

# POSC 4811-1001: The Best Constitution

Professor Darrell Dobbs

Office Hours: 8:30-9:30 am T TH and by appointment

Office: 421 Wm. Wehr Physics

Marquette University, Spring 2017

Class time: 3:30-4:45 T TH

Classroom: 216 Lalumiere

## Course Rationale

Is good government only a matter of efficiency in administration, or are the *ends* pursued by government also subject to rational evaluation? The Constitution of the United States of America was expressly designed “to form a more perfect union, establish justice, insure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity.” But government elsewhere has been organized to promote martial virtue, religious conformity, imperial hegemony, and even the cultivation of a master race. What, then, are the rightful ends or aims of government? Moreover, what limits, if any, are to be acknowledged in the political pursuit of rightful aims? To help answer these questions, we shall examine two political regimes whose justifying principles and modes of administration are exceptionally well-documented: the aristocratic political order theoretically outlined in Plato’s *Republic* and the American democratic republic as it existed in practice prior to the Civil War.

## Policies, Expectations, and Grading

You are expected to attend every meeting of this class, having carefully read the assigned texts. Take it as a working premise that there is truth to be discovered and that the authors selected for attention in this class are among mankind’s most reliable guides to its discovery. You will need your own copy of Plato’s *Republic* (Sachs, trans.) and Tocqueville’s *Democracy in America* (Mansfield & Winthrop, trans.). Grades will be based on four papers (80%) and regular participation in class discussion (20%). Absences are excusable upon my receipt of your email request, time-stamped prior to class time of the day of your absence. It remains your responsibility to make up any missed assignments. Your second, and every subsequent, *unexcused* absence will lower your final grade by one step: e.g., B ---> BC. Plan to spend an average of 5 hours per week preparing and studying for this class. (If you carry a full load of fifteen credit hours, following this rule of thumb will result in a 40 hour work week).

## Course Outline, Schedule, and Assigned Readings

### Week

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| 1   | I. Introductions and exploratory discussion of the aims of government  |
| 2-3 | II. Typology of political regimes -- Plato, <i>Republic</i> 545a-550c; 550c-555b; 555b-562a; 562a-569c;  |
| 4-8 | III. Genealogy of government, highlighting the question: “Who will guard us from our guardians?”<br>A. Educating chosen rulers<br>1. Pursuing Meritocracy -- Plato, <i>Republic</i> 367e-383c; 386a-403c; 403c-417b; 419a-424d; 449a-457c;<br>2. Are there limits in the pursuit of justice? -- Plato, <i>Republic</i> 457c-471d; 472a-480a;<br>3. Educating for wisdom -- Plato, <i>Republic</i> 484a-506c; 506c-517a; 517b-528b; 528b-541b |

But “enlightened statesmen will not always be at the helm”

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## Spring Break

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| 10-11 | B. Limiting the Ends Pursued by Government (not to say mankind) and Self-Regulating Institutions<br>1. The justice of resisting the injustice of tyranny -- <i>Federalist Papers</i> , #10; #51;<br>2. Civic, not philosophical, Education -- Diamond, “Ethics and Politics,” pp.75-92; pp.92-108;<br>3. Features of the American democratic republic,<br>a. Governmental features resisting the injustice of tyranny and fostering civic education<br>i. The nature of the danger -- Tocqueville, pp.3-15, 52; 235-249, 403-410;<br>ii. Federalism and separation of powers -- Tocqueville, pp.105-115, 143-161; <b>Easter</b> ;<br>iii. Administrative decentralization, Township Institutions -- pp.56-65, 82-93; 250-264;<br>iv. Courts -- pp.93-99, 130-142;<br>b. Social Characteristics resisting the injustice of tyranny and fostering civic education<br>i. Mores -- Tocqueville, pp.27-44, 274-295;<br>ii. Religion vs. materialism -- Tocqueville, pp.417-428, 514-524;<br>iii. Voluntary associations vs. individualism -- Tocqueville, pp.479-506 |
| 12-16 |   |