

POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

PROFESSOR: Dr. Blake Hereth (“Dr. H”)

PRONOUNS: they/them

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OFFICE: Great Hall 101

CLASS MEETINGS: MWF 12-1pm in Classroom Hall 202

STUDENT HOURS: TTh 10am-12pm and by appointment

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

Political philosophy is about how we should live *together*. Civil life has a fundamentally collective nature: It concerns not just individuals, but groups of people, and the rules they decide to live by. Our course will explore five major topics. First, we will question the legitimacy of the state: What, if anything, gives the state its rightful power? Second, we will examine Plato’s question of who should rule: Should it be philosophers or politicians, stakeholders or shareholders? Third, we shall explore the critical importance of liberty in society: What freedoms should citizens have, and what limits are there to those freedoms? Fourth, how should property be distributed? Should it be distributed, as libertarians claim, exclusively according to labor? Or do broader considerations of justice, such as concern for the worst-off, play a role in fair distribution? Finally, we will examine whether states have *global* responsibilities to the distant poor.

COURSE GOALS:

By the end of the course, students should be able to:

- Identify and explain major views in political philosophy and their proponents
- Speak and write intelligently about major issues in political philosophy, their history, and their contemporary importance
- Ask critical questions each week that closely engage the assigned readings
- Work with their groups to design a new and original constitution
- Develop original, philosophically creative arguments about political philosophy

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

- **Critical Reading Questions (20%):** All students should prepare a critical question for each reading/video/podcast. Each class, I will call upon several random students to share their critical questions for that day’s reading with the rest of the class. Each critical question should be substantive and reflect strong familiarity with the reading and will serve as a starting point for class discussions. If you are called on and *don’t* have a substantive critical reading question, you won’t receive credit for that day. If you are called on and *do* have a substantive critical reading question, you will receive full credit for that day. If you *aren’t* called on, you must submit your question by the end of that day via Blackboard.

- **Constitutional Convention Group Project (20%)**: The U.S. Constitution was developed two-and-a-half centuries ago. In terms of membership (our country is much more diverse than it was in 1788), culture (our melting pot has been melting for a while now), and technology (AR-15s are not Colonial muskets), the needs of The People have changed radically since the Constitution was first improved. Armed with knowledge of major theories and issues in political philosophy, students will be divided into groups and required to write a *new* constitution governing the people of the United States. In addition to breadth and depth, each group's constitution must answer (with justification) the five main questions of the course: (1) What, if anything, gives the state its rightful power? (2) Who should rule? (3) Which liberties should citizens or residents have, and what restrictions apply to those liberties? (4) How should property and other goods be distributed? (5) Should states have a cosmopolitan outlook towards other countries? The polished constitution is due Wednesday, May 5th, at 5pm via Blackboard.
- **Humility Journal (15%)**: Cultivating epistemic humility is important, especially in college (and *especially* especially in philosophy). Each week, students will write in class about something they learned about political philosophy that was epistemically humbling for them. That doesn't necessarily mean 'embarrassed'. Rather, it means that the student has made an *important realization* that has changed their way of thinking about political principles, including (possibly) about their own. Your final entry should reflect on the trajectory of your humility progress throughout the course. The entire journal portfolio is due Monday, May 3rd, at 5pm via Blackboard.
- **Draft Paper (15%)**: Each student should write a 3,000-word draft paper (exclusive of notes and bibliography) where they make an original, creative argument on a relevant course topic. (See the Blackboard rubric for further details.) The Draft Paper is due Monday, November 2, 2020, at 5pm on Blackboard.
- **Final Paper (30%)**: Each student should write a 4,000-word paper (exclusive of notes and bibliography) in which they revise their Draft Paper in light of my feedback. The idea is to polish, and add to, the Draft Paper. The Final Paper is due Tuesday, December 15, 2020, at 5pm on Blackboard.

GRADING SCALE:

I use a standard grading scale for this course:

- A = 90-100%
- B = 80-89.99%
- C = 70-79.99%
- D = 60-69.99%
- F = 59.99 or below

TEXTBOOK(S):

- Jonathan Wolff, *An Introduction to Political Philosophy*, Third Edition (Oxford University Press, 2015)
- Bob Fischer (ed.), *Ethics, Left and Right: The Moral Issues that Divide Us* (Oxford University Press, 2019)

SCHEDULE:

WEEK 1 (JAN 11, 13, 15): COURSE INTRODUCTION

Readings:

- Syllabus
- Wolff, Chapter 1
- Plato, *Crito*, selections (Blackboard)

WEEK 2 (JAN 18, 20, 22): JUSTIFYING THE STATE

Readings:

- Wolff, Chapter 2
- Michael Huemer, “The Problem of Political Authority” (Blackboard)

WEEK 3 (JAN 25, 27, 29): JUSTIFYING THE STATE

Readings:

- Katie Stockdale, “Hope, Solidarity, and Justice” (Blackboard)
- Avery Kolers, “Justice and the Politics of Deference” (Blackboard)

WEEK 4 (FEB 1, 3, 5): JUSTIFYING THE STATE

Readings:

- Dorothea Gaedeke, “The Domination of States” (Blackboard)
- Judith Schrempf-Stirling, “State Power: Rethinking the Role of the State in Political Corporate Social Responsibility” (Blackboard)

WEEK 5 (FEB 8, 10, 12): WHO SHOULD RULE?

Readings:

- Wolff, Chapter 3
- Plato, *Republic*, selections (Blackboard)
- Jason Brennan, “The Rule of the Knowers” (Blackboard)

WEEK 6 (FEB 15, 17, 19): WHO SHOULD RULE?

Readings:

- Michael LaBossiere, “Voting for the Lesser Evil” (*Ethics, Left and Right*)
- Patrick Taylor Smith, “The Ethics of Voting Badly” (*Ethics, Left and Right*)

WEEK 7 (FEB 22, 24, 26): WHO SHOULD RULE?

Readings:

- Charles Mills, *The Racial Contract*, selections (Blackboard)
- Susan Moller Okin, “Philosopher Queens and Private Wives: Plato on Women and the Family” (Blackboard)

WEEK 8 (MAR 1, 3, 5): THE SCOPE OF LIBERTY

Readings:

- Wolff, Chapter 4
- John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*, selections (Blackboard)
- Inigo González-Ricoy and Jahel Queralt, “Political Liberties and Social Equality” (Blackboard)

WEEK 9 (MAR 8, 10, 12): THE SCOPE OF LIBERTY

Readings:

- John Corvino, “Religious Belief, Discrimination, and the Law” (*Ethics, Left and Right*)
- Ryan T. Anderson and Sherif Girgis, “Pluralism, Fairness, and Debates About Discrimination” (*Ethics, Left and Right*)

WEEK 10 (MAR 15, 17, 19): THE SCOPE OF LIBERTY

Readings:

- Tully Borland, “Against Politically Correct Speech” (*Ethics, Left and Right*)
- Megan Hyska, “In Defense of Political Correctness and Against ‘Political Correctness’” (*Ethics, Left and Right*)

WEEK 11 (MAR 22, 24, 26): DISTRIBUTING PROPERTY

Readings:

- Wolff, Chapter 5
- Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, selections (Blackboard)
- John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, selections (Blackboard)

WEEK 12 (MAR 29, 31, APR 2): DISTRIBUTING PROPERTY

Readings:

- A. Miklos, “Public Health and the Rights of States” (Blackboard)
- Sam Fleishacker and Sherry Glied, “In Defense of a Right to Health Care” (*Ethics, Left and Right*)
- Chris Freiman, “Distribute Money, Not Medicine” (*Ethics, Left and Right*)

WEEK 13 (APR 5, 7, 9): DISTRIBUTING PROPERTY

Readings:

- Stephen Kershnar, “Affirmative Action is Unjust, Wrong, and Bad” (*Ethics, Left and Right*)
- Kristina Meshelski, “Affirmative Action” (*Ethics, Left and Right*)

WEEK 14 (APR 12, 14, 16): GLOBAL JUSTICE

Readings:

- Edwin Etieyibo, “Political Reparationists and the Moral Case for Reparations to Africa for Colonialism” (Blackboard)
- Nicole Hassoun, “The Case for Foreign Aid” (*Ethics, Left and Right*)
- Jason Brennan, “International Aid” (*Ethics, Left and Right*)

WEEK 15 (APR 19, 21, 23): GLOBAL JUSTICE

Readings:

- Wolff, Chapter 6
- Peter Jaworski, “Markets Without Labor Limits” (*Ethics, Left and Right*)
- Hrishikesh Joshi, “For (Some) Immigration Restrictions” (*Ethics, Left and Right*)

WEEK 16 (APR 26, 28, 30): GLOBAL JUSTICE

Readings:

- Dan Bonevac, “America First” (*Ethics, Left and Right*)
- Gillian Brock, “Defending the Cosmopolitan Outlook” (*Ethics, Left and Right*)

WEEK 17 (MAY 3, 5, 7): FINALS WEEK!