

Introduction to Political Philosophy
80-135

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PURPOSE:

This is an introductory course in political philosophy -- the philosophical study of public institutions, government, and political relations. It is a course with no pre-requisites.

DESCRIPTION:

What obligation do we have, as citizens, to our government or community? What obligation does our government have to us? Philosophical debates arise in public life all the time. We expect that the government and others around us respect certain rights we have, we acknowledge some communal obligations when pay our taxes or establish welfare programs, and we participate in democratic processes. But what are we talking about, when we speak of “rights”? Or “justice”? Why do we assume that democracy is good? The ideas we invoke along the way -- justice, equality, rights, democracy, progress -- these are the subjects of political philosophy. In this seminar we will interrogate some of these ideas by examining traditions in Western political thought and the challenges to some of these traditions from more contemporary authors. We will begin by reading some classical texts in the social contract tradition (Hobbes, Locke, Rawls), and dissents from anarchist (Goldman), communist (Marx & Engels), and feminist (Held) thinkers. We will think about whether individuals do in fact or should have “rights” (Nussbaum, Marx). We will read philosophical reflections on political revolutions and political change (Condorcet, Burke, Fanon). We will investigate justifications for democratic government (Rousseau, Mill, Benhabib, Anderson). Finally, we will turn our attention to some of the most pressing challenges of our age: multiculturalism (Gutmann), identity politics (Alcoff), and justice as it relates to race and gender (Coates, Okin, Young).

OBJECTIVES:

At the end of this course you will be able to:

- Read and analyze difficult philosophical texts
- Summarize and reconstruct philosophical arguments
- Identify descriptive (empirical), normative, and speculative elements in political argument
- Compare the viewpoints of different political thinkers
- Formulate your own ideas and arguments concerning controversial political concepts

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

There will be reading assigned for every class meeting. It is **MANDATORY** that you complete this reading in full before the meeting of the class. You are expected to contribute to class discussion. For every class meeting, you are required to send me (by email) one discussion/comprehension question about the reading. This can be a question like: "I don't understand what Marx is talking about when he says X." or "I'm interested why Nussbaum thinks Y. Couldn't it be Z instead?" It can be a genuine request for clarification on some point, or a broad open-ended question for class discussion. This will be worth 15% of your final grade (an easy 15%!). For each question you fail to submit, I will subtract half a point from that 15. Please send these questions to me **NO LATER THAN 10AM** the morning of the class that the reading is due.

There will be two writing assignments. The first, which will be due on **June 1st** will be an analysis of one of the assigned readings. This should be 500-700 words (about 1-2 pages, double-spaced). The second, which will be due **June 10th**, will be comparison paper where you discuss the perspectives of 2 (or maybe 3) authors, comparing and contrasting their views on some issue. This should be 600-900 words (about 2-3 pages, double-spaced). Detailed instructions for these assignments will be handed out in class, about a week ahead of time.

The final assignment will be a more creative project. I hope this course will develop your ability to think critically about the political ideas around you -- what you hear on television, read in the news, encounter on social media, etc. To that end, the final project will involve analyzing a piece of political "speech," and presenting your analysis to the class. This can be an actual speech by a politician, an article in the popular media, a campaign advertisement, or something else. I want to leave this open-ended, so please pick something that is particularly interesting to you! You should meet with me briefly several days before the last day of class to tell me about your choice and what you plan to present (this is mandatory). The goal here will be to uncover: a) empirical presuppositions or speculations which are being presented/hidden by the "speech," b) the structure of the argument being put forth, and c) how the argument relates to some of the things we have read and discussed in this class. More details about the project, including grading rubric, will be distributed later.

Your grade will be calculated as follows:

Daily reading responses: 15%

Class participation and attendance: 15%

First writing assignment (analysis): 20%

Second writing assignment (comparison): 20%

Final presentation: 30%

POLICIES:

Missing class and late assignments

You are expected to come to every class. If you are absent, the entire class is disrupted. I recognize that occasional problems associated with illness, family emergencies, job interviews, other professors, etc. will inevitably lead to legitimate conflicts over your time. If you expect that you will be unable to turn in an assignment on time, or must be absent from a class meeting, please notify me (either in class or via email) in advance and we can agree on a reasonable accommodation. Otherwise, your grade will be penalized. If you miss more than a few meetings, your grade will seriously suffer.

Cheating and Plagiarism

It is the responsibility of each student to be aware of the university policies on academic integrity, including the policies on cheating and plagiarism. This information is available at <http://www.cmu.edu/policies/documents/Academic%20Integrity.htm> and in the section on “University Policies” in the most recent edition of *The Word: Undergraduate Student Handbook*. We will have a discussion in class on what constitutes plagiarism, but if you have any questions please ask for guidance before handing in your paper.

Students who cheat or plagiarize face serious sanctions at both the course level, and the university level. At the course level, faculty at Carnegie Mellon University has significant discretion to determine the sanctions that are appropriate to individual cases of cheating and plagiarism. Within the Philosophy Department, it is customary to give plagiarized assignments a failing grade and, where appropriate, to fail students for the course. Additionally, a letter is sent to the Dean of Students indicating that the student in question has submitted plagiarized material and received a course-level sanction. Plagiarism is also a violation of the community standards of Carnegie Mellon University. As such, allegations of plagiarism may be brought before a University Academic Review Board, which will determine whether a violation of community standards has taken place and level additional sanctions if appropriate. Although this body also has significant discretion over the sanctions that it levels, plagiarism can result in academic probation, suspension, and even expulsion. *(This section and the previous one are based on text provided by Sarah Wellen.)*

READING SCHEDULE: *(all readings will be available online on Blackboard)*

May 18th: First day of class, no reading

Topic: The social contract tradition & its critics

May 19th: Thomas Hobbes, excerpts from *Leviathan*

May 20th: John Locke, excerpts from *Second Treatise on Government*

May 21st: John Locke, continued
May 22nd: Emma Goldman, *Anarchism: What it really stands for* and “What I believe”
May 25th: NO CLASS (Memorial Day)
May 26th: Karl Marx & Fredreich Engels, *Communist Manifesto* chapter 1;
Rosa Luxemburg, “The Socialization of Society”
May 27th: John Rawls, “Justice as Fairness”
May 28th: Robert Nozick, excerpts from *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*
May 29th: Virginia Held, “Non-contractual society: a feminist view”
June 1st: NO CLASS ***first assignment due***

Topic: Rights

June 2nd: Dudley Knowles, excerpt from *Political Philosophy* on rights
June 3rd: Martha Nussbaum, “Capabilities and Human Rights”
June 4th: Karl Marx, “On the Jewish Question”

Topic: Progress, violence, and political change

June 5th: Marquis de Condorcet, excerpts from “Sketch for a historical view of the progress of the human mind”
June 8th: Edmund Burke, excerpts from *Reflections on the revolution in France*
June 9th: Frantz Fanon, excerpts from “On Violence”

Topic: Democracy

June 10th: Jean-Jacques Rousseau, excerpts from *The Social Contract*
John Stuart Mill, excerpts from *Considerations on Representative Government*
second assignment due
June 11th: Seyla Benhabib, “Deliberative Rationality and Models of Democratic Legitimacy”
June 12th: Elizabeth Anderson, “Democracy: instrumental vs non-instrumental value”
June 15th: Thomas Christiano, “Democratic equality and the problem of persistent minorities”

Topic: Difference and social justice

June 16th: Ta-Nehisi Coates, “The Case for Reparations”
June 17th: Susan Moller Okin, “Gender, Justice, and Gender: An Unfinished Debate”
June 18th: Iris Marion Young, excerpts from *Justice and the Politics of Difference*
June 19th: NO CLASS
June 22nd: Linda Martín Alcoff, “The Political Critique of Identity”
June 23rd: Amy Gutmann, “The Challenge of Multiculturalism in Political Ethics”
June 24th: *Presentations
June 25th: *Presentations