

MAIN THEMES AND METHODS IN POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

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Tutorials: Wednesday (18-19.30) or by email.

DESCRIPTION

This is an introductory course in political philosophy that focuses on some of its central questions: what is freedom? How has it evolved historically? What is equality, and is it compatible with market freedom? What is the basis of political obligation, and can violent civil disobedience ever be legitimate? Is democracy compatible with nationalism? Should religious people enjoy special state protection and exemptions from general laws? What is the relation between war and ethics? What are the principles of environmental justice? What are the obligations towards foreigners, and can they prevail over the obligations towards our kin and fellow citizens? How does the technological revolution transform law and democratic politics?

We shall look into these questions by considering various methods of building arguments in political philosophy, from phenomenology, hermeneutics, and Critical Theory to the Cambridge School and the rational reconstruction. In doing so, we are going to read both ancient and contemporary texts, with a focus on the latter.

The classes will combine the tutor's lecture followed by 10-minute student presentations opening up the discussion of compulsory texts.

GRADING SYSTEM AND REQUIREMENTS

- 1) 30% class participation
- 2) 30% three position papers (800-900 words)
- 3) 40% final essay (2000-2500 words).

Classes are compulsory. The general rule of the MA is that missing more than two classes without an adequate justification entails failing the course.

I. Introduction: What is political philosophy?

The introductory class deals with the definition of political philosophy and its main functions, as well as with its relation to arts and (social) science. The session will also map different methods of building arguments in political theory.

Compulsory readings

Miller, D. from *Introduction to Political Philosophy*

Aristotle, from *Politics*

Optional

Rawls, J. from *Political Liberalism*

Skinner, Q. from *Visions of Politics*, vol. III

Debate between Foucault and Chomsky

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c2sYYBQk-mE>

II. Freedom between rational autonomy and self-creation

This session focuses on changes of the conceptions of freedom from Antiquity to Modern Times, as well with the classic but controversial distinction between negative

and positive freedom. We shall also debate the methodological and substantial differences between Kant's and Nietzsche's influential views of freedom.¹

Compulsory readings

Kant, I., from *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*

Nietzsche, from *The Genealogy of Morals*

Nietzsche, from *Beyond Good and Evil*

Optional

Mill, J. S., from *On liberty*; Mill, *Utilitarianism*

Arendt, H., "What is freedom?", in *Between Past and Future*

Berlin, I. "Two concepts of freedom"

Skinner, Q., from *Liberty before Liberalism*

Nietzsche. Human, all too human, 1999, BBC documentary (those who have never read Nietzsche are advised to see first the documentary, and then do the readings).

III. Political obligation, State authority, and Civil Disobedience

This session focuses on the bases of political obligations towards the state, as well as with their limits. We will ask the question whether violent civil disobedience against the state can be ever legitimate.

Compulsory readings:

Plato, *Crito*

Rawls, John, "Definition and justification of civil disobedience", in Bedau, H.A. (ed), *Civil Disobedience in focus*

Optional

Plato, *The Apology of Socrates*

Sophocles, *Antigone*

Gandhi, from *Autography*

Sartre, "Preface" to Fanon, F., *Les damnés de la terre*

Derrida, J., The "Mystical" Foundation of Authority

Dostoyevsky, F. "The Great Inquisitor", ch. 5 from *Brothers Karamazov*

IV. Democratic equality and market freedom: compatibility or contradiction?

We shall deal with the questions of what is equality, and whether is it possible to square it with capitalist freedom. We will discuss the libertarian and the socialist critiques of Rawls' difference principle and egalitarian liberalism.

Compulsory Readings

Rawls, J. from *A Theory of Justice*

Nozick, R. from *Anarchy, State and Utopia*

Cohen, G. from *Why Not Socialism?*

Optional

Sandel, M. from *Why Money can't buy. The moral limits of markets*

Harvey, D., "Reading Marx's *Capital* with David Harvey" (a series of lectures available online, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gBazR59SZXk> by an influential left-wing theorist).

Friedman, M., *Capitalism and Freedom*

¹ Other first trimester courses will deal in more detail with Mill's and Berlin's views of freedom.

V. Community, democratic state, and minority rights.

First, we map the relation between community and democratic politics by focusing on its historical and contemporary dimensions. Then, we center on two types of community allegiances (national and religious) that profoundly shape current political life. We deal with the questions such as: are democracy and nationalism compatible? What's the place of religion in public life? Should religious people be granted exceptions from general laws?

Compulsory readings

Renan, "What is a nation?"

Habermas, J. "Religion in the Public Sphere"

Dworkin, J., from *Religion without God*

Optional

Rawls, "The Idea of Public Reason Revisited", from Rawls, *Political Liberalism*

Derrida, "Faith and Knowledge: The Two Sources of 'Religion' at the Limits of Mere Reason"

Rorty "Religion as a conversation-stopper"

Smith, A., *Nationalism and modernism*

VI. Radical evil, transitional justice, and forgiveness

In this class we deal with the different models of balancing or choosing between law, justice and forgiveness (e.g. South Africa, Argentina, etc.) in passing from a dictatorial regime to a democracy, or in dealing with a criminal past.

Compulsory materials

Arendt, H. "Epilogue" to *Eichmann in Jerusalem. A study of the banality of evil*

Arendt, H., from *The Human Condition*

von Trotta, M. *Hannah Arendt* (2012)

Optional

Primo L., *The Last Man*

Coetzee, J.M. *Disgrace*, 1999 (and the film *Disgrace*, dir. Jacobs, S.)

Derrida, J. "Forgiveness"

VII. Gender equality or cultural recognition?

What are equality and difference feminism? Are feminism and multiculturalism in tension or contradiction? Is it possible to square gender equality and the recognition of difference? How far should go the state in pursuing gender equality?

Compulsory readings

Okin, Susan Moller, "Is multiculturalism bad for women?" from Cohen, J., Howard, M., y Nussbaum, M., (eds.) (with Kymlicka's, Parekh's and Sunstein's replies)

Optional

Leyla Sahin vs Turkey (2004; available online).

Phillips, A., *Multiculturalism without culture*

VIII. War, Emergency Situations and Human Rights

What are the main elements of the just war theory? What is the doctrine of double effect? What is the relation between the political, war and emergency in Schmitt's view? What is Schmitt critique of the liberal view based on universal human rights and rule of law?

In this class we shall also deal with the debate surrounding the Danzig airstrike in WWII, and Walzer's defense of an emergency ethics; and the ethical-legal problems posed by the increasing use of military drones.

Compulsory readings

Schmitt, C., from *The Concept of the Political*

Walzer, M., "Emergency ethics", from *Arguing about War*

Optional

Walzer, M., *Arguing about War*

Coppola, F. F., *Apocalypse Now*

IX. Technology, post-humanism, and the transformation of politics

The growing impact of technology on political life has generated theoretical problems and practical conflicts by blurring the border between private and public, natural and artificial, human and non-human: consider cloning, surrogate motherhood, genetic engineering, robots, etc.. First, we shall deal with some of the philosophical issues concerning technology by focusing on Heidegger's view and its limits. Then we shall focus on the controversy surrounding genetic engineering.

Compulsory readings

Heidegger, M. from "Letter on Humanism" and "The Question of Technology"

Sandel, M., from *Against perfectionism* and

Buchanan, A., from *Beyond Humanity*

Optional

BBC Heidegger Documentary, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r8YTD51IGFg> (It's not a brilliant documentary, but some parts of it can be useful).

X. Justice beyond frontiers?

This class will deal to two fundamental aspects of justice at the global level.

First, what are our duties towards the foreigners? Second, what are the main principles governing environmental justice?

Compulsory readings

The Bible, Luke 10:25-10-37

Waldron, Jeremy, "On the road: Good Samaritans and Compelling Duties" (available online)

Singer, P., "Climate Change" chapter in *Practical Ethics*

Optional

Rawls, J. from *The Law of Peoples*, 1999

Pogge, Th. from *World Poverty and Human Rights: Cosmopolitan Responsibilities and Reforms*

Secondary bibliography

Bevir, M. (ed) *Encyclopedia of Political Theory*, Sage, 2012.

Boucher, D. and Kelly, P. (eds), *Political Thinkers: From Socrates to the Present*, Oxford University Press, 2008.

Hampsher-Monk, I., *History of Modern Political Thought*, Blackwell, 1996.

Kymlicka, W., *Contemporary Political Philosophy*, 2nd edition, OUP, 2001

Sandel, M. <http://www.justiceharvard.org/>

Ungureanu, C. & al. (eds.), *J. Habermas. From the nation-state to the post-national constellation* (2 vols), Ashgate, 2011.