

# A TF's Guide to Teaching in Government 10 - Introduction to Political Thought

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# A TF's Guide to Teaching in Government 10

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# ■ The Purpose of Sections in Government 10

[from a TF's perspective]

Discussion sections may be the most important component of a student's Gov 10 experience, and they serve a variety of purposes. Sections should clarify material from readings and lectures and provide students with a relatively informal venue for discussing the larger questions in political philosophy that the course raises. They offer a forum for students to communicate their understanding and opinions of the course materials to teaching fellows verbally and in writing, which in turn allows us to evaluate their involvement and performance. Most importantly, however, section gives us regular opportunities to help students develop the skills they will need to think analytically and write critically about political philosophy. Our job is to teach them how to gain a nuanced understanding of the texts, ask probing questions, and write persuasive, thoughtful, and accurate essays. Weekly sections and your commentary on reflection statements and papers should not only focus on making sure students understand the assigned texts, but should also offer guidance, by suggestion and example, on how to approach future texts and assignments.

This guide offers advice on the essential elements of creating an effective section. It addresses how to lead section, relate weekly material to course themes, engage students, grade their work, offer constructive commentary - and how to do all these things in ways that develop and reinforce scholarly habits. You have a significant amount of autonomy in planning and running your section(s), but in a large course such as Gov 10 where most students are new to the material it is especially important to maintain continuity across the sections, in terms of both course content and evaluative standards. Because every student will take the same final exam, all the sections should cover the same set of key concepts each week and build on a common set of study questions. How you guide your students through this material, however, will be a function of your own style, strengths, and particular interests. Grading standards and the mechanisms we will employ for ensuring continuity in this domain are discussed in Section IV below.





## ■ Leading Effective Discussion Sections

### A The first meeting: Starting off on the right foot

Your students should leave the first meeting of their section with a clear idea of three things: why they should be excited about the course; what they can expect from section; and where to place Gov 10 in their list of priorities. Harvard students are invariably busy with a sometimes inconceivable variety of activities, and many of our students will be taking the course to fulfill the concentration requirement in political theory. Therefore you can expect to have competition for their time and attention. But the more time and energy they devote to the course the more they'll get out of it, so we must give them reasons at the outset to care about Gov 10! Highlight the important issues we'll explore (freedom is something we all have an interest in, after all, and something about which most of us have an opinion or two), and relate them to the other subfields in political science. Tell them why they should be excited at the prospect of reading the famous books on the syllabus (for many this will be the only time they ever read Machiavelli or Aristotle, and many students from past years have commented on how important it was to them that their Harvard education included the study of these works) and what an impact these texts have had on shaping political systems historically, including our own. Communicate your own excitement about political theory - it's contagious.

In order for your students to meet your expectations over the course of the semester you need to make those expectations explicit, and the best time to begin doing so is in the first section meeting. What do you expect of them? Be sure to cover your expectations for both section discussions and the reflection statements. Talk to them about why reflection statements are required and why they're valuable. Students often complain about having to write these, but in course evaluations they overwhelmingly report that the reflection statements helped them master the material and improve their writing. Reflection statements also make section discussions far more rigorous and consequently more fruitful for students. Let them know that reflection statements are due before section (at a

time specified by you; by email is often the best mechanism), so that you have a chance to look them over and consider adjusting your section plan in response to common confusions, mistakes, and interests. And let them know, too, that you'll always provide them with comments on their reflection statements, either before section meets or in section (whichever system works best for you). Don't be afraid to state the small things (e.g., "bring your books to section," "don't miss section without an explanation and advance notification"), or to demand serious effort (e.g., "I expect you to read using the study questions, and to take notes that will allow you to cite specific textual passages for support in section discussion"). Knowing that something is important to you will raise its importance in their eyes. Moreover, if they know that you expect them to work hard and come prepared, they will often rise to the challenge.

What should they expect of you? Will you cold call? What criteria will you use to evaluate their participation, and are sections organized in a way that allows you to gauge their individual contributions accurately? Is section discussion structured in a way that showcases preparedness or a lack thereof? How quickly will you return their work, and what can they expect in the way of written commentary? When are you available for their questions? What degree of formality and distance will you maintain? Will you give them more feedback early on and less over the course of the semester?

### B Managing content, participation, and time

#### 1 Course content

Each discussion section corresponds to the weekly lectures and readings on the syllabus, and should be motivated around two or three major study questions. The bulk of your time each week should be devoted to working through the texts in search of answers to these motivating questions. Usually you will decide upon the particular questions in weekly TF meetings, but they will reflect the "key concepts" listed in Appendix A. The course has been structured around a series of disagreements between major philosophers about the meaning and practice of free-dom. You should formulate the questions in a way that stresses this debate-oriented format by fostering cross-author comparisons.

It is a good idea to write the questions on the board and approach them in an order that makes sense of the links between them. For example, you might discuss the definition of Aristotelian virtue before considering Aristotle's political prescriptions, and flesh out the ideas of natural law and the state of nature before discussing property or civil resistance in Locke. Approach the questions in a way that builds the author's theory from the ground up, bringing out the connections between concepts and arguments.

## 2 Student participation

Soliciting students' opinions on the weekly texts, as well as on larger thematic issues, is an integral part of section. But this interactive feature should play a supportive role in the directed exploration of the texts and major questions of the course. A central part of your job as section leader is to help students formulate and support their opinions in terms of the texts and to connect the arguments they want to make with what they have read. We want them to transform their raw reactions and disagreements into a critical evaluation and exploration of the texts, rather than engage in polemics or rest satisfied with an expression of unreflective opinion (the "thumbs up/down" reaction). You can model this art for them in the way you make arguments and express opinions in section. You can also elicit well-considered answers by asking well-considered questions. Here are some other suggestions:

- Read a well-chosen passage aloud (preferably a passage tied to one of the study questions or key concepts for the week), and ask them what they think each important phrase means, how they can make sense of the links between each part, and what is their sense of the passage as a whole. This solicits their opinion while teaching them how to do a close reading of the text.
- Solicit their opinion of some feature of an author's theory, but require them to defend it. For example, is Locke's vision of human nature convincing? If not, where has Locke's chain of reasoning gone awry? How might Locke rebut their criticism? If they think Locke is convincing, what features make him

more convincing on this point than Aristotle or Hobbes?

- After fleshing out one author's critique of an earlier author's work, ask them how the earlier author might defend himself. For example, Rousseau contends that the type of political society Locke defends leads to extreme material inequality and relations of domination - enemies of freedom both. How would Locke respond? Questions like these stress the use of textual evidence and introduce students to the importance of engaging counterarguments.

Students' opinions also provide another valuable opportunity for stressing the debate-oriented structure of the course. Having received their reflection statements before section, you might ask leading questions that you know will elicit different responses from students who already have a grasp of the evidence. This will encourage the entire class to consider counterarguments or alternative interpretations and revisit texts in order to formulate credible defenses of their views.

That said, you are not forbidden to play Socrates and ask students for their raw opinions, but do so sparingly and wisely. For example, after having established the protected status of even extreme material inequality in Locke, you might ask them whether they think this is justified (fair, compatible with moral equality, etc.). This is mere opinion in a week on Locke, but gets them thinking about issues Rousseau will raise more systematically in the near future. Lobbing a few softballs may also be necessary to engage students in those weeks when you know their understanding of the text is poor (i.e., just after a paper, or with particularly difficult authors).

## 3 Time allocation

Devote the bulk of section to discussing the two or three key concepts for the week, working student opinion and debate into a supportive role in the formulation of answers. While you should certainly keep other important questions in reserve, you will find that extra time is rare. Those few concepts

will easily fill the hour, and it is better to address a limited number of important issues fully than try to cover too much superficially. Take some time between larger questions to make sure that students have understood the answers, and allow them to interject their own lingering questions or confusions. Devoting a bit of time at the beginning or end to administrative business offers a good way to get students to switch gears initially (signal that it's time to get down to business), or keep them from switching gears too soon at the end of section. In the week preceding paper deadlines, however, you should be prepared to devote a larger portion of time to administrative matters relating to the papers, including reiterating your expectations, briefly reviewing good writing habits, and answering any questions students may have regarding the assignment. You may also want to set aside a short period on the days you return their assignments to draw attention to common strengths and weaknesses that you found noteworthy. For instance, if you found that a certain kind of error or problem was widespread, be it interpretive, structural, or grammatical, it would be useful to review the relevant material or rule briefly. But avoid embarrassing or intimidating individual students by singling them out in class.

## **C Helping students get the most from section**

### **1 Structure**

Sometimes students find sections unhelpful even when interesting and engaging. When this occurs it is typically due to a lack of organization. Organization is something over which you largely have control, however. One effective tactic for organizing section discussions, mentioned above, is to motivate each discussion around a systematic exploration of or two or three questions related to the key concepts for the week. It is also crucial to communicate this organizing principle to the students, so they leave with the clear sense that the discussion has produced a coherent story. Writing the motivating questions (or identifying the key concepts) on the board is a good way to do this, and it offers the added benefits of structuring your use of section time and providing students with a clear framework within which to take notes. If you put an outline on the board, be sure to refer to it occasionally—remind your students of where you are and relate their comments to specific points of the

outline. This will help clarify the relevance of what is being discussed.

How much you use the blackboard in general depends on your personal style. It can be a very effective tool to reinforce and clarify material and to promote engagement. For many students, it's helpful to see key words and concepts as well as hear them. When discussing the differences between Locke and Rousseau on the social contract, for instance, you might find it useful to put lists of differences and similarities on the board. Or if you ask students to come up with criticisms of Aristotelian politics you might list them on the board as students formulate them. When a question has produced debate or confusion, the main point or correct response may be mentioned (and even noted verbally by you) without students picking up on it. Putting that point on the board can be a useful way to resolve confusion and signal the end of debate on that particular question. Use discretion, however. Overuse of the blackboard tends to bury important points in minutia or leave students feeling that section was merely a pedantic rehearsal of the text or lecture.

### **2 Preparation**

The first few section meetings set the tone for the semester. Since Gov 10 is given in the fall and many of our students are freshmen, a significant number of your students have never encountered a discussion section before - and they don't instinctively know what to do. You have to let them know (both directly and indirectly) what counts as "coming prepared." Be sure to emphasize the importance of the study questions, which are an integral part of preparation. The study questions are found in Appendix B of this guide (and in Appendix B of the *Student's Guide to Writing in Government 10*, and on the course website as well). Students should read through the study questions before doing the reading assignment, use them to take notes while reading, and review them again afterward in order to grasp the big picture. The study questions are formulated to guide them through the readings by drawing attention to important passages, key concepts, and central questions or problems in the texts, as well as helping them make connections between different philosophers on themes that are important for the course. You might also let them know that sections are a forum for them to ask

questions, so another part of their preparation is to formulate questions of their own for section discussion.

If you refuse to settle for mere opinion or regurgitation of the lecture in the first few section meetings, if you push students to defend themselves using textual evidence, they will know that “coming prepared” means coming armed with knowledge of the text and having given serious thought to each week’s study questions. In addition to paying careful attention in those first few weeks, you may want to be in email contact each week reminding students of which books to bring and noting the study questions on which they should focus their attention. You may also want to create handouts in the event that you have something special planned for section and might not cover all the relevant textual points.

### 3 Mentoring through section

Students become engaged in section in a number of ways (personal interest in the material, response to your enthusiasm and high expectations, etc.), but their individual relationships with you are of foremost importance. Be approachable and interested. Learn their names! Name cards can be very helpful here, as they identify students for one another as well as for you, which helps foster freer and more collegial discussions. If they know you are aware of their particular interests, ideas, and progress, they will be far more likely to invest in the course. Writing commentary is perhaps the most important medium for communicating this awareness (see Section III on “Commenting on Student Writing” below). But you should also take time in section to urge (and then remind) your students to contact you or drop by office hours if they have questions, concerns, or just want to discuss their ideas. Brief and informal personal meetings with each student in the first few weeks, before they submit their first essay, are also quite useful in establishing good relationships.

### 4 Creative sections

An occasional change of format can provide a break for students without compromising the goals of the course. Mock debates, small group work, role-playing and well conceived games offer stu-

dents a chance to approach section discussion in a novel way. All students don’t learn in the same way or have identical strengths, and by varying your approach occasionally, you can attend to different learning styles. For example, you might assign half the class to be Aristotle and the other half to be Hobbes and then ask them to debate a couple of questions from the list of study questions: What kind of freedom should politics aim for and protect? For whom? What kinds of political institutions does freedom require? What qualities of character does it call for in or call forth from citizens? Alternatively, you might play the role of Marx and have your students impersonate Mill, or even just put their own questions to you. Depending on your plans, you may want to warn students a few days beforehand if you have something special in mind, thus allowing them time to prepare if it seems necessary. You should not give them substantial extra work, however, or place demands on their time that are inconsistent with what is being asked of students in other sections.

### 5 Troubleshooting

Naturally, some students will be less involved than others, but when a student becomes particularly lax in one or several aspects of section (attendance, participation, writing acceptable reflection statements, late papers), you should approach them personally. Try to find something positive within their recent work (reflection statements, section contributions, or papers) and then encourage them to maintain that level of commitment generally. If the problem continues for several weeks (especially absences), you should contact the Head TF and the instructor. You may eventually be asked to notify the student’s senior tutor or the Freshman Dean.

At times students will bring up outside material or personal experience in section, including current events, things they have read in other classes, prior knowledge of political philosophy, and so forth. These references can be good servants if directed effectively, but they are always bad masters. Be prepared to take control in these situations in a way that is firm but also respectful of students’ contributions. Think ahead of time about what sorts of contemporary examples might be useful, so that you can either introduce them yourself or reshape spontaneous contributions in a way that relates

them more closely to the text at hand and to the key concepts for the week. Also, urge students to help you reshape examples that require too much background information to be useful for everyone (not by explaining the example at length, but by simplifying it). If you find one or two students in particular frequently appealing to their specialized knowledge (which can happen when you have juniors and seniors from other subfields), you may want to approach them personally.

One of the most common complaints that students have is that their TF permitted one or two students to dominate discussion. This can be extremely difficult to avoid, especially if other students tend to keep quiet even when you restrict the contributions of the dominant few. Invite those who speak least to participate more by calling on them occasionally and referring back to the ideas they have contributed. This not only reinforces that person's contributions but also sends a signal to others that you'll take their comments seriously and make room for them in the discussion. If necessary, let your students know in advance that you're going to start calling on them in section, and then do so. If you take this avenue, you might use the reflection statements to help you identify good questions to ask of particular students - with the reflection statements in mind you can call on someone to answer a question that you know they've been thinking about already. And watch your students' faces. Sometimes a student has something to say but might be hesitant to raise his hand. If you learn to tell when that is the case, you can actively draw him out.

Three or four weeks into the semester we'll distribute informal midterm evaluations to get feedback from the students about what is working well for them and where we can improve. Appendix C contains a sample evaluation form. Feedback is an important part of our own learning process, and soliciting student responses early in the term provides us with an extremely valuable resource in determining what adjustments and modifications will make our teaching more effective.

As you develop and refine your teaching skills, you may also wish to make use of other resources. The Bok Center offers many useful services for proactive TFs, and their website is filled with good advice on a variety of subjects you may face in sections.

Finally, never be shy about asking for the advice and support of your fellow Gov 10 TFs, the Head TF, and the instructor. Oftentimes someone else is experiencing a similar challenge or has had experience solving it. In any case, the more we communicate with one another the more useful we will all be to our students.





## ■ ■ ■ Commenting on Student Writing

From a pedagogical standpoint, your comments are much more important than the grade you affix to a student's work. The grade is important too, of course, since it gives the student one reason to care about your comments. It is your comments, however, that they will remember. These will affect the quality of their future work, both in this course and throughout their undergraduate careers. Commentary offers you the opportunity to guide, encourage, and correct your students, to forge personal relationships with them, and to introduce them to the concept of respectful scholarly dialogue and the process of intersubjective learning. Be specific, be constructive, and phrase your corrections as advice for the future whenever possible.

Remember, both in writing commentary and in discussing assignments with your students, that many Gov 10 students are freshmen encountering college writing assignments for the first time. In addition to keeping your commentary constructive, be sure to explain that the analytical argumentation they are expected to master in this course will prove useful in most humanities and social science courses at Harvard. It is also worth mentioning that Gov 10 assignments require the basic elements of academic essay writing stressed in the one-semester course on Expository Writing. In "Expos" students learn how to read texts closely, formulate an arguable thesis, establish an intellectual context for an argument, support a thesis with major claims laid out in logical steps and substantiated with carefully analyzed evidence, use primary sources, construct and incorporate counterarguments, and revise work effectively. Their Expos preceptors also stress the fact that these basic elements are shared across disciplines and lay the groundwork for more specialized writing skills, such as those necessary to political theory. All members of the freshmen class take Expos (half in fall, half in spring). So for most of your students, you will be laying the groundwork for or simultaneously reinforcing the fundamental precepts they will encounter or are currently encountering in Expos.

In addition to running commentary placed in the margins of papers and reflection statements, it is a good idea to offer a paragraph or two of final

comments at the end of each assignment. A useful standard format for such comments includes: (a) a restatement of the author's thesis; (b) acknowledgement of one or two particular strengths in the piece, however difficult that may be in the worst cases; and (c) two or three ways the author might improve in future work. Appendix D offers three sample student papers with TF commentary illustrative of this format.

### A Reflection statements and the three papers

**1** Balancing commentary: How much can you fix? Flaws in student writing fall into four main categories: substance (outright misinterpretation or misapplication of text), organization (poorly structured essays), methodology (insufficient text or shallow analysis) and stylistic flaws (awkward prose, misspelled words, errors in grammar and punctuation, improper use of quotations and citations, and so forth). Correcting all of these can be daunting, both for a grader and for the student receiving commentary. In general, spend little time on stylistic criticism. These errors are minor, and often accompany initial insecurity with the subject matter. Advise students that they need to work on editing and revising their own work stylistically - and that this means much more than running a grammar/spell check. Tell them that they should slowly read their own paper aloud to themselves before submitting it, find a classmate or friend who will provide them with tough criticism, and possibly go to the Writing Center for feedback on their next paper. Pick a few sentences to use as illustrations of recurring stylistic errors, but no more. These are surface imperfections, and should be treated as such. Devoting too much time to them dilutes the importance of more pressing objections. This is not to say stylistic problems shouldn't be reflected in the grade assigned - they should be. Substance, organizational, and methodological problems are all far more important, however, and should comprise the bulk of your thoughtful, detailed commentary. With respect to developmental guidance, substance, organization, and methodology should take precedence.

#### **2** Substance

If a student makes what is clearly an inaccurate claim about the text, you must remedy their ignorance - every time. But do not stop at merely sub-

stituting the right interpretation for the wrong one. Try instead to discover and alert students to where they went wrong. Substance mistakes are often concealed, and even caused, by methodological and organizational problems. When you characterize students' errors on a particular text as illustrations of general problems that can be corrected with effort and attention, you offer them hope for improvement next time. For example:

- A student interprets Locke as an active advocate of a redistributive welfare state, neglecting to account for his vehement defense of private property. She could, however, defensibly claim that the moral equality which grounds Locke's Natural Law obligates us to redistribute, and that Locke reasons poorly from good foundations.

**General advice, after substance correction:**

"Forcing yourself to find textual support for your claims about an author will alert you to assertions that are unfounded. This doesn't necessarily mean you should abandon your claims. Supporting your argument sometimes means demonstrating that the author makes bad arguments on his own terms or says things contrary to his own principles."

- A student criticizes both Hobbes's and Locke's foundations for human equality, oversimplifying them as questions of physical vulnerability and theology alone, and then suggests that reason alone is sufficient to ground *moral* equality. The authors clearly take a back seat to the student's (non-textual) description of his own positive vision. Moreover, the student's argument overlooks both authors' extensive discussions of the role (and limits) of reason in politics. They consider his suggestion, and Hobbes in particular offers a forceful rejection (the strength of which might account for Locke's apparent fear of relying solely upon reason). The student might have uncovered this error and defended his thesis much more effectively by organizing his paper in a way that integrates more textual analysis.

**General advice, after substance correction:**

"Rather than merely asserting a new foundational principle as an alternative unrelated to the text, organize your essay as a *defense* of your principle against the authors' *rejection* of it. Ask yourself why the authors have chosen (and often it is a "choice" - these were smart fellows) their foundations rather than yours. What might they (do they) say is wrong with your view? Or why do they accept your foundation but think it points in a different direction (e.g., for Hobbes, reason does not create moral obligations)? Once you understand these aspects of the texts, you can attack them directly and offer a compelling defense of your own vision."

### 3 Organization

Purely organizational mistakes are easy to spot, and generally easy to remedy as well. In fact, directing students to the *Student's Guide to Writing* and devoting the first section meeting to constructing an example reflection statement will help mitigate many organizational flaws. Nevertheless, they may still crop up, especially in early written work. Organizational mistakes can be traced to two root causes: (a) improper management of the three to four separate questions that comprise one paper topic or study question, and (b) a failure to differentiate between exploration and presentation.

Reflection statements and paper topics are typically an amalgam of three to four questions, and students are sometimes unsure how to offer an answer to all of these while simultaneously crafting a persuasive, coherent argument of their own. Instead of noting which question calls for an evaluative opinion and then recognizing that the other questions provide hints about what evidence they will need to gather in order to support their opinion, they organize their essay according to the order of the sub-questions. The thesis is merely descriptive and the information in the body is not well integrated. They come to a conclusion at the end (the thesis-generating question is usually the last), and have all the tools necessary to support it, but the overall effect is that of a puzzle left in pieces. Students also sometimes fail to separate the exploratory stage



of essay construction from the presentation stage. Papers then become journals of how they figured out what they thought, rather than a defense of their conclusions. Hence we see introductions that note the evaluative question but give no answer (no argumentative thesis or roadmap), bodies that move back and forth between different assertions, bits of evidence, and analysis, and conclusions that offer a thesis at long last.

When confronted with problems of this sort, you should note particular passages in the essay that illustrate deviations from organizational principles (descriptive thesis, lack of thesis, points in the body where students split information that belongs under one supportive point, etc.) and briefly suggest revisions (“you could have used this on page 2, in the discussion of the priority of the city,” “on the last page you say Hobbes’s state of nature is more defensible - that’s your thesis, and it belongs here at the beginning”). Then include an end comment that explicitly relates those marginal suggestions to advice on decoding questions and moving from exploration to presentation.

Poorly constructed introductions are also quite common, although less serious. The thesis sentence may be vague (e.g., “Both Locke’s and Hobbes’s accounts of human nature prove unsatisfactory in a number of ways”), and a roadmap may be missing. The reader has no clear indication of the paper’s destination or the path that will take him there. Offer marginal suggestions for a more informative introduction, and include an endnote describing the purpose of an introduction (“orienting the reader so they will never feel lost”) and urging the student to pay closer attention to his introduction on the next paper.

Several examples of introductions and concluding paragraphs of varying quality are provided with commentary in the *Student’s Guide to Writing*.

#### 4 Methodology

Even a graceful, well-organized, generally accurate paper can be, in the end, a “shallow” offering. The student’s understanding of the author’s argument or his evaluative response to it (or both) may lack depth. This is a methodological problem. The student has either failed to include sufficient textual

references or, more often, to analyze the text they have included. This is by far the most common student mistake, and also the one that takes the most time and practice to correct. One could view this as the opposite of the second organizational problem above. It seems that the student has presented a thesis without first undertaking the exploratory journey that ought to lend depth to their conclusions. With respect to an author’s argument, a student may get the facts right but lack comprehension of the chain of reasoning that leads from one idea to another. For example, a student describes Hobbes’s natural right and knows he defends absolute sovereignty, but does not see the relationship between these points. Brief, prodding questions in the margins can be an effective response to this problem (e.g., “why?,” “what’s the connective tissue between these points?,” “textual backing?,” “how does the author define this term?,” “how is this related to the author’s conception of justice?,” “how does the author defend this claim?”). Be sure, however, to summarize all these staccato queries with a piece of general advice at the end. Tell the student that “engaging the text more fully” means being able to answer all the “why?” questions and incorporating those answers into the argument next time.

Another kind of shallow paper may get the facts right and showcase a general grasp of the argument, but involves little more than reproducing and then gainsaying an author’s premises or conclusions without sufficient grounds. The student may have a thesis, but it is asserted rather than argued for, perhaps even after assembling a fair number of potentially relevant quotations. Or her perspective may reflect an uncritical acceptance of a contemporary conventional opinion, her favorite interpretive lens, or her peculiar world-view. There may be very little in such a paper that is categorically wrong, but it is important to discourage this approach by alerting the student to its characteristic flaws. Point out how she has failed to relate her thesis to the analysis of the author’s argument, usually by describing the author’s perspective without differentiating between what has particular bearing on her response and what does not. Note how she fails to apply the same rigorous standards to both the author’s point of view and her own. Once aware of such an imbalance, a student can detect and probe her own unquestioned prejudices more easily.

A related but slightly milder and far more common instance of such tunnel vision is the over simplification and or complete neglect of counterevidence. This is the mistake of the student who has written his paper as if it were a speech. In such cases, the student needs to learn that his own arguments will be enhanced if he addresses counterevidence and considers alternative interpretations of the evidence he is already using. This will deepen his argument and render his thesis more persuasive. When confronted with a paper that suffers in this way, offer pro-voking comments that encourage further reflection (e.g., “what about when the author previously said (or later says) *this*?” or “but couldn’t one interpret this passage to mean *this* instead?—what would follow then?”).

A separate problem arises when a student makes an argument that might be appropriate in another discipline, such as history or literary criticism, but isn’t entirely suitable for a paper in political theory. Such mistakes are often due to the discomfort that may accompany forays into an unfamiliar field of study. You should direct the student to the *Student’s Guide to Writing* and invite him to discuss approaches and expectations with you during office hours. Be careful, however, not to reject novel approaches out of hand. They sometimes prefigure the creativity and intellectual openness that, when properly directed, produce keen analysis and truly interesting conclusions.

A related problem of which you should take special note is the failure to define key terms. Political philosophy attributes very specific (and often contested) meanings to terms that we use unreflectively in daily life. Remind students early and often that, in this course, terms such as freedom, equality, justice, virtue, democratic, and liberal are not unproblematic. It is often worth spending some time in section discussing how the authors we cover use some words differently than we do in ordinary speech today. For instance, Mill’s concept of “individuality” is something other than merely “marching to the beat of a different drum.” Each political philosopher we encounter offers a new set of definitions, and in order to judge an author’s prescriptions to be “unjust,” for instance, a student must make explicit both the author’s definition of justice and his own.

## 5 Tact and praise

It goes without saying that criticism should not be unkind. The majority of your students work hard on every assignment they turn in, and your comments should never trivialize their effort. Future-oriented advice is perfect in this respect because it corrects without berating and acknowledges the student’s desire to improve. There is a difference between demanding much of your students (for which they will respect you and strive) and discouraging them with disrespectful or dismissive commentary (for which they will resent you and tune out). Always be aware of yourself as a guide, rather than merely a critic.

That said, it is important not to shrink from your responsibility to be critical of your students’ work. Students, especially those new to the College or to the discipline need to know what they are doing wrong and what to avoid. By and large, they will only learn if you tell them. You do them no favors by sugarcoating your comments. If you seriously expect your students to improve, they need to know that when their work needs serious improvements. Students in the College don’t mind coasting through their classes and minimizing their effort if they can get away with it. But they are also especially appreciative of TFs who take a genuine interest in helping them to improve instead of patting them on the back. And they are quite perceptive - they can tell when your praise is phony and when your criticisms are valid. While they may want you to give them higher grades, they no more desire empty flattery than vindictive commentary.

A major part of offering criticism tactfully is a corresponding willingness to offer genuine praise. Perfect papers are rare, but thankfully irredeemable papers are even more so. Praise of some sort is always possible. Often different portions of a paper will showcase different problems - a smattering of style and substance errors across the board, one page a bit shallow, another poorly organized. This is why it is important to connect your general advice at the end to particular examples noted in the margins of the text. This variable quality also opens the door for encouragement even in the face of mistakes. Highlight examples of accurate interpretations of the text and simple, graceful prose. Note the solid organization of the shallow page and praise the muddled page for its greater analytical

depth. Be sure to offer such praise in context, however, or else you will leave the student wondering why you gave a low grade to a paper you appeared to love. When congratulating them on what they have done well, note specifically where they have done it and if the success is only partial (e.g., “good organization in the discussion of the spoilage limit on page 3 - this is what you want to aim for!” or “despite poor organization, the paragraph on the sovereign’s irrationality shows a firm grasp of the Hobbesian vision of human nature.” Both your critical and complimentary comments should be clear and specific enough to leave students with no doubts about why the paper received the grade it did. They should also provide templates of what to avoid and what to reproduce next time. In terms of presentation, it is a good idea to begin your final comments with something positive, and try to end on a note that is if not positive at least encouraging.

Avoid making negative comments that do not offer any help. They serve only to frustrate the student, who does not know where he went wrong or how to correct it. Writing “No!” or “Wrong” in the margins and marking pages with an “X” or a “?!” without providing accompanying explanations for your disapproval or confusion do not constitute good paper-grading practices. Avoid being too blunt in your criticisms (e.g., “Read the text” or “Are you serious?” or “Think about this”). And when a paper is outrageously bad, it is advisable to follow the old adage about having nothing nice to say. After all, if a student has put little effort into composing his paper, he shouldn’t expect you to put a tremendous amount of effort into correcting it line by line.

## **B Common weaknesses in student writing**

Keep the following in mind when reading student papers. In order to save time and promote uniform guidance, you may want to formulate standardized descriptions and advice with which to address such problems in your summary comments. Such comments should, of course, always be related to particular errors noted in the text, and should be as free of academic jargon as possible. For instance, tell a student, “avoid a ‘summary of author A, summary of author B, my opinion as afterthought’ format,” rather than offering the fairly opaque remark,

“descriptive body/marginal argument.” Usually you will get a feel for which phrasings make sense to students and which do not in reflection statements, but asking for feedback on this point can be helpful as well.

The following is a list of common, generic problems to look for and make suitable comments about when you come across them.

- insufficient use and/or analysis of text
- poor relation of text to argument (off-topic, ill-chosen, poorly integrated)
- too many quotations or overly long quotations
- failure to define terms
- failure to differentiate between relevant and irrelevant text
- disjunction between claims of the thesis/conclusion and the body of the paper
- extreme claims or sweeping generalizations (urge moderation)
- allowing similarities to swallow key distinctions between authors or the differences to obstruct important points of convergence
- failure to consider counterarguments, or an author’s possible (or actual) response to an objection the student has raised
- parroting the lecture, or worse, a discussion in section
- unraveling at the end - either because the student begins waffling, tries to cover all the bases (rather than limiting himself to the most relevant), or trivializes his own argument
- substantially over the length requirement or in any measure under that requirement
- awkward or belabored prose (passive voice, repetition, jargon, hackneyed phrasing, empty words/sentences, overuse of clauses or qualifiers, stilted “academic” prose, etc.) or grammatical mistakes
- a problem apart: the willfully poor paper. Both the comments and grade should convey

the unacceptability of such work. You should still include comments that direct the student back to the text, however, and offer what encouragement you can (e.g., “how might you relate this point to Marx’s teleological vision of human nature?” or “the example which occupies the bulk of your paper would have been an interesting hook if mentioned only briefly in the conclusion and thesis”)

- arguments off topic and lacking connections to the text (e.g., a paper that spends the first page on Locke’s defense of private property and the remainder of the essay on the Canadian health-care system, or the first page on Marx and the rest on social Darwinism)
- substance errors that are clearly the result of failure to read the text or attend lectures
- last-minute efforts or stream-of-consciousness, “organically” written papers with no evidence of any editing

### C Strengths to look for in student writing

The following are strengths to watch for and praise. Few papers will demonstrate all these strengths throughout, but most will offer at least a paragraph or two that demonstrates several of them. Some of the following exist hand in hand with the errors above. For example, passion often results in extreme claims. But you don’t want to throw the baby out with the bathwater. Praise small victories even as you note their twin defeats.

- interesting thesis
- convincing argument
- well-chosen quotations analyzed effectively
- skillful use of text
- watch for the apt quote that appeared in no other papers - one that took time and careful searching find and astute insight to recognize its importance
- draws out the connections within, assumptions behind, or implications of an author’s argument

- organizational clarity
- innovative interpretations (can appear even in poor papers)
- raises and refutes strong counter-objections
- unique perspective or moments of clever defense (even in poor papers)
- even-handedness (often coupled with lengthy description and marginal argument)
- asks probing questions about an author’s work
- brevity wed to dense, accurate information
- passion (often coupled with marginal text)
- confidence in talking to the texts & getting them to talk to each other
- seamless interweaving of text and prose
- simple, graceful prose

Three sample essays are found in Appendix D, complete with appropriate commentary.

### D A word about reflection statements

The general advice above applies to both reflection statements and longer papers. The two serve different functions, however, and should be handled differently in some respects.

Reflection statements are truncated essays that help students master the material and develop the skills they will need to write the longer papers. In a longer paper students are expected to answer every sub-question contained in the paper topic, but in the limited space of a reflection statement (and given the fact that many of the study questions are longer than a paper topic would be) this is impossible. When students use the study questions to write reflection statements they should pick one or two sub-questions to focus on. Your commentary on reflection statements should focus on the development of paper skills, especially in the first few weeks. In particular, you should scrupulously observe the practice of making marginal notations and summarizing them as illustrations of general, future-oriented points at the end. Iron out orga-

nizational problems and dwell on analytical lapses as well. This level of commentary is demanding (of both you and your students), but your students will thank you when they approach their first paper knowing what you expect and which weaknesses to guard against. As for the demands on your time, extensive commentary is only necessary initially. You should warn your students at the beginning that such careful preparation will occur mostly in the reflection statements before the first paper, then taper off.

The *Student's Guide to Writing* contains a selection of reflection papers with commentary.

## E Mentoring through commentary

Commentary offers a unique opportunity to foster a personal bond with your students and introduce them to the concept of scholarly dialogue. You signal your interest in them personally not only by offering encouraging comments, but also by attending to their unique personalities, ideas, and progress. Keep track of your suggestions and their improvements in response, and congratulate them (e.g., “I notice you’re already incorporating the advice I gave you last week about moving away from the ‘general summary/my opinion as afterthought’ format”). Note how each student’s opinions become more refined and well articulated over the course of the semester, and help them along in this process (e.g., “3 weeks ago you endorsed Locke, but now seem persuaded by Marx. Have you given up on Locke, or do you still approve of some aspects of his theory? Is there a philosophically defensible way to merge the laudable aspects of each?”). Keep track of their interests and suggest external literature they might find informative. Giving them personalized attention will make their experience much more memorable, and they will invest more of themselves into the course when they know someone is actually noticing their extra effort.

## F Troubleshooting

### 1 Resources

Alert students to the many resources available to help them improve their writing: the course website, the *Student's Guide to Writing*, the Writing Center website and staff (who are happy to read

drafts), their house tutors and Expos preceptors, and of course, yourself (during office hours and by email). Appendix F contains contact information for those resources not directly connected to Government 10. Alert your students to the corresponding information in “Part Three: Additional writing resources” in the *Student's Guide to Writing*. In particular, communicate your expectation that students will read the writing guide carefully within the first week or so of class and incorporate its suggestions in their work. This should improve their work and eliminate any confusion about your commentary on the first few reflection statements.

### 2 Guidance versus micromanagement

Some forms of micromanagement are obvious (e.g., copy-editing). Others are more context sensitive. Be careful to avoid imposing your own ideological lens on the section. Students pick up on subtle clues, and can come away with the impression that you are only open to a certain interpretation of the material. Be aware of the age and experience of your students. Juniors and seniors will be less receptive to extensive commentary, even when it’s future-oriented. That doesn’t mean you should forego commentary—they still need an explanation for their grades and indications of how to improve. But do scale back accordingly. Freshmen, on the other hand, are very receptive but easily overwhelmed. Consider limiting the final summary of critical advice to three points.





## IV Grading Student Writing

### A Grading standards and distinctions

The three longer papers will receive letter grades. See the *Harvard Writing Project Bulletin* in Appendix E for a description of the specific characteristics of A, B, C, D, and E papers. As you grade, keep in mind the criteria that students are given for their papers:

- Does the paper take a *position* on the topic and provide an informed and thoughtful *defense* of that position? Does it address *counterarguments*?
- Does the paper provide an *accurate interpretation* of the relevant texts and demonstrate *understanding of the theories* they represent?
- Does the paper make effective use of *textual references* and provide *analysis* of the textual references employed?
- Does the paper clearly articulate its *reasoning* and is the *writing* graceful and free of error?

A paper that meets all these criteria with basic competency deserves a grade in the “B+” range. One that meets the criteria with real artfulness and genuine insight should probably receive a grade in the “A” or “A-” range. A paper that meets few or none of the criteria will fall into the “C” range at best. Late papers are to be penalized at the rate of 1/3 letter grade per day except with a medical excuse (i.e., a note from a physician or UHS).

Reflection statements should be graded on a “+, , -” scale. A grade of “+” is equivalent to a letter grade A or A-. A “ ” is equivalent to a grade B+; a “ ” to a grade of B; a “insert check mark” to a B-; and a “-” represents work in the C- range or below.

### B The “B+” paper

When grading longer papers, you may experience particular difficulty commenting on “B+” work. In general these are solid papers in which there may be a lapse in the support or organization at one point, or a relatively minor interpretive error, but which on the whole demonstrate clarity, insight, and con-

fidence. They have no major substance errors, are organized clearly, analyze the text adequately, and are generally free of major stylistic problems. The thesis is rarely original or remarkable, but it is argumentative and clearly defended by the body. What keeps them from receiving an “A-”? A “B+” is adequate, but an “A-” is very good. A “B+” avoids criticism, but an “A-” impresses you with its skill, originality, analytical depth, confident argument and management of the text, or grace.

This difference can be difficult to convey to a student, however. You should try, tactfully, to indicate points at which he might have pushed the textual analysis further, chosen a more representative quote, or made an interesting argumentative move. You might note important counterarguments that go unmentioned, or point out how he might have made the counterarguments in the paper stronger, thus forcing himself to construct a more rigorous defense. Also, in your final comments explicitly relate these marginalia to the qualities of an “A-”. Be positive about his ability to incorporate your suggests and move beyond a solid case to a truly thought-provoking analysis next time.

Graduate students who did not attend Harvard College are often surprised to learn that on the Registrar’s grading scale the difference between a “B+” and an “A-” is twice the difference between a “B” and a “B+” or an “A-” and an “A”. Students in the College, ever sensitive to their GPAs, are acutely cognizant of this fact. Therefore, when you give a fairly strong paper a “B+” students are more likely to be disappointed. That is why it is good to be especially clear about the reasons for the grade given to papers like these.

### C Returning papers

Returning papers in a timely fashion is crucial. Reflection statements should be returned with comments no later than the section meeting of the week in which they are received. The three longer papers should be returned in two weeks. As for the final exam, the registrar requires that course grades be submitted one week after the final exam takes place. Therefore, you should expect to grade your exams within 2 or 3 days to allow time for a grading meeting and the final compilation of grades before

the grades must be submitted.

#### **D Achieving objectivity**

To ensure consistent grading standards across all sections in the course, the instructor and TFs will conduct grading sessions as a group for each of the three major papers and the final exam. In these meetings, we will exchange student papers in order to flesh out the content and nuances of our standards and make sure that we apply them uniformly. In preparation for these sessions (which will take place one week after the papers have been turned in and one week before they are due to be handed back), you should have graded at least half of your papers so you have a good sense of the range of student work. It is a good idea to write comments on the papers so you'll easily remember why you graded them as you did, but keep the grades you assign in a separate place. Do not put letter grades on the papers before this meeting since you may have to make some adjustments after consulting with the other TFs. Although you should have read a substantial number of your papers by the time of the grading session, you don't need to bring them all with you. Bring representatives of papers in the "A" and "B" range, and all "C" range papers and worse. Also bring any papers for which you've had trouble deciding on a grade. In addition to ensuring consistency, this process helps clarify the finer distinctions within letter grades that can be particularly difficult for first-time graders to identify. It also helps diminish the likelihood that students will protest their grades, and you should inform your students that we have procedures in place to ensure the fair and consistent application of grading standards in all sections. Finally, before you write grades on any of your papers you will be asked to provide the Head TF with a breakdown of your grades, including the average. This serves as an additional mechanism to ensure that no TF's grading standards are radically different from the prevailing standard in the course as a whole.

You should adhere closely to the grading criteria above and the description of letter grades found in Appendix E. It may also prove helpful to watch for the good and bad features mentioned in "General advice" and the lists of "Common weaknesses" and "Strengths to look for" in Section III above. This will promote uniform application of objective

standards. You may also find grading "blind" to be helpful in assuring fairness. If you decide to do this, cover students' names with Post-Its and instruct them not to place their names atop every page. This will ensure that you don't give a more generous reading to the work of students whom you expect to do well, or read the work of students who have performed poorly in the past with an overly critical eye. There are drawbacks to this procedure, however. It is easier to slip into frustrated, unkind commentary when there is no face behind a poor argument. Also, noting improvement is more difficult this way. If you grade blind, be sure to go back and review your commentary, if not the grade, with knowledge of the author.



## V Frequently Asked Questions

### 1 Should I read drafts of student papers?

As a general matter, no. The submission of working drafts is not part of the pedagogical format of Gov 10, and TFs are not obligated to read drafts of student papers. TFs may use their discretion, however, in determining whether or not to read a draft in any particular case. If you do decide to read a draft, the following policy is strongly recommended: the student should give you the draft at least one week before the due date and should meet with you during office hours to discuss your comments. Comments on drafts should not be overly specific. Give enough advice that they are able to make improvements, but you should not correct or proofread their paper too closely. You do not want to give the student reason to think that they can claim to have written a perfect paper after following each of your specific recommendations to the letter.

Whether or not you ever read any drafts, you should let students know that you are available in office hours to discuss their paper ideas with them and to answer any questions they may have in the process of writing their papers. In addition, you can remind them about the various resources around campus for writers—especially the Writing Center, which has a staff of peer tutors who will read drafts of student papers and provide very helpful comments.

### 2 What should I do if a student disputes his or her grade on an assignment?

Ask the student to provide you with the copy of the paper that includes your comments. Give yourself a couple of days to look it over and collect your thoughts and then meet with the student in office hours. Don't try to discuss it with the student without having first re-read the paper and your initial comments. If you've had a chance to look over the paper again and collect your thoughts you'll be able to provide the student with a clearer account of why you graded the paper as you did. Feel free to ask another TF to look at the paper if you have any doubts or just want some reinforcement. When you meet with the student, it's a good idea to go in with the assumption that the student's main objective is to learn how to write a better paper. This is not

always the case, but if you can orient the meeting around helping the student learn, it's likely to be a more fruitful session. If, after meeting with you, the student has further questions about the course grading policies, refer him or her to the Head TF.

Disputes over grades will be less likely if students are made aware that the TFs and the instructor have met together to share and discuss papers, ensuring that evaluative standards are consistent across all sections

### 3 May students devise their own paper topics or modify an assigned topic?

Only with the TF's permission, and the topic must be approved well in advance by the TF. When you are deciding whether to approve a proposed topic, consider the following criteria: Is it comparable in difficulty to the assigned topics? Does it engage a comparable range of material and raise comparably fundamental issues? Is it a topic that the student can adequately address in the allotted number of pages? Is it specific enough as a topic to allow the student to construct a sharply focused argument around it? Do you suspect that they are attempting to make the assignment closely fit another assignment they have already completed for another course? If you have any doubts about a proposed topic, consult the Head TF or the instructor.

### 4 How should I handle late papers and is it okay to grant extensions?

The course policy, printed on the syllabus, is that late papers will be penalized at the rate of 1/3 letter grade per day, except in the case of medical emergencies (which means with a doctor's note or a note from UHS). Extensions should be granted, if they are granted, only well in advance (a week or so). There may be some good reasons to deviate on occasion from the official policy. TFs may exercise discretion in making this judgment in the really exceptional case. If you need advice, consult the Head TF or the instructor. Should you decide to make such an exception, inform the Head TF so that fairness across sections can be maintained.

### 5 If a student misses a section can he or she make it up by going to another TF's section that

**week?**

If a student has to miss a section it's a good idea for him or her to go to another section that week instead. However, it is necessary for the student to notify his or her TF about this in advance, and also request permission of the TF whose section he or she wishes to attend. In such a case the student's reflection statement should be turned in to his or her regularly assigned TF. But scheduling changes should be kept to a minimum. Students should not get the impression that all sections are "open" and that their assignment to a particular one is merely a formality. Prior commitments (e.g., doctor's appointments, extracurricular special events, etc.) should be noted in advance, and unexpected switches should not occur for frivolous reasons.

As a general matter, it is important for TFs to keep attendance. A significant portion of the grade is determined by section participation, so we need to have accurate data on this. It is reasonable to expect that most students will miss a section during the course of the term, but if a student is regularly absent from section the TF should remind him or her that section attendance is mandatory and constitutes a significant portion of the course grade. Repeated absence from assigned sections, even when accompanied by attendance at other sections, impairs a TF's ability to evaluate and guide a student effectively.

## **6 What should I do if I have a student who is not meeting the course requirements?**

If you have a student who is failing to meet course requirements (by missing multiple sections, turning in late or failing papers, etc.) you should let the Head TF know as soon as it becomes clear. We will work together to make sure that the student and appropriate Senior Tutor are kept well informed about the student's status in the course.

# Appendix A

## Key concepts: A weekly guide to section discussions

It is a good idea to identify in advance textual passages that illustrate each week's key concepts, and then focus on them in section discussion. Also, be aware each week of what is on the list for the following week. Sometimes discussions of particular authors are carried over from one week to the next, and in any case, knowing what's coming will help to prepare your students for the next meeting.

### Section #1: Thoreau & King (week of September 24)

This opening pair is a bit light in comparison to the rest of the course. You should therefore have time this week for introductions, for setting out section goals and expectations, and for discussing the reflection statements.

- The concept of political obligation. What does it mean for a political system to be "justified" such that we are legitimately obligated to obey? On what grounds might a political system be justified? When may we disobey, and how are the conditions under which we may disobey and the character of that disobedience related to political justification?
- The relationship between civic duty, civil disobedience/resistance, and freedom. How can we be subject to political obligations and still be "free?"
- The role & characterization of majority opinion (communal norms), personal conscience, and "higher" law (natural, divine, moral) in political obligation.

### Section #2: Plato's Apology and Crito (week of October 1)

- The "care of the soul" as a political goal. What does it mean? What is attractive about it? What's disturbing? Is there any freedom involved in it?
- The distinction between the good citizen and the good person. Is it possible to be both? Or

does membership in a political community necessarily compromise one's moral standing? Note and probe the tension between the two works on this point.

- The role & characterization of majority opinion (communal norms), personal conscience, and "higher" law (natural, divine, moral) in political obligation - compare Socrates on this subject to last week's discussion of King and Thoreau on the same. Which of the three views is most valuable?

### Section #3: Machiavelli's Prince (week of October 8)

- The concept of "virtù" as amoral and yet dependent on conventional morality. How does it serve freedom? What does freedom mean in Machiavelli?
- Stability as the goal of politics. Contrast with Socrates.
- The relationship between fortune and virtù. Does the prince direct fortune or is he directed by it? What is the significance of this contest for politics?

### Section #4: Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics and Politics (week of October 15)

- The role of virtue in the varieties of happiness in the *Ethics*. Grasp the chain of argument that moves from happiness, to the "function" of man, to reason, and finally to virtue. Note how this connection undergirds the definition of justice and the structure and goals of the political regimes of the *Politics*.
- Consider the dual telos of man - the perfection of his own virtue and fulfilling his role in the city. How and in what situations might these goals be compatible? Incompatible?
- Aristotle v. Machiavelli: How does the nature and function of man differ between the two? Consider how Aristotle redefines (given the order in which we read the authors) the role of reason and prudence, and the relationship between reason and inclination. How does Aristotle's "virtue" differ from Machiavelli's

“virtù”? What do the authors have in common?

- The concepts of personal freedom as a prerequisite for civic participation and political freedom as the exercise of civic participation. How does virtue figure in this account? How is virtue related to slavery?
- Note the lack of individual sovereignty. The state does not exist because we consent to or create it, and there are no “individual rights” - only what is naturally right.

#### Section #5: Hobbes's Leviathan (week of October 22)

- Hobbes's modern scientific approach to politics. Compare his purposes to those of Aristotle and Machiavelli.
- The concept of the state of nature. What does it tell us about the vision of human nature on which Hobbes's theory is founded? What does it say about the basis of political (and moral) obligation? Consider the ideas of natural freedom and equality, which are departures from Aristotle and Machiavelli. Why does Hobbes begin with these ideas?
- The lack of pre-civil justice. Nothing is “wrong” in the state of nature. Why? Grasp the chain linking the absence of natural justice to our absolute “natural right,” and to the inevitable insecurity of the state of nature.
- The concepts of natural right and natural laws.

#### Section #6: Hobbes's Leviathan (week of October 29)

- The meaning of moral virtue and its relation to natural laws and natural right. How is reason involved in virtue?
- The structure of government. Hobbes's justification for absolute sovereignty. Note the death of moral elitism in Hobbes: the sovereign has no special merit (neither “virtue” nor “virtù”). Note, too, the artificial nature of political power. It is we, the people, who

create the state by an act of will. Why doesn't this new focus on equality result in more power for the individual vis-à-vis the state (i.e., rights)?

- The nature of freedom, including natural freedom and civil liberty. How are they related to natural right and natural laws? And to Hobbes's ideal of absolute sovereignty?
- Compare Machiavelli, Aristotle, and Hobbes on their different concepts of freedom and the type of virtue each requires. What are the strengths and weaknesses of each? Which is to be preferred? Does freedom need virtue? Does virtue lead to freedom?

#### Section #7: Locke's Second Treatise and “Letter Concerning Toleration” (week of November 5)

- The difference between Locke's and Hobbes's states of nature. It is significant that Locke begins with natural law (the reverse of Hobbes). What is it, and how do both our natural rights and the limits on them spring from that law? How is the equality Locke's law supposes different from the equality Hobbes describes?
- Locke's argument for private property and his acceptance of inequality.
- The components of Locke's social contract theory of government (consent, limited government, the division of powers, representation, private property, the rule of law, natural law, natural rights, the right to resist, toleration, etc.). What does freedom mean for Locke and how is it tied to these features of his social contract theory of government?
- Explore the definition of the term “classical liberal” and the meaning of liberal constitutionalism with Locke as a template. Consider liberal aspects of American political life.

#### Section #8: Rousseau's Discourse on the Origin of Inequality and On the Social Contract (week of November 12)

- The features of Rousseau's natural man, the innate capacity for "perfectibility," and the historical changes that shape him into something like the Lockean/Hobbesian vision. What is the significance of this historicized account of human nature?
- The general will. Note the difference between the general will (which is always "right," even when unwise) and the "will of all." How is the former *legitimate* even when its decisions are bad, and the latter illegitimate except in those rare cases when it coincides with the general will?
- The relationship between freedom and self-rule. When have we ever been free? Why aren't we free now? How does Rousseau's social contract give us back our freedom? Consider all the ways in which the general will is free (absolute, unlimited, etc.). Are the individuals who comprise that will free? Explore the concept of being "forced to be free."

#### Section #9: Rousseau's On the Social Contract (week of November 19)

- The components of Rousseau's social contract theory of government (general will, conventional rights, equality, mutual dependence, self-legislation, absolute sovereignty, limited toleration, cultural homogeneity, small size, the legislator, the distinction between government and sovereign, etc.).
- The democratic features of this theory of government, and the concept of democracy in general contrasted with liberalism. Similarities and complementarities. Benefits and dangers of each.
- Compare the different conceptions of freedom found in Locke and Rousseau and the forms of government that sustain them. Which is a more persuasive account of how we should organize collective life?

#### Section #10: Marx's "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844"; "The German Ideology"; "Theses on Feuerbach"; and "The Communist

#### Manifesto" (week of December 3)

- The concept of alienation. Note its various forms. How does the negation of alienation make us free?
- The nature of freedom in Marx, as a personal and a social phenomenon.
- The concept of the species-being. What are the characteristics of the species-being? How is it the integration of the human and the natural? How is it social? In what way is it historical?
- Note the tension between Marx's emphasis on historical determinism and his insistence on revolution. Why might we need to incite revolution if capitalism is untenable in the long run?
- The concept of ideology. What does Marx think of all the previous authors we've read? Why is his theory different?

#### Section #11: Mill's On Liberty (week of December 10)

- The meaning of utilitarianism. Mill's specific definition of utility. Similarities and differences to Aristotle's conception of the good.
- The meaning of liberty. Its role in social progress. Is liberty merely the instrument of progress for Mill, or is it an end in itself?
- The limits of liberty. Note how utility provides both the justification for and the limits of liberty. Can Mill meet the criticism of those who regard his defense of rights as too contingent?
- The concept of "individuality." Is it elitist? Is it relativistic? Is his denigration of custom anti-democratic? What would Marx say to Mill about this ideal?
- Mill v. Marx on freedom and social progress. Does freedom lead to social progress? Does progress generate freedom? Which view is the more persuasive one?



# Appendix B

## Study Questions

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# Introduction to Political Thought

## Government 10

### Study Questions

**Thoreau, "On Resistance to Civil Government"**  
**King, Letter from Birmingham City Jail**

- 1 What obligation do citizens have to obey the laws, according to Thoreau? What obligation do citizens have to one another, on this view? What is the foundation of such obligations, or why do citizens have any obligations at all? Is Thoreau's account of political obligation adequate? If not, what might a better account include?
- 2 What is the highest authority over the individual that Thoreau recognizes in politics? Why does he refuse to recognize the authority of majority will?
- 3 Is Thoreau's stance on resistance to civil government selfish or self-sacrificing? What is the difference between subjectivity and selfishness, if any? Does his perspective offer a potential source of strength for liberal-democratic polities such as the U.S., or is it a weakness? What are the reasons for your assessment?
- 4 On what grounds does King justify civil disobedience? On what basis can an act of resistance properly be counted as civil disobedience? How is King's justification for resistance different from that of Thoreau, if at all? Which is better founded?
- 5 To what extent does King's argument on behalf of civil rights for African Americans challenge prevailing majority opinion, and to what extent does it depend on majority opinion? What is the relationship between freedom and majority rule?
- 6 What does Thoreau mean by freedom? Does King take freedom to mean the same thing? How are their (possibly different) conceptions of freedom reflected in their respective views on civil resistance?



# Introduction to Political Thought

## Government 10

### Study Questions

#### Plato, *Apology* and *Crito*

- 1 What is the meaning of the distinction Socrates makes between “true speech” and “persuasive speech” in the *Apology*? Must they be two separate things? Is it possible to defend what is true without recourse to persuasive speech? Is persuasive speech always less true than true speech? Is there any reason to think that the relationship between true speech and persuasive speech is especially important (or problematic) for democracies as opposed to other regimes?
- 2 What does Socrates mean in the *Apology* when he speaks about the “care of the soul?” Is there any kind of freedom involved in it? Why is this the highest end for human beings as individuals, and why is it the proper purpose of politics? Do you agree with him?
- 3 Does Socrates give an adequate defense of himself in the *Apology*, in your view? Why did the Athenians condemn him? Were his actions justified, or were the Athenians right to find him guilty as charged? Would you consider him to be a civil disobedient? Does his trial tell us anything about the nature of political philosophy as an enterprise, or about the relationship between politics and philosophy?
- 4 Who is Crito and what is his character meant to represent in the *Crito*? What are the arguments that Socrates puts to Crito, and what do these arguments tell us about Crito’s character? What do they tell us about Socrates?
- 5 What are the arguments made by the Laws? Are they persuasive arguments? Are they true? Are they just? Do they accurately describe the nature of political obligation? What does it mean when the laws speak of “what is just by nature?” Does Socrates accept the arguments of the Laws? Why or why not? Is his response just? Is it politic?
- 6 Is Socrates a good citizen? Is he a good person? What is the difference? Is it possible to be both simultaneously? Do the *Apology* and the *Crito* lead you to give two different answers to these questions, or do the two dialogues lead to the same conclusion?
- 7 Can you find any notion of freedom in these two dialogues? If so, what does it amount to and how is it different from what you’ve seen in King and Thoreau? If not, how do you account for its absence?

# Introduction to Political Thought

## Government 10

### Study Questions

#### Machiavelli, *The Prince*

- 1 What does Machiavelli regard as the purpose of politics? How does this purpose differ from the one that Socrates defends? What does freedom mean for Machiavelli, and how is freedom related to the purpose(s) of politics?
- 2 Look at Machiavelli's description of Agathocles in chapter 8. What meaning(s) does Machiavelli assign to the term *virtù*? How does *virtù* differ from common conceptions of virtue? To what extent does it represent a wholesale rejection of conventional virtue and how much does it rely on conventional virtue? How does *virtù* serve freedom, if at all?
- 3 Describe Machiavelli's new prince. What motivates him? What principles guide him? What qualities characterize him? What sorts of activities does he undertake? How does the character of Machiavelli's new prince reflect the author's understanding of politics? Should everybody emulate the new prince?
- 4 What role should reason play in politics, according to Machiavelli? How does the reason of the new prince differ from that of Socrates? What is the significance of this difference?
- 5 What is fortune, as it appears in *The Prince*? What is the nature of the contest between fortune and the *virtù* of Machiavelli's new prince in chapter 25? Which side in the contest does Machiavelli's account show to be victorious? What is the significance of this contest for modern politics, and how is it related to freedom?
- 6 Is Machiavelli's freedom sustainable on its own terms or are there any ways in which it depends on ideas and virtues that he rejects? Is Machiavelli's realism realistic?

# Introduction to Political Thought

## Government 10

### Study Questions

#### Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* and *Politics*

- 1 What is happiness, as Aristotle describes it in Book I of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, and what are its different varieties? Do you find this to be an adequate definition? What is the basis of the ranking of the different varieties of happiness, and do you accept this ranking? Why or why not? Is Aristotle right to say that happiness, as he defines it, is the true end or purpose of moral life? Or is the individual concern with happiness selfish and antithetical to morality, as some modern theorists have argued? What do happiness and morality have to do with politics?
- 2 What is the “function” of the human being, according to Aristotle? How is this function related to moral virtue, and how is it related to happiness? How is virtue related to government and political life?
- 3 What is the purpose of politics, for Aristotle? On what basis does he describe (in the *Politics*) the city as “the most authoritative partnership?” In what sense is the city natural? In what sense is it self-sufficient? In what sense in the city “prior to” the individuals of which it is comprised? What is the political significance of the priority of the city vis a vis the individual?
- 4 Citizenship is for free persons, according to Aristotle. What does freedom mean in this view? What does it require and why? What institutional forms and what qualities of character does the exercise of freedom involve? In what sense does political freedom presuppose equality and how does it require inequality?
- 5 Does freedom need virtue? If so, what kind(s) of virtue does it need and why? What would Machiavelli say about Aristotle’s conception of freedom and the virtue that sustains it? Would he be right? Could Aristotle meet his objections? Does America’s politics embody the freedom and the virtue that Aristotle envisions, or is it closer to Machiavelli’s account?
- 6 Is a good person the same as a good citizen? Why or why not? Why does Aristotle say that the virtue that constitutes “the good man” necessarily entails the virtues that go with political rule? (III.5) What does Aristotle mean by “prudence,” and how is it related to moral virtue and the virtue of good political rulers? (see III.4) How is Aristotelian prudence different from prudence in Machiavelli?
- 7 What are the different types of regimes (“constitutions”—see III) Aristotle identifies, and how does he distinguish among them? What is the nature of the best regime? How does freedom figure in the best regime, if at all?
- 8 What is justice, and how is the meaning of justice in Aristotle related to the nature of the regime? Does justice promote freedom?

# Introduction to Political Thought

## Government 10

### Study Questions

#### Hobbes, *Leviathan*

- 1 What constitutes the Hobbesian “scientific analysis” of human nature? How is it related to his theory of politics?
- 2 What is the significance of the fact that Hobbes begins his account of politics in the state of nature? Did the state of nature ever exist? Could it exist again? Does it exist anywhere now? What is it meant to tell us about the basis of political obligation, about the meaning of justice, about the nature of the human being, about the relationship between the individual and the political community? How does this beginning point change the purposes of politics as compared with Aristotle, and how does it reverse the priority of the polity to the individual that Aristotle defends? What is Hobbes’s purpose in making this reversal?
- 3 What is the basis of natural freedom in Hobbes? In what sense are all persons naturally equal? What is the relationship between natural freedom and natural equality? How would you compare natural freedom in Hobbes to Machiavelli’s conception of freedom?
- 4 What is natural right? What are natural laws? How are they related? How does Hobbes define moral virtue, and how is it related to natural rights and natural laws? How is virtue related to fear? Compare this conception of virtue to those of Aristotle and Machiavelli.
- 5 How does Hobbes define “liberty?” Is this an adequate way to understand liberty, in your view? How is this definition of liberty related to the freedom of persons in the state of nature? How is it related to their condition in civil society? To what extent does liberty require what Hobbes calls “virtue?” Are people free under the form of government that Hobbes defends?
- 6 What is the nature of the political sovereign in Hobbes? What rights does the sovereign have and what rights do his subjects have against him? Why is it so important that the political sovereign have absolute power, and why does Hobbes seem to be so unconcerned about the potential dangers of this system? How does Hobbes’s conception of absolute political power compare with the power of Machiavelli’s new prince?

# Introduction to Political Thought

## Government 10

### Study Questions

#### Locke, *Second Treatise of Government* and *A Letter Concerning Toleration*

- 1 What is the purpose of Locke's *Second Treatise of Government*? Why does he begin the book by describing life in the state of nature? How is Locke's state of nature different from that of Hobbes, if at all? What is the significance of the differences?
- 2 What is the "strange doctrine" that Locke describes in chapter 2? What rights and presuppositions it is based on? What rights does it grant individuals in the state of nature? How does this account of natural rights differ from that of Hobbes, if at all? How do their conceptions of natural law(s) differ, and what is the political significance of these differences?
- 3 How does Locke define property? How does he justify inequalities of property? What limits, if any, does he set to inequality of property in the state of nature? In civil society? Is this a just account? What is the relationship between property and political liberty, in Locke's view?
- 4 What type of government does Locke defend and why? What political institutions does he recommend? What does he consider to be the proper purposes of politics? How does his account of good government compare to that of Aristotle? How does it compare to Hobbes's view?
- 5 What does freedom mean in Locke? How is it different from Aristotle's conception of freedom? What political institutions and what qualities of character does the exercise of freedom in Locke require?
- 6 What natural rights do we have and why? What role (if any) do these rights play in politics? How are they related to freedom? What justifies the natural right to political resistance in Locke, and what are the limits of this right? Compare Locke on resistance to civil government with Thoreau and/or King. Which is the best account? Are natural rights intrinsically revolutionary?
- 7 On what basis does Locke advocate the separation of church and state in his *Letter Concerning Toleration*? How does this separation relate to the more general division between public and private spheres that characterizes contemporary liberal societies? How is it related to pluralism? To freedom as Locke understands it?
- 8 What features make Locke's social contract theory of government an example of classical liberalism? What aspects of his theory support freedom? Is Hobbes, who is also a social contract theorist, a liberal as well?

# Introduction to Political Thought

## Government 10

### Study Questions

#### Rousseau, *Discourse on the Origins of Inequality* and *On the Social Contract*

- 1 What differences do you see in Rousseau's account of the state of nature as compared to Locke's? What do you think is the significance of these differences?
- 2 What does Rousseau mean when he speaks of the human "faculty of perfectibility?" How does this faculty make his conception of human nature different from that of Locke? Compare the faculty of perfectibility in Rousseau to the perfection of the soul in Aristotle. How are they similar and how are they different? How is the faculty of perfectibility related to freedom, as Rousseau describes it in the *Discourse*?
- 3 Why does Rousseau object so strongly to inequality? Is he right to do so? Should we reject Lockean liberalism on these grounds?
- 4 Is reason a good thing in Rousseau's view, or is it the cause of human misery?
- 5 What does freedom mean in Rousseau? Does it mean the same thing in the *Discourse on Inequality* as in *On the Social Contract*? Note the distinction between natural freedom and civil freedom. Is Rousseau's account of civil freedom in the *Social Contract* similar at all to that of Aristotle? Compare the meaning of civil freedom in Rousseau with the meaning of civil freedom in Locke. Which account of freedom do you find most accurate or persuasive? In what sense might you say that Rousseau's account is more democratic? Would there be any reason to dispute this characterization?
- 6 To what type of government should we aspire, according to Rousseau's *Social Contract*? What are the differences between this social contract theory and Locke's? What advantages does Rousseau see in his model, and do you agree with him? What political and non-political supports are necessary to sustain it? Is it a viable ideal in general, and in the United States in particular? Is it desirable, in your opinion?
- 7 What is the general will? How does it differ from what Rousseau calls "the will of all?" How is it related to freedom? Why does Rousseau think it is so important for political decisions to be made by such a mechanism? Is he right to think so?

# Introduction to Political Thought

## Government 10

### Study Questions

#### **Marx – “Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844”**

**“Theses on Feuerbach”**

**“The German Ideology”**

**“The Communist Manifesto”**

- 1 What is alienation, according to Marx? What are its different forms? What causes it? Why is bad? How does alienation in Marx compare to Rousseau’s understanding of the misery of modern man?
- 2 What is the “species being,” as Marx defines it? How would you compare the idea of species being in Marx with the idea of human nature in Aristotle or Locke?
- 3 What does freedom mean to Marx? How is it to be achieved? What does it require? Is freedom a political phenomenon? What role does human reason play in bringing about freedom as emancipation? How is freedom related to individual development, individual choice, and social progress? What role does individual human action play?
- 4 What is “labor,” according to Marx? How does his understanding of the relationship between labor and property compare to that of Locke? Why does Marx end up with such a radically different assessment of the value of private property and its connection to freedom? How is the activity of labor, on Marx’s view, related to individual development? How is it related to social progress?
- 5 What are the necessary conditions that make individual development and social progress possible? What would a fully emancipated society look like, according to Marx? Is this a viable objective? A desirable one? A just one?
- 6 What are the most persuasive elements of Marx’s critique of modern liberalism in your view? What elements in Marx’s thought would you classify as democratic, if any? Which ones run counter to democracy?

# Introduction to Political Thought

## Government 10

### Study Questions

#### J.S. Mill, *On Liberty*

- 1 How does Mill define liberty, and how does he justify it? Do we have a “right” to liberty on his account? What principle does he invoke to defend protections for individuals against the state, and does this principle stand up? Can you think of a better defense?
- 2 What should be the limits of individual liberty, according to Mill? Do you agree?
- 3 What is utilitarianism? Is it a democratic view? Is it a liberal view? Does it support individual rights? Does it promote individual happiness? Does it make for good government? For justice?
- 4 What is the quality that Mill calls “individuality?” How does it contribute to good government, as he sees it? How does it contribute to social progress? Is it an egalitarian or inegalitarian concept? How does Mill measure social progress, and on what basis does he make judgments about what contributes to individual development or utility? What would Marx say about Mill’s concept of individuality? Could Mill answer Marx’s objections? How would you compare individuality in Mill to Aristotle’s idea of the cultivation of the soul?
- 5 Is liberty an end in itself, on Mill’s account, or are there some higher ends that liberty serves? If so, what are they?
- 6 Compare Mill’s conception of freedom to that of Marx. Both connect freedom to individual development and social progress but they do so in very different ways. What are the differences and what is their significance politically? Which view do you find more compelling? Should we expect freedom to produce more highly developed individuals, and should we expect it to lead to social progress?



# Introduction to Political Thought

## Government 10

### Study Questions

#### Review

- 1 What does Berlin mean by “positive” and “negative” liberty? How do they differ? Which figures covered in the course would you associate with each form of politics? Which does Berlin defend? Do you agree with him? What type of regime is most likely to promote and protect the form of liberty you find most important?
- 2 Compare the various conceptions of liberty or freedom covered in the course. What are the strengths and weaknesses of each view? What conception of human nature does each one presuppose? What risks does each run? Which one do you defend and why?
- 3 What kinds of government institutions are most likely to promote and protect freedom? Why? How can they be brought into being, or do they already exist? How close does the government of the United States come?
- 4 How would you characterize the major differences between the ancient and modern approaches to politics that you’ve seen in this course? What similarities do you find between ancient and modern views? Should we be grateful to be born in the modern period, or are we missing out on a form of political life that only the ancients knew? Would it be possible to reconstruct the ancient polis today, if it were deemed desirable to do so? Why or why not?
- 5 Are political norms (or standards of justice and political right) strictly conventional, or can objective sources of political norms be found (higher law, science, etc.)? If so, where? If not, why not? Which of the views covered in the course gives the best account of the basis of political norms—or standards of justice—in your view?
- 6 What is the relationship between freedom and equality? What are the foundations of each, or what justifies our claims to be free and equal? What is the relationship between liberalism and democracy? Define each, and describe how they are complementary and why (if at all) they may conflict.
- 7 What types of political institutions and what forms of political life are most conducive to tyranny? What mechanisms most effectively prevent it? Which of the political theories covered in the course gives the best account of the causes and prevention of tyranny? How does Aristotle’s account differ from that of Locke in this regard?



# Appendix C

## Midterm Section Evaluation Government 10—Introduction to Political Thought

Name of TF:

		Never	Moderately		Frequently		
1	Explains material clearly	1	2	3	4	5	
2	Effectively directs and stimulates discussion	1	2	3	4	5	
3	Is available outside of class	1	2	3	4	5	
4	Effectively encourages students to participate		1	2	3	4	5
5	Seems well prepared	1	2	3	4	5	
6	Stimulates interest in material		1	2	3	4	5
7	Treats students with respect	1	2	3	4	5	
8	Overall effectiveness of TF in helping you learn		1	2	3	4	5

9 What do you consider the most successful aspects of your section so far?

10 Do you have any suggestions for improving your section? Please be specific.



# Appendix D

## Sample Essays with Commentary

Following this page you will find three student essays that demonstrate common strengths and weaknesses of undergraduate writing in political theory. Sample comments have been provided in the margins and general comments at the end of each paper.

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### End Comment: (paper 3)

There are some serious but correctable flaws in this paper. Don't be discouraged! There are two major areas that need work, but there is promise here too. Implement the advice below and you will do better on your next paper.

First the premise, and how to develop it: Your style is very accessible. So when you work on developing precision & clarity, try to maintain the directness of your natural voice. You also have good instincts for issue-oriented compare/contrast. But your promising ideas (practicality, intractability of difference among men &c) are underdeveloped. Either is acceptable, so play to your strengths, and organize your paper around them. Writing an outline will help you organize your ideas. I'm also glad to see you thinking about authors outside the scope of the question. You select Mill, at first w/o naming him, but should probably have chosen Locke and Kant - Marx's real targets. More could be added to your observation about Hobbes too. Now, Advice for next time:

1 Engage the text on its own terms. Understand an author's argument from his own perspective before criticizing it. Pay attention to how he uses his own key terms and don't misconstrue them according to your own usage. In this paper you have been too dismissive of Marx. Don't assume he has no defensible reasons for his point of view. Reasonable disagreement is desirable, but you must first patiently search out and consider his arguments, and withhold judgment til you've done so. This will lead to stronger use of evidence, a deeper level of analysis & a more persuasive argument on your part.

2 Strive for clarity of presentation. Define key terms. Choose your own words with care. Develop a clear organizational framework—then you will be better able to focus on unfolding your argument, and avoid tangents. Include your plan in your introduction. Come visit me during office hours and we'll work on organizational structure. Proofread your draft. Avoid casual language, missing citations.

# Appendix E

## Harvard Writing Project Bulletin





# Appendix F

## Additional Student Writing Resources

**1** Harvard University Writing Center in the Barker Center, room 19.

Telephone: x5-1655

Website: [www.fas.harvard.edu/~wricntr/](http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~wricntr/).

Pre-scheduled conferences with trained peer tutors are offered Monday through Friday during the day; drop-in hours are offered from 7 to 9 PM Monday through Thursday at the Barker Center, and on Sunday evenings during the academic year from 7 to 9 in Room 209 at Hilles Library (during the week, arrive no later than 8 PM to guarantee a slot). The peer tutors will read drafts of student papers. Students are also welcome to drop in during the day, and, if one of the tutors is free, he or she will gladly meet with them at that time.

The Writing Center's website has a helpful link called "Writing Tools" that includes tips on writing academic essays and reference guides.

**2** House Tutors in Academic Writing. Some houses in Harvard's house system are staffed with resident or non-resident academic writing tutors. These tutors often have office hours at the house to work with students on all stages of their papers.











