unless you stop the class to ask if you may come or go. If you plan to leave early or arrive late on a regular basis, you should speak with me due to the above attendance policy.

If you miss a class – with or without a legitimate excuse – you are responsible for getting lecture notes from a classmate. If you have questions about the material after looking over the notes, please stop by during my office hours or schedule an appointment with me. Please do not send me an e-mail to ask whether you missed anything important, as you definitely did.

Students with disabilities are encouraged to contact the instructor for a confidential discussion of their individual needs for academic accommodation. It is the policy of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln to provide flexible and individualized accommodation to students with documented disabilities that may affect their ability to fully participate in course activities or to meet course requirements. To receive accommodation services, students must be registered with the Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) office, 132 Canfield Administration, 472-3787 voice or TTY.

Day-by-Day Assignment Breakdown

Monday, August 26	Introduction
Wednesday, August 28	Read Bloom, pgs. 25-43, 246-56
Friday, August 30	No Class Meeting
Monday, September 2	Labor Day – No Class Meeting
Wednesday, September 4	Read Rorty, Chapters 5 and 8
Friday, September 6	No Class Meeting
Monday, September 9	Read Rawls, pg. 1-61
Wednesday, September 11	Read Rawls, pgs. 61-134
Friday, September 13	Discussion Day
Monday, September 16	Read Rawls, pgs. 135-175
Wednesday, September 18	Read Rawls, pgs. 176-202

Friday, September 20	Discussion Day
Monday, September 23	Read Nozick, pgs. ix-xiv, 149-164, 167-174, 232-238
Wednesday, September 25	Read Nozick, pgs. 183-204, 213-231
Friday, September 27	Discussion Day
Monday, September 30	Read Sandel, "The Procedural Republic and the Unencumbered Self"; <i>Democracy's Discontent</i> , pgs. 3-17, 317-324
Wednesday, October 2	Read Bloom, "Justice: John Rawls versus the Tradition of Political Philosophy"
Friday, October 4	Discussion Day Paper #1 Due
Monday, October 7	Read Rorty, Chapter 3
Wednesday, October 9	Read Arendt, Chapter 2
Friday, October 11	Discussion Day
Monday, October 14	Read Habermas, Chapters 1-7
Wednesday, October 16	Read Habermas, Chapters 10-11, 15
Friday, October 18	Discussion Day
Monday, October 21	Fall Break – No Class Meeting
Wednesday, October 23	Read Habermas, Chapters 16-19
Friday, October 25	Midterm Exam
Monday, October 28	Read Rorty, Chapter 6
Wednesday, October 30	Read Foucault, pgs. xv-77
Friday, November 1	Discussion Day
Monday, November 4	Read Foucault, pgs. 217-249
Wednesday, November 6	Read Foucault, pgs. 303-343

Friday, November 8	Discussion Day
Monday, November 11	Read Foucault, pgs. 344-387
Wednesday, November 13	Read Lacan, <i>Écrits</i> , Chapter 4
Friday, November 15	Discussion Paper #2 Due
Monday, November 18	Read Bloom, pgs. 47-81
Wednesday, November 20	Read Rorty, <i>Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity</i> (Chapter 1-3)
Friday, November 22	Discussion Day
Monday, November 25	Read Kautz, <i>Liberalism and Community</i> , Chapter 8
Wednesday, November 27	Thanksgiving Break – No Class Meeting
Friday, November 29	Thanksgiving Break – No Class Meeting
Monday, December 2	Read Rorty, Chapters 7 and 4
Wednesday, December 4	Read Bloom, pgs. 336-47, 356-82
Friday, December 6	Discussion Day
Monday, December 9	Read Rorty, Chapter 13
Wednesday, December 11	Conclusion
Friday, December 13	Discussion Day/Course Evaluations
Friday, December 20	Final Exam (10:00am-12:00pm)