

# POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

## PHILOSOPHY 332

Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, 10:20–11:10 AM, IOP 4007

Fall semester, 2021

Instructor: Jason Sorens

Office Hours: by appointment; 216 Poisson

Email: jsorens@anselm.edu (preferred)

Tel.: x7262

## Course Description

What is just and unjust, and how do we know? What is the proper role of government and the law?

To answer these questions, we need to do *political philosophy*, the study of the moral foundations of politics. 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 a 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 three-quarters 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 quarter of the course, we will discuss specific political issues of current relevance. The format of the course is a mix of lecture and discussion. Active participation in class is important.

It can be difficult to confront your own political ideas critically and dispassionately. You can expect – and *hope* – to encounter ideas and claims that make you angry or uncomfortable. These moments are some of the best opportunities to learn.

## 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). You should be prepared to participate in discussion and, if necessary, answer questions when called upon. 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 book for the course:

- Steven M. Cahn (ed.), *Political Philosophy: The Essential Texts*, 2nd ed. (Oxford University Press).

*Political Philosophy* is an edited volume of classic works in the field throughout the ages. The second edition is out of print but widely available used and cheaper than the third edition. The bookstore has the third edition, and page numbers may be different from this syllabus. Some of the readings are also available free online at <http://oll.libertyfund.org>. In addition to this text, there are several essay readings available in HTML or PDF format on the course's Canvas 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

### Class Participation

My lectures will involve classroom questions. Some of these questions will be open-ended, and some will be factual questions directed more or less randomly to specific students. These latter questions will be basic questions about the reading assigned for the day or points mentioned earlier in lecture. Accordingly, you will want to take a few notes about the main points of the readings and bring them to class. You should try to participate in class at least once a week. Subject to that frequency constraint, try to make quality points that advance the discussion, helping us to solve a problem or see something more clearly. Class participation is worth 15% of the overall grade.

### Quizzes

There will be five in-class quizzes in short-answer format on October 2. Each one is worth 5% of your grade. For these I use a special curve, such that the new score on your quiz ( $Y$ ) depends on the raw score on your quiz ( $X$ ) in the following way:

- If  $X < 20$ , then  $Y = 3X$ . For instance, if you get a 10/100 on your midterm, that will be converted to a 30. As usual, anything 60 and below is an F.
- If  $X \geq 20$ , then  $Y = 60 + \frac{X-20}{2}$ . For instance, if you get a 50/100 on your midterm, that will be converted to a 75 (C). I use the full grading scale with pluses and minuses.

### Short Papers

You will be responsible for writing two short papers of approximately 1,200 words on a topic that will be assigned in class a week in advance of the due date. You should make a clear, logical argument that is directly to the point of the assigned topic and that takes into account at least one theory we have learned in class. The purpose of these assignments is to give you practice in critiquing the soundness of philosophical arguments. You will be asked to

evaluate readings we have discussed in class. The best papers also consider the strongest possible counterarguments (put yourself charitably in the position of the author) and respond to them. Each paper will be worth 10% of your grade. There will be an opportunity to rewrite your paper following my comments and receive the average of the grades on the original and rewritten papers.

## Final Essay Examination

You will have a cumulative, take-home, open-book, open-notes final essay examination. You will have some choice in which essay questions you answer. Essentially, this “examination” is really a series of three short papers. These papers will draw together multiple readings from the course on particular themes or questions. The very best papers will show some ability to build persuasive arguments for a position you favor. At the end of the day, we want to know what the right thing to do is, about distributive justice, obedience to the law, regulating markets, respecting individual choices, protecting children, or whatever the topic might be. Can you help my knowledge grow? This assignment is worth 40% of your course grade.

## Academic Integrity

Please be aware of the College’s policies on academic integrity. Some examples of academic dishonesty are:

1. Copying from another student’s examination paper or allowing another to copy from one’s own paper during an examination.
2. Using unpermitted material (notes, texts, calculators, smart phones, etc.) during an examination.
3. Revising, without the instructor’s knowledge, and resubmitting a quiz or examination for regrading.
4. Plagiarism means the presentation by a student of the work of another person as his or her own. It includes wholly or partially copying, translating, or paraphrasing without acknowledgement of the source.

College guidelines currently provide the instructor with a wide range of discretion as to the penalties to pursue for any violation of academic integrity. My general policy is to impose a grade of zero as a penalty for academic dishonesty on an assignment, but failure in the course is also possible for particularly serious violations. In addition, please note that citing something is not an excuse for copying large portions of it for an assignment.

## Schedule of Topics and Readings

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

1. What is political philosophy? (Mon. Aug. 23)

2. Moral Philosophy I: Teleology  
 Aristotle, "Introduction" by Richard Kraut and "Nicomachean Ethics," pp. 154–74 (Wed. Aug. 25 & Fri. Aug. 27)  
 Thomas Aquinas, "Introduction" by Paul J. Weithman and "Summa Theologiae," pp. 237–52 (Mon. Aug. 30)
3. Moral Philosophy II: Moral Sense  
 David Hume, "Introduction" by Donald W. Livingston and "A Treatise of Human Nature," pp. 399–426 (Wed. Sep. 1)  
 Adam Smith, II.i.4, II.i.5, II.ii.1, and II.ii.2 from *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* # (Fri. Sep. 3)
4. Moral Philosophy III: Deontology  
 Immanuel Kant, "Introduction" by Paul Guyer and "Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals," pp. 495–507 (Mon. Sep. 6)  
*Quiz #1* (Wed. Sep. 8)  
 Immanuel Kant, "On the Common Saying: 'This May Be True in Theory, But It Does Not Apply in Practice'," pp. 508–27 (Fri. Sep. 10)
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"), and XIII ("Cases Unmeet for Punishment") # (Mon. Sep. 13)  
 John Stuart Mill, "Utilitarianism," pp. 599–632 (Wed. Sep. 15)
6. Moral Philosophy V: Marxism  
 Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, "Introduction" by Richard Miller, pp. 566–69 and "The German Ideology," pp. 577–82 (Fri. Sep. 17)  
*Quiz #2; Short paper #1 assigned* (Mon. Sep. 20)  
 John Roemer (1985), "Should Marxists Be Interested in Exploitation?," *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, sections I–III and VI only, pp. 30–38, 52–61 # (Wed. Sep. 22)
7. Why Government?  
 Thomas Hobbes, "Introduction" by Jean Hampton and **part of** "Leviathan," pp. 282–302 (to end of chapter 17) (Fri. Sep. 24)  
 Thomas Hobbes, "Leviathan," pp. 302–10 (remainder)  
*Short paper #1 due* (Mon. Sep. 27)  
 John Locke, "Introduction" by A. John Simmons and **part of** "Second Treatise of Government," pp. 311–25 (to end of Chapter VII) (Wed. Sep. 29)  
*Quiz #3* (Fri. Oct. 1)  
 John Locke, "Second Treatise of Government" (remainder), pp. 325–42 (Mon. Oct. 4)  
 "The Declaration of Independence" and "The Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen" pp. 799–803 (Wed. Oct. 6)  
 Charles Taylor, "Atomism," pp. 729–43 (Fri. Oct. 8)
8. The Limits of Government  
 John Stuart Mill, **part of** "On Liberty," pp. 633–57 (Wed. Oct. 13)

- John Stuart Mill, "On Liberty," pp. 657–66 (remainder) (Fri. Oct. 15)  
 Herbert Spencer, *Social Statics*, "Chapter IV.: Derivation of a First Principle" & "Chapter XIX.: The Right to Ignore the State." #  
*Quiz #4* (Mon. Oct. 18)  
 Martin Luther King, Jr., "Letter from a Birmingham City Jail," pp. 830–38 (Wed. Oct. 20)  
 John Rawls, "Introduction" by Joshua Cohen and "A Theory of Justice," pp. 690–709 (Fri. Oct. 22 & Mon. Oct. 25)  
 Robert Nozick, "Introduction" by Thomas Christiano and "Anarchy, State, and Utopia," pp. 710–25 (Wed. Oct. 27 & Fri. Oct. 29)
9. Political Institutions  
 "The Federalist Papers," numbers 10, 39, & 51, pp. 470–76, 480–86 (Mon. Nov. 1 & Wed. Nov. 3)  
 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." #  
*Final essay topics announced* (Fri. Nov. 5)
10. Policy Debates I: Global Justice  
 Peter Singer (1972), "Famine, Affluence, and Morality," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 1 (1): 229–43 [revised edition] and Leif Wenar (2010), "Poverty is No Pond: Challenges for the Affluent" in *Giving Well: The Ethics of Philanthropy*, ed. P. Illingworth, T. Pogge, L. Wenar (Oxford University Press): 104–32 # (Mon. Nov. 8)  
*Quiz #5* (Wed. Nov. 10)
11. Policy Debates II: Drug Legalization  
 Douglas N. Husak (2000), "Liberal Neutrality, Autonomy, and Drug Prohibitions," *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 29 (1): 43–80 and Samuel Freeman, "Liberalism, Inalienability, and Rights of Drug Use" in Pablo de Greiff (ed.), *Drugs and the Limits of Liberalism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press). # (Fri. Nov. 12)
12. Policy Debates III: Gun Control  
 Todd C. Hughes & Lester H. Hunt (2000), "The Liberal Basis of the Right to Bear Arms," *Public Affairs Quarterly* 14 (1): 1–25 and Hugh LaFollette (2000), "Gun Control," *Ethics* 110: 263–81. # (Mon. Nov. 15)  
*Short paper #2 assigned*
13. Policy Debates IV: Torture  
 Henry Shue (1978), "Torture," *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 7 (2): 124–43 and Daniel J. Hill (2007), "Ticking Bombs, Torture, and the Analogy with Self-Defense," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 44 (4): 395–404. # (Wed. Nov. 17)
14. Policy Debates V: Immigration  
 Michael Walzer (1983), *Spheres of Justice* (New York: Basic Books), ch. 2 and Joseph H. Carens (1987), "Aliens and Citizens: The Case for Open Borders," *The Review of*

*Politics: 251–73. #* (Fri. Nov. 19)  
*Short paper #2 due* (Mon. Nov. 22)

15. Conclusions (Mon. Nov. 29)