



# COURSE OUTLINE

## POLS307

### Nature, Conflict, and the State

How can human beings order their relations to each other and to the natural world under conditions of scarcity and conflict? What cultural, social, institutional, and theoretical resources might human beings use to arrange these relationships in ways that promote human and non-human flourishing? What collective and individual responses can we make to problems like climate change, species extinction, water and other resource shortages, animal welfare, habitat loss for human and non-human beings, inequality, and generally insufficient flourishing? These issues are not new, only especially acute today. Writers from ancient Greece to the present day have thought about these questions, and we will think them through in the company of a broad range of perspectives. Taking this paper will (1) acquaint you with some of the core texts in the history of political thought and environmental political thought, (2) help you identify ways in which they apply to our world and (3) develop your original political thinking about human relationships in nature. You will be able to demonstrate understanding of these texts the ability to think critically - including applying key political concepts to the world as we encounter it.

#### Semester 2, 2020

**Lectures: 1 hour/week**

**Discussion Sections: 2 hours/week**

**Lecturer: Professor Lisa Ellis**

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#### Assessment

Reflective Diary Entries (22 x 200-300 words; formative assessments returned weekly).

Revised Diary Entries (10 200-300 word entries, 5% each for 50%)

Final Exam (2 hours, 50%)

#### Terms

In order for a student's exam to be marked, they must successfully complete at least eight discussion sections. "Successfully complete" means submitting the week's diary entry for formative assessment and discussing those ideas and other students' ideas in discussion section. There will be make-up sessions in the last week of class for students with excused absences from discussion sections.

## **Course structure**

Instruction consists of one hour of lecture per week and two hours of discussion per week. Students read to prepare for discussion section and reflect on their reading by writing weekly diary entries. These diary entries are formatively assessed each week; the instructor provides feedback on how well the student understands the reading discussed and how that might be improved, and on how well the student uses the ideas from the reading for further reflection or connection among ideas, and how that might be improved. Diary entries on ten of the readings are selected for revision and submission as the final reflective diary for summative assessment. The weekly diary entries also form the basis for discussion in weekly discussion section.

## **Course materials**

Readings will be available in a course pack.

Many of the sources of political theoretical information on the internet are dangerously misleading. Simple glosses of these texts will not help you understand them: the texts are complicated and difficult because understanding politics is complicated and difficult. We will teach you how to interpret these texts yourself. If you have questions about the material remaining after your readings, and after attending lecture and discussion section, ask the lecturer for advice. Your first effort should be to read the original material, and your next effort should be to read it again and discuss it with your fellow students.

## **Learning Strategies**

The readings for this paper are often difficult to interpret both because they were (some of them) written long ago and far away and because they deal with really complicated problems. No one really understands these texts on the first read. It is a good idea to schedule regular quiet reading time into your weekly diary. Mark up your text as you read, and not just with highlighter (you can't write with highlighter, and you should record your reactions as well as impressions of key arguments).

Next, most students will benefit from regular discussions outside class about the material. Ideally you would meet every week with a few fellow students to talk about the readings and the lectures. The more often you talk about an idea, the better you will understand it. Trying to explain a position to someone else also shows you what you do and do not know about the position. Even without a regular study group, you will benefit from just talking about the course material with anyone willing to listen to you (roommates, relatives, friends, anyone really).

The most efficient way to learn a large amount of material quickly is to combine listening to an expert with reading, writing, and most importantly talking about it. To get the most out of lecture, do not treat it like the place to transcribe the text book your lecturer is reading out to you. Lectures are meant to be engaged with, not memorised. Every lecture in this class is available on Otago Capture, so you can always go back if you want to hear some of it again. In lecture itself, try to engage in active, productive learning.

To do that, devote the full 50 minutes of lecture time to focused efforts on POLS 307. This means disabling distracting devices and ideally hand-writing your notes. Your notes should include both information from the lecturer and your own ideas. Your ideas include questions, reactions, and points of agreement and disagreement, as well as ideas for further inquiry and other connections

you might make. If you try to transcribe the lecture, you will not have time to think about any of the ideas, and in order to understand the lecture material you will have to start from scratch with your notes.

On the advantages of handwritten notes, see: <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/a-learning-secret-don-t-take-notes-with-a-laptop/>

On the inefficiency of online multi-tasking during lecture: <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/students-are-better-off-without-a-laptop-in-the-classroom/>

POLS 307 does not ban laptops or other devices. But we do have a politeness policy.

### **Politeness Policy**

We meet two times a week to learn about political theory together. Especially since political theory is inherently difficult, controversial, and occasionally offensive to some, we need to take extra care to establish a civil learning environment in which we all treat each other with respect.

Some tips for respectful in-class behaviour include: 1) Disable all noise-making and other distracting device functions before class begins; 2) Grant whoever is speaking (students especially) your respectful attention (it is not easy to speak in public); this means not looking at your phone while engaging with others in tutorial or lecture; 3) Enable those around you to enjoy 50 minutes of undistracted learning (and so do not put distracting screens up, make noise leaving early, eat food perceptibly, etc.).

Tutorials and lecture are the most efficient way for you to master this material (they might even be enjoyable on occasion): use them wisely!

## Schedule

Week	Readings	Lecture Topic	Discussion Topic
1	<b>Introduction</b>	Nature, conflict and the state	Environmental political theorizing
2	Machiavelli, <i>Discourses on Livy</i> (selections); John Meyer, "Theorizing the Populist Challenge to/of Climate Change"	Introduction to Machiavelli's <i>Discourses</i>	The few and the many in environmental thought
3	Machiavelli, <i>Discourses on Livy</i> (selections); Meyer and Maniates, <i>The Environmental Politics of Sacrifice</i> (selections).	Machiavellian democracy	Framing environmental political ideas
4	Hobbes, <i>Leviathan</i> (selections); Garrett Hardin, "The Tragedy of the Commons"	Introduction to social contract theory	Environmental policy as collective action
5	Elinor Ostrom, "Revisiting the Commons," and "A Polycentric Approach to Climate Change".	Revisionist social contract theory	Solving collective action problems in self-organised fashion
6	Locke, <i>Selected Political Writings</i> (selections); Onur Ulas Ince, <i>Colonial Capitalism and the Dilemmas of Liberalism</i> (selection).	Lockean social contract theory and theory of property	Legacies of Lockeanism
7	Rousseau, <i>Reveries of the Solitary Walker</i> (selections); Val Plumwood, "On Being Prey"; Freya Mathews, "The Anguish of Wildlife Ethics"	Rousseauian ambivalences: between contract theory and romantic individualism	Individuals in nature
8	Kant, <i>Political Essays</i> (selections); Ellis, "Democracy as Constraint and Possibility for Environmental Politics"	Kantian contract theory and theory of property	Democratic environmental policy under conditions of uncertainty
9	Mill, <i>Utilitarianism</i> (selections); Peter Singer, "Speciesism and Moral Status"; Donaldson and Kymlicka, <i>Zoopolis</i> (selections).	The consequentialist perspective: Mill and Singer	Political theory and animal rights I
10	Weber, selections from <i>Economy and Society</i>	Introduction to modern state theory	Ecological modernisation

11	James Scott, <i>Seeing Like a State</i> (selections)	Critique of modern state theory	Ecological anarchism
12	Habermas, selections from <i>Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere</i> . John Dryzek and Simon Niemeyer, "Deliberative Democracy and Climate Governance"	Discursive environmental democracy	Deliberation and environmental action
13	<b>Review and conclusion</b>	Review of main themes	Review of concepts