

Political Philosophy, PHIL-UA-45, Summer Session I 2015

6/15/2015

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Office Hours: Thursday, 1.30pm or by appointment
Class Times: M T W Th 11.30 – 1.05
Location: 3rd floor seminar room, 5 Washington Place

1. Course Description

This course provides an introduction to some of the central problems of political philosophy, many of which are the subject of deep controversies in public life. The first two-thirds of the course will explore questions of political authority, distributive justice, liberty, and equality. For roughly the last third of the course, together we will choose some other topics within political philosophy for investigation and discussion.

2. Evaluation and Assignments

Assessment will be based on:

1. One short (approximately 10 minute) in-class presentation, summarizing and evaluating an assigned paper. (20% of the total grade). This will involve presenting the author's main position and supporting argumentation, evaluating the argument, and leading a short discussion. You should prepare a short (around a page, absolute max 2 pages) handout for your presentation.
2. Two papers, each 8 pages in length, the first due at the end of Week 3 and the second due at the end of Week 6. (70% of the total grade, i.e. 35% per paper). I will give you a list of potential topics in due course; if you prefer, you can choose your own (on the condition that you consult with me first).
3. Class participation. (10% of the total grade).

I'll be available to talk with you about your presentations/papers in advance, and I strongly encourage you to take me up on this. Late papers will be marked down a full letter-grade immediately, and an additional letter-grade for every further 24 hour delay.

As should go without saying, plagiarism is strictly forbidden. Anyone who is found to have committed plagiarism will receive an F grade in the course and the matter will be referred to the relevant authorities for further disciplinary action. A more detailed description of the College of Arts and Science's policies concerning cheating and plagiarism can be found at <http://cas.nyu.edu/page/academicintegrity>.

3. Class Requirements

Attendance

You should attend all of the classes; failure to do so without a valid excuse will negatively affect your attendance and participation grade. If you can't attend a class session for whatever reason, please let me know (in advance if possible).

Classes, Reading, and Class Participation

As far as I'm concerned, the classes have two goals: (1) to supply relevant background information for the readings and to place them in a larger philosophical context; and (2) to teach you the skill of identifying, analyzing, and assessing the central claims and arguments in philosophical texts. The best way of learning this skill is through practice, so the classes will be substantially devoted to discussion. This makes it even more critical than usual that you actually do the reading: if not, informed discussion will be impossible. The material we'll be looking at will often be difficult and demanding (don't worry if there are parts you don't understand the first time around!) and you should read each paper at least twice. You may find it helpful to read Jim Pryor's guides on how to read and write philosophy papers, which I'll put up on NYU Classes.

4. Schedule of Topics and Readings

I'll put PDFs of all the readings below on NYU Classes at least a week in advance (except the first week might be a bit delayed). There is no required text.

Week 1. Intro, and Political Authority

- Monday – No class (Memorial Day)
- Tuesday – Huemer, “The Problem of Political Authority” (Chs 1-3)
- Wednesday – Simmons, “The Principle of Fair Play”
- Thursday – Klosko, “Presumptive Benefit, Fairness, and Political Obligation”

Week 2. Political Authority continued, and Distributive Justice

- Monday – Kolodny, “Rule over None: Part II”
- Tuesday – Rawls, “A Theory of Justice” (§1-12)
- Wednesday – Rawls, “A Theory of Justice” (§20 – 30)
- Thursday – Nozick, “Anarchy, State, and Utopia” (Chs 7-8)

Week 3. Distributive Justice continued, and Liberty

- Monday – Scheffler, “Desert and Justice in Liberal Theory”
- Tuesday – Miller “Two Cheers for Meritocracy”
- Wednesday – Berlin, “Two Concepts of Liberty”
- Thursday – MacCullum, “Negative and Positive Freedom”

Week 4. Liberty continued, and Equality

- Monday – Cohen, “Freedom and Money” and Wenar, “Meanings of Freedom”
- Tuesday – Cohen, “On the Currency of Egalitarian Justice”
- Wednesday – Frankfurt, “Equality as a Moral Ideal”
- Thursday – Parfit, “Equality or Priority?”

Week 5. Equality continued, and Assorted Topics (global justice, just war, and the role of religion in public life)

- Monday – Anderson, “What is the Point of Equality?”
- Tuesday – Nagel, “The Problem of Global Justice”
- Wednesday – McMahan, “Unjust War”
- Thursday – Vallier, “Liberalism, Religion and Integrity”

Week 6. Assorted Topics continued (paternalism, freedom of speech and expression, the justice of punishment, and civil disobedience)

- Monday – Dworkin, “Paternalism” and “Moral Paternalism”
- Tuesday – Feinberg, “Limits to the Freedom of Expression”
- Wednesday – Boonin, “The Problem of Punishment” (Chs 1, 3)
- Thursday – Simmons, “Disobedience and its Objects”