

Philosophy 2400: Political and Social Philosophy
Spring 2015 • M/W/F 12:40–1:35 PM • University Hall 043

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Course Description

This course explores foundational philosophical questions about politics. We will make a special effort to combine abstract philosophical theorizing with attention to the way these issues surface in contemporary American society.

Some of the questions we will explore: How is the state's authority justified? Is authority ever legitimate? When and why is civil disobedience permissible? How does massive racial inequality in the imposition of criminal punishment in our society affect its legitimacy? Is the state obligated to promote equality? Is there a tension between the pursuit of equality and individual freedom?

Course Goals

This is a philosophy course. As such, it has two primary goals: to introduce you to an exciting ongoing discussion about some topics of immense human significance, and to develop your skill at participating in that ongoing discussion. You will be asked both to show understanding of the material and to undertake some philosophical argument yourself.

Don't worry, that's not as hard as it sounds.¹ In fact, it's a lot of fun. It can also be very useful: many of the courses that you take in the remainder of your university career will require that you produce the sort of clear, direct, argumentative writing that is emphasized in a philosophy class. And both during and beyond your college career, you'll be better off if you're able to formulate clear arguments for your views and critically analyze the way that other people argue for their views.

Some advice about the readings: many of these readings are difficult and complex. Don't be daunted! In philosophy we compensate for this difficulty by assigning fewer pages of reading

¹ For one, it doesn't require that you write in anything like the style of the philosophers we will read. When the time comes, I will give you some specific guidance for writing philosophy papers.

than you will find assigned in many other courses. And, of course, *come to class*. In class I will identify and expand upon the most important threads in each reading.

Texts

Political Philosophy: Essential Texts, 2nd Edition, edited by Steven M. Cahn. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

Please use only the 2nd edition of the textbook. (Note that a 3rd edition has recently been published, but the 2nd edition should still be widely available.) If acquiring the textbook is difficult or unreasonably expensive, please contact me.

Additional readings will be posted on the class website.

Grading

10% Attendance and participation

10% Discussion board postings: on Carmen there is a forum set up for each week of class. To help you start thinking about the reading, each week you should post TWO questions or comments about the upcoming week's reading. One, but not both, of these may be a reply to another student's post.

All posts must be made by 11:59 PM on Sundays. These posts only need to be a few sentences in length; they will be graded credit/no credit. There are 12 weekend forums; you may take two weekends off. (You only get credit for a weekend on which you post TWO questions/comments.) Grades for these posts will be assigned as follows: if you post questions/comments on 10 weekends, you will receive an A for this portion of your grade; for 9, A-; for 8, B+; and so on.

This requirement may also be satisfied by posting a track for the course soundtrack. See below.

10% 1–2 pp. Argument Analysis
Assigned 1/28; due 2/4.

20% First 3–5 pp. paper
Topics handed out 2/18; due 3/4.

20% Second 3–5 pp. paper
Topics handed out 3/25; due 4/10.

30% Final exam (Tues 5/5, 12–1:45 PM)
Review topics handed out 4/22.

Papers should be turned via hard copy AND via Carmen's dropbox (in word/rtf format) by the beginning of lecture on the dates they are due. **Be sure to put your name in the**

body of the paper. I do run turnitin “originality” scans on papers to identify potentially plagiarized content.

Every student may avail herself of one *no questions asked* 48-hour extension on a paper for this class. (This policy does not apply to the forum posts.) Just let me know before the paper is due. (You don’t have to wait for me to reply to approve your request. So, an e-mail telling me that you’re taking your extension today is perfectly fine.) All other extensions must involve a documented, approved excuse.

Late papers not excused by the previous paragraph will be penalized at a rate of one-third of a letter grade (e.g., from a B+ to a B) per day late.

Course Soundtrack

We’ll be compiling a soundtrack as the semester goes on. There is a forum on the course website where you can post suggested tracks (popular music, from the past ~50 years) along with an explanation of their relevance to the class. A single post in this forum satisfies the discussion board posting requirement for the week in which you post it.

Schedule

Week 1

- 1/12 Introduction: course mechanics, course overview.
no readings
- 1/14 Challenging the state’s authority: philosophical anarchism
R. P. Wolff, *In Defense of Anarchism* I.1 (Carmen)
- 1/16 Philosophical anarchism
R. P. Wolff, *In Defense of Anarchism* I.1 (Carmen)

Week 2

- 1/19 Martin Luther King Day: no school
- 1/21 Philosophical anarchism
R. P. Wolff, *In Defense of Anarchism* I.2, 3 (Carmen)
- 1/23 Wolff: critical discussion
begin *Crito*

Week 3

- 1/26 Socrates defends the state
Plato, *Crito* (*Political Philosophy: The Essential Texts* pp. 22–30)

1/28 Crito cont'd
Plato, *Crito* (*Political Philosophy: The Essential Texts* pp. 22–30)
Argument analysis assigned

1/30 Crito: critical discussion
Jean Hampton's introduction to Hobbes (*PPET* pp. 282–284)

Week 4

2/2 Hobbes: foundations
Hobbes, *Leviathan* I.6, 10, 11 (*PPET* pp. 287–290)

2/4 Hobbes: the state of nature
Leviathan I.13–14 (*PPET* pp. 292–297)
Argument analysis due

2/6 Hobbes: the state
Leviathan I.15, 17, 18, 21 (*PPET* pp. 297–307)

Week 5

2/9 Hobbes wrap-up & critical discussion
re-read as necessary; get started on Locke (below)

2/11 Locke: the state of nature
Second Treatise of Government chs. I–V (*PPET* pp. 315–323)

2/13 Locke on the state of nature, cont'd
Second Treatise chs. I–V cont'd (*PPET* pp. 315–323)

Week 6

2/16 Locke on political society
Second Treatise chs. VII–IX, XI (*PPET* pp. 323–329, 330–332)

2/18 Locke wrap-up & critical discussion
re-read as necessary
First paper topics handed out

2/20 Civil disobedience
Martin Luther King, Jr., “Letter from a Birmingham City Jail” (*PPET* 830–839)

Week 7

2/23 Civil disobedience: Rawls on the duty to obey the law—including *some* unjust laws
Rawls, “Civil Disobedience” (Carmen)

2/25 Civil disobedience: Rawls on the nature and justification of civil disobedience
Rawls, “Civil Disobedience” cont’d (Carmen)

2/27 Civil disobedience critical discussion
re-read/catch up as necessary

Week 8

3/2 Background to Rawls’s *A Theory of Justice*
read Joshua Cohen’s introduction to Rawls (*PPET* pp. 690–694); begin Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* §§ 3, 4 (*PPET* pp. 694–699)

3/4 The original position
TOJ §§ 3, 4 (*PPET* pp. 694–699)
First papers due

3/6 The two principles
TOJ §§ 11, 13 (*PPET* pp. 699–702)

Week 9

3/9 Intuitive appeal of the two principles
TOJ § 17 (*PPET* pp. 702–704)

3/11 Getting to the two principles in the original position
TOJ §§ 24, 26 (*PPET* pp. 704–709)

3/13 Nozick’s critique of Rawls
Nozick, “How Liberty Upsets Patterns” (*PPET* pp. 719–720)

SPRING BREAK

Week 10

3/23 Critical discussion: Rawls; Nozick’s critique

3/25 Foundations of Nozick’s libertarianism: rights as side-constraints
Second paper topics handed out

3/27 The origins of the minimal state: private protective organizations
Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* pp. 10–17, 22–25 (Carmen)

Week 11

3/30 From private protective organizations to the ultraminimal state
ASU pp. 54–56, 108–115 (Carmen)

- 4/1 From the ultraminimal state to the minimal state
ASU pp. 108-115 (Carmen)
- 4/3 Critical discussion: R. P. Wolff's internal criticisms
R. P. Wolff, "Robert Nozick's Derivation of the Minimal State" pp. 7-14, 17-18
(Carmen)

Week 12

- 4/6 Jeremy Waldron, "Homelessness and the Issue of Freedom" (Carmen)
- 4/8 "Homelessness and the Issue of Freedom" (Carmen) cont'd
- 4/10 "Homelessness and the Issue of Freedom" (Carmen) cont'd
Second papers due

Week 13

- 4/13 G. A. Cohen, "The Structure of Proletarian Unfreedom" (Carmen)
- 4/15 "The Structure of Proletarian Unfreedom" (Carmen) cont'd
- 4/17 "The Structure of Proletarian Unfreedom" (Carmen) cont'd

Week 14

- 4/20 "The Structure of Proletarian Unfreedom" (Carmen) cont'd
- 4/22 catch-up
Review topics handed out
- 4/24 wrap-up and review

Week 15

- 4/27 review

*******This syllabus is subject to revision.*******