

INTRODUCTION TO POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

POLITICAL SCIENCE 104

Tuesdays and Thursdays, 9:30-10:50 AM, 115 Talbert

Fall semester, 2010

Instructor: Jason Sorens

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Course Description

This course introduces normative political theories, that is, theories about the moral foundations of politics. Most political science addresses questions about how the world *does* work, but in this course we will try to answer questions about how the world *ought* to work. Political philosophy is therefore a component of the realm of philosophical inquiry known as “ethics.” We will learn about different ethical theories in this class, but our focus will be on applying them to specifically political questions.

What makes an moral question “political”? Some moral questions may not be primarily political, such as the duties we may have to ourselves or to non-human nature. In general, we will focus our inquiry on the exercise of power by some humans over others, most obviously including the workings of the state.

In the first two-thirds of the course, you will learn about ethical theories and what these theories have to say about politics. Along the way, we will consider specific scenarios and applications in order to make these ideas more concrete. Then, in the last third of the course, we will discuss specific political issues of current relevance. The format of the course is lecture with occasional breaks for discussion.

Course Requirements

The goal of this course is to give you a solid foundation in moral philosophies of politics, which will allow you to discuss fundamental questions about the proper role and structure of government logically and critically. These skills are essential to well-informed citizenship, critical thinking, and the examined life.

To keep up with the pace of the course, you must do *all* the reading for a particular day *before* that day’s lecture (see class schedule below). I will not waste time taking attendance, but you will need to be in class regularly in order to do well. If you have questions about the material early on, bring them to me right away, because if you get lost at the beginning, it will quickly become difficult for you to catch up. Finally, I expect you to complete assignments on time and in the format requested (see **Grading** section below).

Readings

I have chosen the following two books for the course, both of which are available at the bookstore:

- Steven M. Cahn (ed.), *Political Philosophy: The Essential Texts*, 2nd ed. (Oxford University Press).
- Steven M. Cahn & Robert B. Talisse (eds.), *Political Problems* (Prentice Hall).

Political Philosophy is an edited volume of classic works in the field throughout the ages, while *Political Problems* features short “pro” and “con” essays on various current political issues. In addition to these texts, there are several essay readings available in PDF format on the course’s UBLearns site, marked with a number sign on the reading list below (#). You must print these out and bring them to class on the days that they are discussed.

Grading

Reading Summaries

Prior to each class meeting, you will need to post a one-paragraph summary of *one* argument from the reading for that day. An argument consists of two or more premises and a conclusion. Sometimes one of the premises will be implicit. On the first day of class I will explain how to find and summarize an argument. For your own reference, please feel free to consult Anthony Weston, *A Rulebook for Arguments*, 2nd ed. (Hackett Publishing). (It is a short, very cheap paperback.)

Your post should be made on the class forum on UBLearns *in the appropriate thread* (very important!). (Post plain text only; do not try to attach files to your message.) If you do not post a summary in the appropriate thread by class time, I will lock the thread and you will be unable to receive credit for the assignment. Also, be sure to check back on each thread after a couple of days, because I will post my own responses to the student summaries. This is an “all or nothing” assignment. If you do the assignment, you receive full credit. Together, your summaries make up **21%** of your final grade. I will not allow make-ups of these assignments. Instead, I will allow you to skip up to three summaries without penalty.

Short Papers

You will be responsible for writing two short papers of approximately 1,000 words on topics that will be assigned in class a week in advance of the rough draft due date. If you turn in the rough draft of your paper on time, you receive credit (4% of your course grade each); otherwise, not. (Paper submissions only – no e-mails!) Then, at the next class, I will randomly assign the rough drafts to other students to critique. By the following class, you should have a 250-word-minimum critique prepared, which you will turn in to me as two copies on separate sheets of paper, along with the original rough draft you received. I will grade one copy of your critique for its coherence and helpfulness (4% of your course grade each) and hand it back to you, and the other copy of the critique I will hand back, along with the rough draft, to the original author. Finally, you have one week after the critiques are returned to you to turn in your final draft, which I will critique and grade myself (9% of your course grade each).

If for some reason you expect to be absent on a due date for an assignment or for a class at which rough drafts or critiques are distributed, please let me know in advance so that you can submit or pick up the relevant material *before* the class at which you will be absent.

Examinations

We will have a centrally scheduled final essay examination on ???, worth 45% of your course grade.

Academic Integrity

I have noticed that many UB students are not adequately familiar with the scope, content, and importance of academic integrity. According to UB Rules and Regulations:

'The University has a responsibility to promote academic honesty and integrity and to develop procedures to deal effectively with instances of academic dishonesty. Students are responsible for the honest completion and representation of their work, for the appropriate citation of sources, and for respect for others' academic endeavors. By placing their name on academic work, students certify the originality of all work not otherwise identified by appropriate acknowledgments.'

Academic dishonesty includes:

- (a) Previously submitted work: submitting academically required material that has been previously submitted in whole or in substantial part in another course, without prior and expressed consent of the instructor;
- (b) Plagiarism: copying or receiving material from a source or sources and submitting this material as one's own without acknowledging the particular debts to the source (quotations, paraphrases, basic ideas), or otherwise representing the work of another as one's own;
- (c) Cheating: receiving information, or soliciting information, from another student or other unauthorized source, or giving information to another student, with the intent to deceive while completing an examination or individual assignment;
- (d) Falsification of academic materials: fabricating laboratory materials, notes, reports, or any forms of computer data; forging an instructor's name or initials; resubmitting an examination or assignment for reevaluation which has been altered without the instructor's authorization; or submitting a report, paper, materials, computer data, or examination (or any considerable part thereof) prepared by any person other than the student responsible for the assignment;
- (e) Misrepresentation of documents: Forgery, alteration, or misuse of any University or Official document, record, or instrument of identification.
- (f) Confidential academic materials: procurement, distribution or acceptance of examinations, laboratory results without prior and expressed consent of the instructor.
- (g) Selling academic assignments: No person shall, for financial consideration, or the promise or financial consideration, prepare, offer to prepare, cause to be prepared, sell or offer for sale to any person any written material which the seller knows, is informed or has reason to believe is intended for submission as a dissertation or thesis, term paper, essay, report or other written assignment by a student in a university, college, academy,

school or other educational institution to such institution or to a course, seminar or degree program held by such institution.

- (h) Selling computer assignments: No person shall sell or offer for sale to any person enrolled in the State University of New York any computer assignment, or any assistance in the preparation, research, or writing of a computer assignment intended for submission in fulfillment of any academic requirement.

UB guidelines currently provide the instructor with a wide range of discretion as to the penalties to pursue for any violation of academic integrity. For clear and particularly serious violations of academic integrity such as cheating, my policy, with no exceptions, is to fail the student in the course. For lesser violations such as low-degree plagiarism, severe point deductions, up to failure of the assignment, is standard. Regarding plagiarism, please note that **you must cite every idea or piece of evidence in your paper that you derived from someone else.** In addition, encyclopedias such as Wikipedia and biased publications from activist organizations are not acceptable sources for scholarly research, although they may well be appropriate places to begin your research. Use primary sources such as news articles for establishing facts and refereed, published research for establishing generally accepted relationships and ideas.

Schedule of Topics and Readings

Unless otherwise indicated, readings are from *Political Philosophy*.

1. What is political philosophy? (Aug 31)
2. Moral Philosophy I: Teleology
Aristotle, "Introduction" by Richard Kraut and "Nicomachean Ethics," pp. 154-74 (Sep 2)
Thomas Aquinas, "Introduction" by Paul J. Weithman and "Summa Theologiae," pp. 237-52 (Sep 7)

No class Sep 9 – Rosh Hashanah

3. Moral Philosophy II: Psychology
David Hume, "Introduction" by Donald W. Livingston and "A Treatise of Human Nature," pp. 399-426 (Sep 14)
Adam Smith, "Introduction" by Charles L. Griswold, Jr. and "The Theory of Moral Sentiments," pp. 443-51 (Sep 16)
4. Moral Philosophy III: Deontology
Immanuel Kant, "Introduction" by Paul Guyer and "Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals," pp. 495-507 (Sep 21)
Immanuel Kant, "On the Common Saying: 'This May Be True in Theory, But It Does Not Apply in Practice'," pp. 508-527 (Sep 23)
Paper 1 topic announced

5. Moral Philosophy IV: Consequentialism

Jeremy Bentham, *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*, Chapters I (“Of the Principle of Utility”), II (“Of Principles Adverse to That of Utility”), IV (“Value of a Lot of Pleasure or Pain, How to Be Measured”), XIV (“Reasons for Considering Certain Actions as Crimes”), and XIX (“Limits Between Private Ethics and the Art of Legislation”). # (Sep 28)

John Stuart Mill, “Utilitarianism,” pp. 599-632 (Sep 30)

Paper 1 rough drafts due
6. Moral Philosophy V: Marxism

Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, “Introduction” by Richard Miller and “Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844,” pp. 566-76, and John Roemer (1985), “Should Marxists Be Interested in Exploitation?,” *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, sections I-III and VI only, pp. 30-38, 52-61. # (Oct 5)
7. Why Government?

Thomas Hobbes, “Introduction” by Jean Hampton and **part of** “Leviathan,” pp. 282-302 (to end of chapter 17) (Oct 7)

Paper 1 critiques due

John Locke, **part of** “Second Treatise of Government,” pp. 315-25 (to end of Chapter VII) (Oct 12)

Paper 1 critiques distributed

No class Oct 14 - class cancelled

“The Declaration of Independence,” “The Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen,” and Edmund Burke, “Speech to the Electors of Bristol,” pp. 799-803 & 817 (Oct 19)

Paper 1 final drafts due

Charles Taylor, “Atomism,” pp. 729-43 (Oct 21)
8. Citizens’ Political Obligations

Thomas Hobbes, “Leviathan,” pp. 302-10 (remainder) (Oct 26)

John Locke, “Introduction” by A. John Simmons and “Second Treatise of Government” (remainder), pp. 311-14 and 325-42 (Oct 28)

Martin Luther King, Jr., “Letter from a Birmingham City Jail,” pp. 830-38, and Herbert Spencer, *Social Statics*, “Chapter XIX.: The Right to Ignore the State.” # (Nov 2)
9. The State’s Obligations to Citizens

John Stuart Mill, **part of** “On Liberty,” pp. 633-57 (Nov 4)

John Stuart Mill, “On Liberty,” pp. 657-66 (remainder), and Herbert Spencer, *Social Statics*, “Chapter IV.: Derivation of a First Principle.” # (Nov 9)

Paper 2 topic announced

John Rawls, “Introduction” by Joshua Cohen and “A Theory of Justice,” pp. 690-709 (Nov 11)

Robert Nozick, "Introduction" by Thomas Christiano and "Anarchy, State, and Utopia," pp. 710-25 (Nov 16)

Paper 2 rough drafts due

10. Political Institutions

"The Federalist Papers," numbers 10, 39, & 51, pp. 470-76, 480-86, and Alexis de Tocqueville, Volume I, Chapter 5, section "Of the Political Effects of Administrative Decentralization in the United States," Volume II, Chapter 7, sections "Tyranny of the Majority" and "That the Greatest Danger to the American Republics Comes from the Omnipotence of the Majority," Volume II, Chapter 8, section "Absence of Administrative Centralization." # (Nov 18)

11. Policy Debates I: School Vouchers

Spoerl and Henig readings in *Political Problems*, pp. 1-18 (Nov 23)

Paper 2 critiques due

No class Nov 25 – Fall recess

12. Policy Debates II: Drug Legalization

Husak and Freeman readings in *Political Problems*, pp. 95-118 (Nov 30)

Paper 2 critiques distributed

13. Policy Debates III: Torture

Shue and Hill readings in *Political Problems*, pp. 179-202 (Dec 2)

14. Policy Debates IV: Affirmative Action

Cahn and Beauchamp readings in *Political Problems*, pp. 225-46 (Dec 7)

Paper 2 final drafts due

15. Policy Debates V: Immigration

Walzer and Carens readings in *Political Problems*, pp. 247-84 (Dec 9)