

Political Science 101: The Best Constitution

Marquette University, "Spring" 2009
11:00 am – 12:15 T TH; AR105
Professor D.D. Dobbs
421 Wm. Wehr Physics
Office Hours: 12:25 - 1:30 T TH 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 political science typically neglects the question of the human good and instead formulates value-free descriptions of the structures and functions characteristic of various "political systems." So an alternative approach is needed to answer the vital 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 and elaborate the constitution we *think* best in the expectation that such conversation will better equip us *to discover* the human good. In this sense, the work of constitutional-design is made instrumental to the development of our understanding of the good, rather than the other way around. Indeed, the consequent improvement in our judgment may well stand out as a greater achievement than the reform of our government! We shall pursue this greater 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 by no means all, of these exercises, collecting them by surprise and treating them as "pop quizzes." Additionally, you will be scheduled to present some of your exercises for class discussion. The quality of your exercises (as written and presented) will account for approximately 2/3 of your final grade. The remaining 1/3 of your grade will be determined by the quality of your contribution to classroom discussion via your responses to the presentations of others.

You should expect to spend at least 6 hours each and every week studying and preparing 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 no more time developing your own human capital than you will spend enlarging your employer's capital after you have graduated. My working assumption is that you are worth the investment. Do you agree?)

Date

Assigned Reading

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| Week 1 | Fr. Guido & The Five-Minute University http://youtube.com/watch?v=kO8x8eoU3L4
D. Sayers, "The Lost Tools of Learning" http://www.gbt.org/text/sayers.html |
| Weeks 2-4 | Richard Weaver, <i>Ideas Have Consequences</i> , pp.1-34; 35-69; 70-112; 113-147; 148-187; review |
| Weeks 5-15 | Plato, <i>Republic</i> 357a-372c; 372c-397e; 397e-417b; 595a-600e; 600e-605c; 605c-612a; 612a-621d; 449a-457c; 457c-466d; 466d-475e; 475e-480a; 484a-487d; 487d-491c; 491c-497a; 497a-506d; 506d-511e; 514a-521b; 521c-527c; 527d-533c; 533c-537d; 537d-541b |