

PHILOSOPHY 512: POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

SYLLABUS

DR. MICHAEL TIBORIS, MTIBORIS@MAIL.SDSU.EDU

SAN DIEGO STATE UNIVERSITY, SPRING 2014

LL-410, T/TH 12:30PM-1:45PM

OFFICE HOURS: T/TH 2:00PM-3:30PM, AL 429, OR BY APPOINTMENT

FINAL EXAM: 5/15/14, 10:30AM-12:30PM

DESCRIPTION

Selected aspects of the political structures within which we live, such as law, power, sovereignty, justice, liberty, welfare.

PREREQUISITES

Philosophy 101, 102 or 103.

INTRODUCTION

This course is an introduction to some central themes and classic texts in the history of political philosophy. Political philosophy is a branch of value theory concerned with the best way to govern human social affairs. To this end, it must address the nature of political organization and its key conceptual elements, including rights, social responsibility, justice, property, authority, and law. We will be focused primarily on the nature of **political legitimacy**, i.e. on what justifies political authority of a government.

Political legitimacy is initially kind of puzzling. If someone has legitimate political power over me, then it seems they have the right to force me to do things against my will or personal interests. Perhaps they even have the right to end my life if it furthers their political aims. How could anyone or any institutional entity get this kind of power over me as an individual? Various justifications for this have been offered including some appealing to my nature as a human being, some appealing to my self-concern, some to my economic entanglements, some to my participation in a scheme of collective action, some to my other-regarding concerns, etc.

WHAT IS EXPECTED OF YOU IN THIS COURSE

I expect that you will keep up with the reading and participate, do your own written work honestly and with the intent to learn. Attendance in the lectures is essential. There will be handouts on some of the readings, and while they will help you they are **not sufficient** for the exams or other written work. I will be drawing exam questions and writing prompts largely from the progress of our class discussion, so if you don't show up to class the handouts will be of limited value.

I strongly encourage you **not** to take notes on a laptop. There are two reasons for this. First, I've tried various ways of containing things like Facebooking and all of them have failed. Second, taking notes on your laptop in lecture leads to poor retention. Part of this is access to the internet, but the other part of it is that attempting to take notes encourages you to try recording

verbatim. This is not a good way to learn. I know, some of you type faster than you write. But that's okay, because effective note taking is largely about choosing what to write down not simply writing it all down. Here is a summary of some student learning objectives:

- Gain an understanding of some classic texts in the history of political philosophy.
- Develop the ability to identify and explain major approaches to political legitimacy and an introductory understanding of philosophical work on distributive justice.
- Extend familiarity with philosophical methodology acquired in 101, 102, or 103 through reading philosophical texts and writing analytical papers about them.
- Develop critical writing skills by writing papers which reconstruct and expose arguments and analyze them critically.
- Apply these philosophical models to your thoughts about contemporary politics, including views about the justice of wealth inequality in our society.

TEXT

Princeton Readings in Political Thought, Mitchell Cohen and Nicole Fermon (eds.) Available at the SDSU Bookstore or online. The text includes all of the readings for the course.

ASSIGNMENTS

(1) Exams (2@25%ea.): Each of these will include a mix of at least two of the following: term/concept identification questions, short answer questions, short essay questions. They are not explicitly cumulative, and are focused more heavily on the material read since the previous exam, but key concepts from earlier parts of the course are likely to be included.

(2) Short Paper (20%): This is a short paper of about 3 pages which will ask you to concisely explain views of political legitimacy. It's focus is primarily reconstructive. A grading rubric is available below.

(3) Longer Paper (30%): This slightly longer paper of about 5 pages will ask you to analyze a particular philosophical problem relevant to our class discussions. A grading rubric is available below.

(4) Helpful Participation: Respectful and timely class participation will be used to make the difference between borderline grades. Participation can come in many forms—asking questions in class is only one of them. Others include asking questions of me through email, visiting during office hours, or participating in the forums on our blackboard page.

GRADUATE STUDENTS

Graduate students taking the course for credit will be asked to write longer papers and may get different prompts. The details of these assignments will be determined by the number of graduate students attending and agreements reached between these students and myself.

ADDITIONAL NOTES

1. Computers and Phones. These won't generally be allowed, even to take notes. I know, I know, but I've tried to be nice about it and it doesn't work, so they're banned. Students observed using them will be asked to leave.

2. Office hours. You'll do well to take advantage of them. If the times I've picked don't work out for you this won't be an excuse because I'm *very able to schedule individual meetings with you if you take the initiative.*

3. Cheating and Plagiarism. You will be beholden to the University's code of conduct, definitions, and consequences outlined here: <http://www.sa.sdsu.edu/srr/cheating-plagiarism.html>. But much more importantly, from my perspective, is that you do your own work honestly and with earnest effort because anything else is a waste of our collective time. There is little daylight between doing dishonest work and being a dishonest person. Think about the kind of person you want to be and then act accordingly.

4. Disabilities and Other Special Accommodations. If you have any concerns here please see me as soon as possible about them so that I can make the appropriate arrangements. If you have special needs due to a learning disability, please avail yourself of the resources in the Student Disability Services in Calpulli Center, Suite 3101 (third floor) Hours: Monday - Friday, 8 am - 4:30. Students who need special religious accommodations should see me as well, as they are entitled to them in many instances.

5. Late Assignments. My policy on late assignments is that **I don't accept them if you have not made prior arrangements with me to hand them in late.** "Prior" here means *at least 48 hours in advance, and it means real contact with me about it* (i.e. You can't just fire off an email to me and say "sorry I'm not turning it in," the matter must be *settled between us* 48 hours in advance). That said, I'm usually quite willing to be flexible if the reasons are sensible. Ask around and you'll find this to be true. Emergencies will be handled on a case-by-case basis and may require documentation.

RUBRIC

This rubric should offer you a sense of how your written work will be evaluated. The categories do not exactly correlate to grades, but "A" papers will be strong in several categories.

	STRONG WORK	NEEDS IMPROVEMENT	UNSATISFACTORY
AUDIENCE	Assumes audience has read the assigned texts carefully; paper uses evidence to make points rather than summarize.	Spends <i>inappropriate</i> amount of time merely summarizing text or repeating material covered in class.	Shows little evidence of understanding the key ideas in the text, or ideas mostly taken directly from lecture notes.
THESIS	Single clear thesis that would be insightful or interesting to someone who had already studied the texts.	Thesis either lacks clear structure, manageable claim, or is too obvious to most thoughtful readers to be interesting.	No clear thesis or multiple competing theses.
BODY	Well-structured paragraphs with effective evidence (see below). Avoids generalizations.	Extraneous generalization, lack of clear connection with the thesis throughout, ineffective use of evidence.	No sense of organization, poor control of paragraph contents and ineffective or no use of evidence.
ARGUMENT	All necessary points in proving or developing the thesis are made; makes compelling argument for thesis; doesn't assume that the reader agrees with the author	Some missteps or missed steps made in proving the thesis, but there is still an attempt to show that the thesis is correct. Argument compelling to those who already agree.	Essay fails to prove or develop a compelling thesis.
USE OF EVIDENCE	Draws evidence from close reading of text and only uses quotations when necessary and then explains them effectively.	Evidence is of a general kind and does not support the immediate claim being made (or the thesis) or it is too general and this is not explained.	Little evidence used; does not support points made or draws support entirely from lecture notes. Poor use of quotations.
DEPTH	Draws implications that go beyond the immediate thesis based on the analysis presented.	Summarizes the paper but doesn't have implications for anything other than what is said.	Essay fails to show that the author sees the connections between the present topic and others in the course.
MECHANICS	Nearly flawless grammar, spelling, word choice. Reads clearly and without being wordy or relying on jargon.	Grammar, spelling, word choice, sentence structure are not confusing but are inefficient, substantially unclear, and show lack of adequate proofing.	Careless typographical errors, or difficult to read. Uses terms without defining them. Poorly written.

COURSE SCHEDULE
(subject to the usual possibilities for revision)

1/23 Introduction

1/28 - 2/13: Ancient Political Thought

Plato, *The Republic*
Aristotle, *The Politics*

2/18 - 2/27: The Origins of Modern Political Thought

St. Thomas Aquinas, *Politics and Law*
Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*
John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*

3/4 *Exam 1*

3/6 - 3/27: Modern Thought I: Human Nature and Liberty

Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *On The Social Contract*
Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discourse on the Origins and Foundations of Inequality Among Men*
Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*
John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*

3/27: *Short Paper Due*

4/1-4/3 Spring Break, no class meetings

4/8 - 4/17: Modern Thought II: Critiques

John Stuart Mill, *On the Subjection of Women*
Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*
Karl Marx, *The Communist Manifesto*
Karl Marx, *Estranged Labour*

4/22 *Exam 2*

4/24 - 5/6: John Rawls

John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*

5/15: *Paper 2 Due*, 10:30am-12:30pm AL 429