

Political Philosophy—Proposal for Advanced Undergraduate Course

Course Description: Aristotle famously said that humans are “political animals.” He meant that human beings are by nature social—that we must live in society. Social living brings many problems of conflict and cooperation. In this advanced course in philosophy, we will examine the fundamental moral concepts that underlie our thinking about political conflict resolution and mutually beneficial cooperation. We will study the nature of justice, equality, authority, and human rights, to name just a few core topics. Our approach will be methodologically diverse, emphasizing the different ways of approaching political questions philosophically.

Part I: Political Community

Are humans fundamentally prone to conflict? How much cooperation can we reasonably expect from one another? What ideals should regulate our social lives? We begin with these questions, considering competing conceptions of political community.

Readings: Aristotle, *Politics*, I, 1–6
 Hobbes, *Leviathan*, chapters 10–11, 13–21
 Cohen, *Why Not Socialism?*

Part II: The State

Who should enforce social norms? Which norms, exactly, should we enforce? How do the limits of enforcement relate to rights, like the right to free speech? To answer these questions, we need an account of the state and its authority.

Readings: Locke, *Second Treatise on Government*, chapters 1–5, 7–11
 Simmons, “Tacit Consent and Political Obligation”
 Mill, *On Liberty*, chapters 1–2

Part III: Distributive Justice

Social cooperation produces many benefits, and it comes with responsibilities. What benefits are we entitled to and what responsibilities do we have? This is the question of distributive justice.

Readings: Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, chapters 1–3
 Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, chapter 7

Part IV: Democracy

The state and distributive justice are quite abstract. What kinds of institutions should we have to realize social justice and a legitimate state? Do institutional questions have any bearing on the content of social justice or legitimacy?

Readings: Schmitt, *The Crisis of Parliamentary Democracy*, Preface to the second edition; chapter 2
Cohen, "Democracy and Democratic Legitimacy"
Estlund, *Democratic Authority*, chapters 1, 3, 6

Part V: Feminism

Do the abstract questions regarding the state and distributive justice overlook the particular problems that face women in society? If so, what language best articulates these problems and how we can resolve them?

Readings: Young, "The Five Faces of Oppression"
MacKinnon, "Francis Biddle's Sister"
Okin, "Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women?"

Part VI: Radical Critique

Are the ideals of liberty, equality, and justice insufficient in analyzing the problems with advanced liberal, democratic, capitalist societies? We will investigate the concepts of exploitation, alienation, and the broader notion of a critique of culture.

Readings: Marx, *The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, "Alienated Labour"
Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 1, chapters 1, 26
Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, "The Culture Industry"

Part VII: The Global Perspective

Political societies do not exist in a vacuum. There are many political societies, whose members exclude and sometimes invade or colonize one another. We conclude with a consideration of the rights and ideals that go beyond any one society.

Readings: Tasioulas, "On the Nature of Human Rights"
Moyn, *The Last Utopia*, chapters 1–2, 4
Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, "Concerning Violence"

Assignments

There will be six assignments for this class: two oral exams, three reading responses, and one short paper. The two oral exams will each make up 15% of your grade (total: 30%).

The three reading responses will make up 10% of your grade (total: 30%). The short paper will make up 25% of your grade. Participation will make up the remaining 15% of your final grade.

First oral exam on **Part I**.

First reading response on **Part II**. [two pages]

Second oral exam on **Part III**.

Second reading response on **Part IV**. [two pages]

Paper on **Part V**. [five pages]

Third reading response on **either Part VI or Part VII**. [two pages]