“Nowhere may be an imaginary country, but the News from Nowhere is real news.”
—Lewis Mumford, *The Story of Utopia*

“No Proverbs for Paranoids #3: If they can get you asking the wrong questions, they don’t have to worry about answers.”
—Thomas Pynchon, *Gravity’s Rainbow*

This course explores two of the central terms in the study of politics, power and justice, paying special attention to the connections between them. We will begin by trying to understand what power is and how it works. Who has it? Is it even something that can be possessed? What are power’s bases and mechanisms? Is it always visible? If not, how can we give an account of it and assess its effects? Over the course of the semester, our focus will shift to how power ought to be shaped and shared by members of political collectivities. We will thus take up some of the oldest and most controversial questions that political thinkers have asked, questions about justice, and also democracy: What is justice? What does it entail for individuals and communities? How can it be secured, socially and politically? Where does it apply? To whom? Who decides? On what basis?

As we engage these questions, our primary materials will be philosophical and theoretical texts, both classic and contemporary. Introducing you to some of the most important and profound past and present ways of thinking about power and justice is one of the main goals of the course; another is challenging you to
develop your own responses to the readings and to our animating questions. Taking that second goal seriously will require you to articulate and examine some of your most basic principles and ideals. But if the study of political theory and the development of one’s personal moral views are in some ways related undertakings, they are by no means the same thing. Our work will underscore the differences as well as the connections. Insofar as we are investigating the political meaning and place of concepts such as justice, we must ask what institutions, principles, actions, and ways of thinking are appropriate to the political world. Whether implicitly or explicitly, each of our readings offers us an understanding of both the nature of politics and the vocation of political theory; much of our work will be devoted to comparing and evaluating these different understandings.

I do not assume that we will begin from or reach shared answers to our questions. I doubt that, when we are done, any of us will consider them to have been answered in a definitive way. But I do expect that you will be willing to confront the issues passionately and thoughtfully as we go along: that is the fundamental course requirement from which all other, more particular ones follow. Work that does not fulfill that requirement will not be rewarded. If you are not interested in thinking—hard—about our difficult and sometimes divisive problems, then this course is probably not for you.

Course Format and Requirements

Classes will be a mix of lecture and discussion, with the emphasis on the latter. I will often begin class with twenty minutes or so of introductory comments, and I will sometimes give more substantial lectures, but most of our sessions will be primarily devoted to discussion. Lively participation is thus essential to the health of the class. To take a useful part in the conversation you of course need to do the assignments on time. As the readings vary in length and difficulty, it is important to familiarize yourself with the nature of the assignments in advance so you leave yourself time to do them properly. You can’t learn political theory by skimming or speed-reading; you may find that the more challenging works or passages require you to read them more than once. Your task is not only to grasp, as best you can, the arguments of the texts but also to begin to figure out what you think of these arguments. Come to class prepared to talk about both. Come prepared to listen carefully, too, since in a group of this size you will inevitably do more listening than talking. Taking notes is fine, and may be useful to you, but attending to the give and take of discussion is, I think, more important. Because of all the ways electronic devices impede engagement, I ask that you not use them during class—even for notes—and that you silence your cell phones. (If, however, you have an accommodation involving the use of laptops, or you otherwise have reason to think the no electronic devices rule will interfere with your learning, please talk to me about it.)

The course TA is Chelsea Thomeer. She will be available (as I am as well) to help you with study skills, understanding the assignments, and navigating through the course requirements. Most important, she will facilitate discussion group meetings throughout the semester. In order to encourage informed and productive conversation, I am requiring every member of the course to participate in a discussion group of 5 or 6 students. Groups will meet once a week to discuss the political and conceptual issues raised by the reading assignment for the next class. Twice a week, I will post discussion questions on the course Glow site. These questions may serve as the focus for group discussion and will help shape my approach in the following class. You are welcome to add or substitute your own topics when you meet as a group: the important thing is that you all think seriously about the texts and issues before class begins. Your TA will help facilitate your discussion every other week, but even on those weeks when she does so, it’s your discussion—she isn’t there to deliver a lecture. Attendance at discussion groups is not optional; this is a non-negotiable course requirement.
For each of the roughly six weeks that it meets without a TA, each group will submit a discussion memo, a brief (about one page) summary of the highlights of your group’s discussion. (You should rotate the writing of these memos among the members of your group, so everyone does at least one; each memo must list which members of the group were present.) Turn in the memo by emailing it to your TA, who in addition to providing occasional, brief written comments, will give each submission either a check or a minus. (If she does not feel the memo is worthy of a check, she will pass it on to me and I will make a final determination.) An accumulation of minuses or repeated failures to turn in the memos on time will substantially lower group members’ grades.

The other written work for the course will consist of three papers. The first and third will be 7-8 pp. each; the second paper will be 8-10 pp. The papers should be occasions for you to think imaginatively and rigorously about some of the readings and issues we have discussed; they do not require extra research.

Final grades will be determined as follows:

- 20% — Attendance and participation in class and discussion groups
- 25% — First Paper (7-8 pages)
- 30% — Second Paper (8-10 pages)
- 25% — Third Paper (7-8 pages)

Let me, however, call your attention to two important points. First, attendance is not optional. If you do not attend class consistently, I reserve the right to lower your grade beyond the 20% allocated for participation. Persistent non-attendance may result in failing the course. Second, the Williams Honor Code applies to all aspects of your work in this course. You are encouraged to discuss ideas with fellow students, and it is fine to have peers read drafts of your work, but all essays must be written by you alone. You must be careful to cite all sources for your papers. If you are at any time uncertain about what this means or how the Honor Code applies, please ask me. If you have concerns about your ability to do an assignment, please come talk to me—do not plagiarize.

The following required books are available at Water St. Books:

- Douglass, Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass (Dover)
- Freud, Civilization and Its Discontents (Norton)
- Hobbes, Leviathan (Cambridge)
- Locke, The Second Treatise of Government (Hackett)
- Mills, The Racial Contract (Cornell)
- Schmitt, The Concept of the Political (Chicago)

All other required readings are in the course reader. (Please obtain a copy promptly.) Selections from the reader are indicated on the syllabus with an asterisk.
Schedule of Assignments

Th. 9/8  Introduction: The Ubiquity of Power and Question of Justice
        (Or: Do Chimpanzees Have Politics?)

I.  Power and Subjection, Speech and Silence, Violence and Transformation

Tu. 9/13 *Plato, Republic (Cambridge, 2000), Book I; II, 357a-368b


Tu. 9/20 *Scott, Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts (Yale, 1990), 1-10, 17-36, 45-52, 70-93, 103-107

Th. 9/22 Douglass, Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, pp. vii-ix, 1-69

Tu. 9/27 *Fanon, “Concerning Violence,” in The Wretched of the Earth (Grove, 2004) pp. 1-62

   *Arendt, The Human Condition (Chicago, 1958), 7-9, 199-207


II.  The Nature of Politics and The Tasks of Theory

Th. 10/6 Aristotle, Nichomachean Ethics, Book X, chp. 9 and Politics, I, 1-7, 12-13; II, 2

Sun. 10/9 First Paper (Plato through Foucault) Due on Glow, 5:00 p.m.

Tu. 10/11 Fall Reading Period, No Class

Th. 10/13 Aristotle, Politics Book III, 1-13, 18

Tu. 10/18 Hobbes, Leviathan, Author’s Introduction, chps. 1, 2 (only bracket #’s 4-6), 4, 5, 6 (24-25), 8 (32-36), 10 (41-42), 11

Th. 10/20 Hobbes, Leviathan, chps. 13-19, 21

Tu. 10/25 Locke, Second Treatise, Chs. 1-5, 6 (only sections 52-65)

Th. 10/27 Locke, Second Treatise, Chs. 7-9, 11, 13 (s. 149-155, 158), 14, 16 (s. 186-192), 18, 19 (s. 211-229, 240-243)

   Marx, from “Estranged Labor,” in ibid. pp. 74-77
   Marx, “Theses on Feuerbach,” in ibid. pp. 143-147
Th. 11/3  Marx, from *The German Ideology* (on “History”), in *Marx-Engels Reader*, pp. 155-163
         Marx, from “Critique of the Gotha Program,” in *ibid.* pp. 528-532

Tu. 11/8  Marx, “Estranged Labor,” in *Marx-Engels Reader*, pp. 70-81

Th. 11/10 Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*

Tu. 11/15 Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, pp. 3-79

III.  *Justice, Equality, and Democracy Now*


Sun. 11/20  Second Paper (Aristotle through Schmitt) Due on Glow, 5:00 p.m.


Th. 11/24  Thanksgiving Break, No Class

         NYT interview with Mills:  http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2014/11/16/lost-in-rawlsland/?_r=0


Tu. 12/6  *Pogge, “Priorities of Global Justice,” in Global Justice* (Oxford, 2001), pp. 6-23


Fri. 12/16  Final Paper (Rawls through Brown) Due on Glow, 5:00 p.m.