

POSC 2801: Justice and Power

Professor Darrell Dobbs
Office Hours: by appointment via Teams
Office: 421 Wehr Physics

Marquette University, Fall 2026
Class Times: 9:30-10:45; 11:00-12:15 T TH
Classroom: Wehr Physics 418

Course Objectives

Think of justice, power, and authority as the ABCs of politics. Without a firm grasp of these elementary principles, you can no more expect to discern the significance of political phenomena than an illiterate can expect to read *Hamlet*. Yet many of our leaders today believe that justice is nothing more than a social construct, that power is measured not by the good it can achieve but merely by its forcefulness, and that authority exists only when someone with whom *they* agree possesses power. Our mission in this introductory course in political philosophy is to question these beliefs and to explore an alternative possibility: namely, that there exists an objective, natural standard in accordance with which a reasonable person may learn to distinguish justice and genuine authority from injustice and brute force. To explore this possibility with the help of the greatest political thinkers, we must exercise and develop the skills of accurate reading, insightful inquiry, and concise exposition.

Expectations

You are expected to attend every meeting of this class and to arrive on time prepared to discuss the assigned readings. Use of electronic devices during class is prohibited, except by permission of the instructor. So, you will need physical copies of the readings. A list of required texts will be posted on D2L. Wisdom awaits the diligent seeker; so, pay attention as you read! Grades will be based on your attendance (20 points), on two examinations of your reading comprehension (30 points each), and on your presentation of two Text Detective Memos, which will involve analysis, problem identification, and textual exegesis of selected reading passages (10 points each). You should expect to study about 3 hours per week outside of class in preparation for class discussion. More time will be required, of course, to prepare for examinations and to compose your memos. Absences from class may be excused, provided a request is made via email prior to the start of class on the day you miss.

Schedule

I. Introduction

9/1, 9/3 Course Goals & Pedagogy; Discussion of Some Questions concerning Justice

II. Consideration of Some Precepts of Justice

9/8, 9/10 Kurt Vonnegut, *Harrison Bergeron* (Equity); Tips for Completing the Text Detective Memo Requirement
9/15, 9/17 Dorothy Sayers, *Lost Tools of Learning* (Good Schools); Discussion of an Exemplary Memo on *Lost Tools*
9/22, 9/24 Plato's Cave (*Republic* 514a1-519b6, Liberation of the Mind); Locke, *2nd Treatise of Government* (ch.5, Rights in Property)
9/29, 10/1 Plato's Cephalus (*Republic* 327a-331d, Honesty) **A**; Plato's Polemarchus (331d-336a, Loyalty to Friends) **B**
10/6, 10/8 Plato's, Thrasymachus I (336a-347e, How Might Makes Right) **C**; Thrasymachus II (348a-354c; How Right Makes Might) **D**
10/13, 10/15 Plato's Glaucon (357a-362c, Compromise) **E**; Plato's Adeimantus (362c-367e; Rejection of False Religion) **F**

10/20, 10/22 **Midterm Examination; Fall Break**

10/27, 10/29 Aquinas, *S.T. Q.91 aa.1-2* (Eternal & Natural Law); Aquinas, *S.T. Q.95 a.2, Q.96 a.2* (Human Law & Opposition to Vice)
11/3, 11/5 Lewis, *Abolition of Man*, ch.1 lines 1-231 (Ordinate Love); *Abolition of Man*, ch.1 lines 232-352 (Propagation)
11/10, 11/12 Thomas Jefferson's *Declaration* (Opposition to Tyranny) **A**; *NW Ordinance of 1787* (Abolition of Slavery) **B**
11/17, 11/19 Washington, *Farewell Address* (Union & Nonintervention) **C**; Thucydides & Lincoln, *Funeral Orations* (Patriotism) **D**
11/24, 11/26 Reading Day; **Thanksgiving Break**
12/1, 12/3 Lincoln, *Lyceum Address* (Reverence for Law) **E**; Lincoln, *Temperance Address* (Friendship & Solidarity) **F**
12/8, 12/10 Thucydides, *Peloponnesian War* I.66-88 (War); Machiavelli, *Prince* chs.1, 6, 8, 12, 15, 16 (The Weight of Glory)

12/16 **Comprehensive Final Examination** (2801 9:30 TTH 8:00 - 10:00 am via D2L)
12/18 **Comprehensive Final Examination** (2801 11:00 TTH 3:30 - 5:30 pm via D2L)