

INTRODUCTORY UNDERGRADUATE COURSE: INTRO TO SOCIAL AND POLITICAL
PHILOSOPHY (FALL 2016)

Political Authority, Justice and Liberty

Fall 2016 Section 15036

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Office Hours: Tuesday/Thursday 2:30-3:30 pm

Class Location and Time: Global & International Studies 1128, T/R 4:00-6:30 pm

Course Description

In this class we will study philosophical approaches to fundamental questions about political institutions and social justice, and apply them to contemporary social and political issues.

Why do we need a state? How can we justify political power? What is the value of liberty? How should wealth be distributed? We will begin to discuss these fundamental questions of political philosophy by examining key theories from the history of western philosophy: theories of the state of nature and social contract by Thomas Hobbes, John Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau; the theory of liberty of John Stuart Mill; and criticism of bourgeois society by Karl Marx. We will then study contemporary theories of justice by Philosophers and criticisms such as Carol Pateman, Charles Mills, John Rawls, Michael Sandel, Iris Young, Robert Nozick and G.A. Cohen. As the class progresses we will discuss applications of these general theories to particular debates in contemporary politics such as: should housing, access to healthcare and education be afforded to every citizen in a just, modern society? Are women's rights and the rights of people of color systematically violated in largely Capitalist countries like the U.S.? Do societies have the right to limit immigration?

Course Objectives

By the end of the semester you will

1. be acquainted with some of the central questions in the field of social and political philosophy and with some ways in which philosophers have tried to answer these questions.
2. develop the skills of critical reasoning and argument evaluation.
3. be able to articulate clear and well-founded positions on contemporary social or political issues.

Required Texts

Political Philosophy: The Essential Texts, 2nd edition, ed. Steven M. Cahn (Oxford, 2011). Cheap used copies are easily obtainable. The newer 3rd edition is also fine, though the page numbers are different.

Other readings will be made available through Canvas —marked with a [C] on the reading schedule.

Course Requirements

Reading

You are expected to attend all class meetings and do the appropriate reading prior to class. Since philosophy involves close examination of often fairly dense arguments, reading means more than just

skimming over the printed page. It requires reading carefully, making an attempt to understand what the author is claiming, why he or she is making that claim, and beginning to think critically about whether those claims are justified.

You are not expected to have figured it all out before you walk in the door - that's what we are going to try to do in class. But we can't begin to make headway in class if you don't make an attempt to read the assigned material.

Attendance and Participation

Attendance for this course is mandatory. Since this is an 8 weeks course and each session is equivalent to a whole week of a regular course, I will accept only **one** unexcused absence —no questions asked. After that, you will receive 0 for this portion of the course grade (15%). If you have an unusual circumstance affecting your attendance (e.g. Mono, flu, family emergency, etc.) you will need to provide documentation for the absence.

Attendance means not only presence in class but also active participation. Obviously it is important to ask questions if you do not understand something. But you will also find that your own ideas and arguments become much clearer if you attempt to articulate them in class. In order to facilitate in-class learning there will be group activities and short written assignments performed in class, which will count towards your participation grade.

The use of cellphones is not permitted in class. The use of laptops for notetaking and class related research is permitted. **Any other use** such as chatting, social media and work related to other courses will count as non-attendance for that session.

In this class we will discuss some controversial political issues and you should remember that the classroom is composed of students from diverse backgrounds. You should respect others' opportunities to speak and promote a free-speech community where ideas may be challenged, but people are never attacked.

Reading responses

By 7AM before each meeting, you should post one brief 'reading response', and one comment to one of your peers' responses on the Canvas site forum.

1. The first response, in no more than a 150 words has two parts: A description of one point you find particularly interesting or convincing; and a question about something you find puzzling or didn't understand.
2. After you post your own response, comment on one of your peer's responses, either criticizing the point made or answering the question. You won't be able to comment before you post your own response.

The aim of the reading responses is to ensure that you do the reading and to give us a 'head start' on our class discussion by helping me assess your reaction to the readings.

The responses will be graded either as exceptional (100%), good (75%), acceptable (50%), unacceptable (0%).

Short Assignments

There will be 2 short assignments (around 750 words). This will be an opportunity to develop your analytical writing skills and apply the theories studied in class.

Group presentations/debates

Groups will be assigned to prepare arguments for or against a certain policy such as: should the minimum wage be increased? Should the US adopt universal health care? Should the US accept more refugees from Syria? Should the US pay reparations slavery? Should there be a change in gun-control laws? In class a formal debate will be held between the opposing groups.

Final paper

A 2000 word paper in which you compare arguments and counter-arguments on a certain contemporary political issue, and based on the theories learned in class explain the philosophical considerations supporting them and argue in favor of a certain policy. You will also need to refer to facts in recent reputable news publications. The topic can be one of the questions debated in the group presentations, one of the additional prompts that will be provided, or any other topic approved by me.

Prior to turning your paper, you will be required to submit an abstract (or outline) and a rough draft. These assignments are intended to ensure that you are developing their papers in a timely, step-by-step process that will produce a good final draft. The abstracts will presented in working groups and the rough drafts will be reviewed and commented by peers.

Grade breakdown

Participation: 20%

Reading responses: 20%

Short assignments: 2 x 10%

Group presentations: 10%

Final paper abstract and rough draft: 5%

Final paper: 25%

Grading rubrics for the short assignments and the final papers will be provided on Canvas.

Special Note on Academic Integrity

As a student at IU, you are expected to adhere to the standards and policies detailed in the Code of Student Rights, Responsibilities, and Conduct: <http://www.iu.edu/~code/>

For the varieties of academic misconduct, see: http://prezi.com/s_-vvodf3avu/academic-misconduct-iu-college-of-arts-and-sciences/

When you submit a homework assignment or a paper with your name on it in this course, you are signifying that the work contained therein is all yours, unless otherwise cited or referenced. Any ideas or materials taken from another source for either written or oral use must be fully acknowledged. If you are unsure about the expectations for completing an assignment or taking a test or exam, be sure to seek clarification beforehand. All suspected violations of the Code will be handled according to University policies. Sanctions for academic misconduct in this course will include a failing grade in the course, along with a report to the Dean of Students.

Schedule of Classes

Readings are to have been read by the day under which they are listed.

Week	Date	Reading / Activity
Week 1	10/18	Introductory class: Overview of course; Introduction to critical thinking and political philosophy
	10/20	The state of nature Thomas Hobbes – Leviathan (S:285-95, T:312-26, except ch. 12); John Locke – second treatise ch. 1-5 (S:315-24, T:365-74), Jean-Jacques Rousseau – Origins of inequality part 1 (S:355-62, T:422-28)
Week 2	10/25	The origins of society and political obligation Thomas Hobbes – Leviathan (S:299-310, T:330-43); John Locke – second treatise ch 7-11 (S:324-62, T:374-82); Jean-Jacques Rousseau – Origins of inequality part 2 (S:362-70, T:428-436)
	10/27	Political obligation - Social contract theories Jean-Jacques Rousseau – The social contract (S:370-98, T:437-463); Declaration of Independence of the United States (S:801, T:1091); France’s Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen (S:817, T:1106)
Week 3	11/1	Individual Liberty Mill – On Liberty, ch I,IV,V (S:633-7,659-67, T: 747-54,785-807)
	11/3	Class and Freedom Karl Marx - Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts; The German Ideology; Manifesto of the Communist Party (S:569-595, T:701-727) First short paper due (11/5)
Week 4	11/8	Gender and social contract Mary Wollstonecraft - Dedicatory Letter from A Vindication of the Rights of Women [C]; Carole Pateman – The Sexual Contract Introduction and Chapter 1 [C]
	11/10	Race and social contract Frederick Douglass - What to the American Negro is the meaning of July 4th [C]; Charles W. Mills - The Racial Contract, Introduction and Overview [C];
Week 5	11/15	Liberal Justice vs. Communitarianism John Rawls – A Theory of Justice (S:694-709, T:917-931) Michael Sandel - The Procedural Republic and the Unencumbered Self [C];
	11/17	Libertarianism vs. Egalitarianism

		Robert Nozick - Anarchy, State, and Utopia (S:713-25, T:957-969); G.A. Cohen "Why Not Socialism?" [C] Second short paper due (11/22)
20-27/11 Thanksgiving break		
Week 6	11/29	Contemporary debates: Affirmative action Albert Mosley - A Defense of Affirmative Action [C]; Celia Wolf-Devine - Preferential Policies Have Become Toxic [C]; Iris M. Young – Five Faces of Oppression (T:1058-1070) [C]
	12/1	Contemporary debates: Immigration David Miller - Immigration: The Case for Limits; Chandran Kukathas - The Case for Open Immigration; [C] Video: Michael Sandel – Should borders matter http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p03njc35
Week 7	12/6	Group debates: Reparations, Basic Income, Wealth inheritance, Healthcare, Multiculturalism Ta-Nehisi Coates - The Case for Reparations [C]; Philippe Van Parijs – Basic Income for All [C]; Silpa Kovvali - The Earth Belongs to the Living [C]; Breaking the Cycle of Prescription Drug Costs [C]; Barbara Ehrenreich – Nickel and dimed ch. 1 [C]; Susan Moller Okin - Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women? [C]
	12/8	Group debates cont. Course conclusion and peer editing session
Week 8		Final paper due 12/11

Sample Assignments – Intro to Social and Political Philosophy

Short papers (750 words):

1. Compare Hobbes' and Locke's accounts of the state of nature. Which account you find more convincing and why?
2. Compare Hobbes' and Locke's accounts of government by social contract. What is Locke's criticism of Hobbes, and how could Hobbes respond? Which account do you find more convincing and why?
3. Rousseau claims that 'whoever refuses to obey the general will shall be constrained to do so by the whole body; which means nothing else than that he shall be forced to be free'. (p. 441 Book I ch. VII). Explain the reasoning behind this statement and its relation to the justification of political obligation. Do you agree with it and why?
5. 'the rich man, thus pressed by necessity, at last conceived the deepest project that ever entered the human mind' (origin of inequality T:435, S:368). What is the project and how is it related to inequality? Do you find Rousseau account plausible and why?
6. According to his arguments in 'On Liberty', would J.S Mill support the right to keep and bear guns for personal use, or would he support stricter gun control regulations? Do you think his argument would be convincing?
7. J.S & Harriet Taylor Mill present several arguments against the discrimination of women in 'On the Subjection of Women'. Pick ONE of them and answer: is it a utilitarian argument? Think of a possible objection to this argument. Is it a good argument?
8. How would Karl Marx criticize Locke's argument for property rights (ch. 5 of the second treatise). You can refer to any of Marx's pieces we discussed in class. Is this a convincing criticism?
9. In what sense is Charles Mills 'Racial Contract' a criticism of Locke's account of social contract? Is this a convincing criticism?
10. Explain Rawls' argument in favor of the Difference Principle . Do you think the argument is successful, why or why not?
11. Explain Sandel's criticism of Rawls' procedure for formulating principles of justice. Do you think the argument is successful, why or why not?

Group debates

On the final two meetings (12/6 and 12/8) we will have group presentations/debates.

There are 5 debate topics, one group will argue for it and one will argue against it.

Please enroll yourself in one of the groups (max 4 students).

In class the presentations will given in this format:

6-8 minutes: position presentation of each group

3 minute break for discussion

3 minute response for each group

2 minute rejoinder or restatement of the main argument for each group

The rest of the class will fill assessment sheets while listening for the debate

Some resources for each topic are listed below, but you are encouraged to do more research and learn more about each topic.

1. Reparations for slavery
2. Universal basic income: should the developed countries guarantee basic income for all citizens?
3. Religious exemptions: should institutions be exempt from general laws if they conflict with their religious beliefs?

4. Universal healthcare: is there a right to healthcare, should the state provide it to all citizens?

5. Wealth inheritance: do people deserve the wealth they inherit? Is it justified for the government to take some or all of it?

Remember that you are not only supposed to argue for the (non) feasibility of the suggested policy, but also why it is just or unjust. For doing that you have to refer to theories we already discussed.

You may choose one of these topics for the final paper, and therefore preparing well for the debates and listening to others will give you a good basis for working on the final paper.

Final Paper

Choose one of the following topics:

1. One of the topics discussed in the debate groups
2. Should buying of sex be illegal (criminalize clients of prostitutes)?
3. Should the US accept more refugees from Syria?
4. Should the 'war on drugs' be ended?
5. Should the government monitor electronic communications of its citizens?
6. Any other topic approved by me

Write an 1700-2000 words paper (4-5 pages double spaced) following these guidelines:

1. Using a reputable media outlets (NY Times, Washington Post, NPR, WSJ, etc.) inform yourself on the empirical facts and common positions expressed in the media (you should reference those sources in your paper).
2. By referring to two theories learned in the course, present the best argument why the policy in question is just and the best argument why it is unjust.
3. Explain which of the two arguments you find to be more convincing.