

Political Science 101: The Best Constitution

Marquette University, "Spring" 2008
11:00 am – 12:15 T TH; WW 418
Professor Dobbs
421 Wm. Wehr Physics
Office Hours: 12:30 - 2:30 F and by appointment
<http://www.mu.edu/polisci/Dobbs.htm>

Course Description

What is the best constitution? It is, presumably, the one that best facilitates the human good. But what is this good? Contemporary social science typically neglects the question of the good and instead formulates value-free descriptions of the structures and functions characteristic of various "political systems." So an alternative approach is needed if we are ever to give a fully responsive answer to the question, which constitution is best? In this class we shall consider the Platonic alternative to modern social science, an alternative that invites us to discuss the constitution we *think* best in the expectation that such conversation will better equip us *to discover* the human good. In other words, the work of constitutional-design, albeit in speech, is instrumental to our understanding of the good, rather than the other way around! The improvement of our understanding thus constitutes an even higher purpose than the reform of our government. We shall pursue this higher purpose by engaging in a close reading of Plato's greatest work, the *Republic*.

Requirements, Expectations and Grading

You are required to attend *every* meeting of this class and to read the assigned texts carefully and on schedule. There will be daily writing assignments. I shall grade several, but not all, of these exercises, collecting some by surprise and some in response to an advanced announcement. Additionally, you will frequently be asked to present some component of your exercises for class discussion. The quality of your written work will account for approximately 65% of your final grade. The remaining 35% of your grade will be determined by the quality of your contribution to classroom discussion.

You should expect to spend at least 6 hours each and every week studying for this class, in addition to your regular attendance. (If you carry a load of fifteen credit hours, and follow this rule of thumb in all your classes, you will still be investing less time developing your own, human, capital than you will spend enlarging your employer's capital after you have graduated! I think you are worth the investment. Don't you?)

Date	Assigned Reading
Week 1	Fr. Guido & Justice in Higher Education; Richard Weaver, <i>Ideas Have Consequences</i> , pp.1-34
Weeks 2-3	Weaver, <i>Ideas Have Consequences</i> pp.35-69; 70-112; 113-147; 148-187
Weeks 4-14	Plato, <i>Republic</i> 357a-372c; 372c-397e; 397e-417b; 595a-600e; 600e-605c; 605c-612a; 612a-621d; 449a-453; 453e-466d; 466d-475e; 475e-480a; 484a-487d; 487d-491c; 491c-497a; 497a-506d; 506d-511e; 514a-517c; 517c-521b; 521c-527c; 527d-533a; 533a-537d; 537d-541b
Week 15	Synopsis and Comprehensive Discussion