

Social & Political Philosophy

PHIL 308, Fall 2014

M/W 2:00 – 3:15

Humanities 114

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<https://blackboard.louisville.edu>

Purpose of the course:

Political institutions are the most important institutions in any society, because they not only stand as institutions in their own right, but define the nature and boundaries of every other institution—the family, the church, medicine, even the beginning and end of human life. Politics therefore constitutes not only government but every other institution as well.

Most of us have strong opinions about at least some aspects of politics. Indeed, most of us have strong *mutually contradictory* opinions about politics. Yet partly because politics so thoroughly pervades our lives, it is hard to know how political questions should be asked, or in some cases, even whether they can be asked.

This course is an introduction to some of the ways that philosophers have articulated some of the main political questions, and what answers they have found. Yet the aim of the course is not (or not *merely*) to provide you with an overview of what others have thought, but **to help you develop the tools with which to pose and even answer these and other questions on your own. It is not expected that you have these tools already.**

Subject of the course:

Fundamentally, politics exists whenever people behave in contingent ways that significantly affect others. In some sense, then, politics is limited only by *nature* and/or *necessity*; but “nature” and “necessity” are themselves intensely political and hotly contested concepts. Most institutions, present and past, have at one time or another been described as natural or inevitable, or in accordance with “human nature.” This is a part of the attempt to legitimate them. Such claims may be true, but if we are to accept this it must be the conclusion of a good argument—not a premise from which argument is to proceed.

Social & Political Philosophy is about politics and society, but not every question about politics or society is a philosophical question. To do philosophy is to ask fundamental *conceptual* and *normative* questions about political values and institutions: for instance, “what does it mean to say that all persons are created equal, and why should we believe it?” In general, though, we leave *empirical* questions—for example, “Do presidential or parliamentary systems tend to do a better job of achieving equality among citizens?”—to social scientists. Note, however, that the empirical question implicitly presupposes that we have answered underlying normative and conceptual questions about the nature and value of equality, the meaning of citizenship, etc.

Political Philosophy has historically focused on a number of distinctive basic questions. **Human nature** is one of them, specifically the political implications of human nature. Does our sociality, or our rationality, or our self-interest, or our sexual nature, or some other putative “natural” feature of us, require that we organize our societies and polities in any particular way? Other questions include those of **self and other**, or **diversity**. How can we understand others whose societies and institutions are

utterly unlike ours? Can we communicate with them? Can we share a society (or a world) with them? Must we want them to be more like us, or vice versa? Further, political philosophers have worried about what can justify **obedience to authority**. If there is to be constituted authority that promulgates laws, how is obedience to law compatible with human freedom? Perhaps obedience is justified because it is the only way to bring about the **ideal society**. But what's that? This is a further basic question of political philosophy. The question of the ideal – or **justice** – raises issues of production and distribution of the product of social cooperation; that is, most familiarly, **economic justice**. But there are other kinds of justice, including the relationships between genders, and these are under the scope of political philosophy as well.

Our approach to these questions will be both **historical** and **question-driven**. That is, we want answers to hard questions, but we also want to know how some of the greatest minds of the western tradition have approached them and answered them. We don't presuppose that their answers are right, but we approach their works knowing that careful study will be repaid with insight.

Requirements

Short writing assignments:	40%
Critical Dialogues:	30%
Take-home final exam:	20%
Participation:	<u>10%</u>
Total:	100%

Short writing assignments: Five times in the semester you must submit a short essay (2-3 pages double-spaced) due on the day indicated in the schedule below. Questions will be distributed separately.

Critical Dialogues: These are opportunities to go out of class and discuss issues in political philosophy. The best way to do this is to use a recording device (e.g. your phone) to create MP3s and upload the sound file to Blackboard. But you can also make a transcript and submit that. They should be about 5 minutes. In a successful dialogue you ask philosophical questions and keep the discussion focused on the philosophical issue. You don't descend into sloganeering, nor do you let your interlocutor do that. You challenge apparent certainties. Basically you play the role of Socrates. Easy. The questions are in the schedule below.

Take-home final exam: The exam will be an essay. It will give you a chance to display both your command of the material we have read, and your skills in philosophical reasoning and writing.

Participation: Valuable participation includes being in class and contributing to discussions. It entails both talking and listening; you should not dominate discussion, but you should also be more than an "active listener". If you are extremely shy or for some other reason unable to speak in class, you may maintain your participation grade by visiting my office hours to discuss the material. **Note**: if it appears to me that no one is reading or that attendance is low, I reserve the right to assign pop quizzes or writing assignments that will be reflected in your participation grade. **Electronic Devices**: A growing body of evidence shows that using a laptop in class distracts the user and her/his peers. Moreover, even if you're not distracted, there is evidence that people who take notes on laptops learn less than those who use pen and paper. So I strongly recommend that you **not use laptops in class**. If you must use a laptop, please talk to me about it. Phones should be off or in airplane mode. If you are expecting an urgent call – say, someone is going into the hospital – please tell me in advance, set your phone to 'silent', and sit near the door so you can take the call outside.

Evaluation

The following scale represents the *guaranteed minimum* grade corresponding to each raw score. If the class average is below a C+ or so, I will bump up letter grades to attain a C+ average.

89.5-92:	A-	92.1-97.4:	A	97.5-100:	A+
79.5-82:	B-	82.1-87.4:	B	87.5-89.4:	B+
69.5-72:	C-	72.1-77.4:	C	77.5-79.4:	C+
59.5-67.4:	D	67.5-69.4:	D+	0-59.4:	F

Academic Integrity

Cheating and plagiarism are immoral because a) they are *dishonest* (to me and others), in that the cheater/plagiarist present as her/his own something that is not; b) they are *unfair* (to classmates), who work hard to meet requirements that the cheater/plagiarist circumvents; c) they violate *academic obligations* (to the university) that students voluntarily accept upon enrollment; and d) they may violate *self-regarding duties* of *self-development* or *self-perfection* (if such duties exist).

They can also get one in serious trouble. According to the University of Louisville's *Code of Student Conduct*, Section 5, "Academic dishonesty is prohibited at the University of Louisville. It is a serious offense because it diminishes the quality of scholarship, makes accurate evaluation of student progress impossible, and defrauds those in society who must ultimately depend upon the knowledge and integrity of the institution and its students and faculty." It is your responsibility to know this code and comply with its requirements. If I discover violations of this policy I will pursue the required disciplinary channels, which normally involve communicating with the dean for undergraduate affairs. If you have any questions about how to comply with this policy, ask me *in advance*.

Handing in assignments

In-class assignments are due at the time marked on them. Take-home assignments are due at the beginning of class on the day indicated in the syllabus below. Late assignments will be penalized 1/3 of a letter grade per school day, beginning at 9:45 a.m. on the due date, up to a maximum of 2 grades (6 days), whereupon they will irrevocably be treated as missed and receive a grade of 0. Assignments that are to be uploaded to Blackboard **must** be there by the beginning of class. We may use them in class.

If for any reason you are unable to hand in an assignment at the appointed time you must communicate with me **in advance**. In general the only exception to this is an unforeseeable emergency such as an untimely death in the family, in which case you must let me know as soon as possible and I reserve the right to demand verification. For foreseeable or predictable absences such as excused religious holidays, births in the family, etc., it is expected that you will complete relevant work **before** the due date, not after.

All assignments must be typed. They should be in normal 12-point font with default margins (usually 1" or 1.25"). I can recognize padding pretty easily, so please do not try. You may submit assignments in hard copy or electronically. Electronic submissions should be in the form of email attachments. You must use MS Word format (.doc, **not** .docx) or Rich Text Format (.rtf). My computer cannot reliably read any other format, and if I cannot open or read a document it will count as not received. **Always cc yourself** on emailed assignments so you can be sure it went through and that the assignment was attached.

Disabilities

The University of Louisville is committed to providing access to programs and services for qualified students with disabilities. If you are a student with a disability and require accommodation to participate and complete requirements for this class, notify me immediately and contact the Disability Resource Center (Robbins Hall, 852-6938) for verification of eligibility and determination of specific accommodations.

Texts: Aristotle, *Politics* (Oxford University Press, 1995)

John Stuart Mill, *Basic Writings*, ed. J.B. Schneewind (Random House, 2002).

Ann Cudd and Nancy Holmstrom, *Capitalism: For and Against: A Feminist Debate* (Cambridge University Press, 2011).

Dale Turner, *This is not a Peace Pipe* (University of Toronto Press, 2006).

Occasional readings available electronically on Blackboard (BB) Course Documents

Schedule

Introduction

Week 1 (8/25-7): Introduction

Activity: Workshop on Writing philosophy, Part I

Reading: Aristotle, Introduction, pp. vii-xxvi, and Book I, chaps. 1-2 (pp. 7-12)

Due:

Week 2 (9/1-3): Aristotle on sociality, the household, women, and slaves

Note: No class on Labor Day

Reading: Aristotle Book I (pp. 12-37)

Due: Short writing assignment #1 in class on Wednesday

Week 3 (9/8-10): Leisure, labor, slavery, and the bounds of citizenship

Activity: Workshop on Arguments

Reading: Lewis Hanke, "The Great Debate at Valladolid 1550-51" (BB)

Bartolomé de las Casas, "Black Slaves in the New World" (BB)

Aristotle Book III, chaps. 1-5;

Kymlicka and Donaldson, "Animals and the Frontiers of Citizenship" (BB)

Week 4 (9/15-17): Aristotle on Constitutions

Note: No class on Wednesday (State of the University address)

Wednesday 9/17 is last day to apply for a December degree

If you are graduating in May, do a preliminary degree check!

Reading: Aristotle Book III chaps. 6-18 (pp. 97-132)

Due: Short writing assignment #2 due on Monday

Week 5 (9/22-24): Aristotle on constitutions (continued)

Reading: Aristotle, Book IV, chaps. 1-9 (pp. 133-55)

Due: Critical Dialogue #1 must be uploaded by class time on Monday. Interview someone (friend, family, roommates, whomever) about whether the US Constitution is a good document, and why. What's good about it? Should we change anything in it? What is it? Is it suited to a polity like ours? And so on.

Week 6 (9/29-10/1): Aristotle's Polity

Reading: Aristotle, Book IV, chaps 11-13 and Book VII, chaps. 1-3 (pp. 156-65 & 251-60)

Week 7 (10/6-8): Mill's core argument on liberty

Note: No Class 10/6 (fall break)

Reading: Mill, *On Liberty*, chaps. I and IV

Due: Critical Dialogue #2 uploaded by class time on Monday. What is "liberty"? Do we live in a "free country"? What does that mean? In what sense(s) are we free? Is there something such that, if *that* changed, we would be *unfree*?

Week 8 (10/13-15): Liberty of thought and discussion and religion

Activity: October 14 talk by Donald Livingston, Emory University: "Scale: Is America Too Big?" Chao Auditorium. Chance to replace lowest writing assignment grade.

Reading: Mill, *On Liberty*, chap. II

Bartolomé de Las Casas, "A Defense of Human Sacrifice" (BB)

Due: Short writing assignment #3 due on Wednesday

Week 9 (10/20-22): Liberal Feminism

Note: **October 23** (Thursday) is the last day to withdraw.

Reading: Mill, *The Subjection of Women*, chaps. I-II

Due: Critical Dialogue #3 uploaded by Monday. What is "human nature"? Do men and women have different natures? How do you know? Does their sameness or difference of natures have any implications for political institutions or leadership?

Week 10 (10/27-29): Liberal Feminism: rights and goals

Activity: We will be making an altar for *Día de los muertos* (Day of the Dead) in Ekstrom library. Our altar will be dedicated to Bartolomé de las Casas. On 10/27 we'll meet for the first 20 or 30 minutes of class in the library to build the altar. Please bring candy or sweets, pictures, candles, anything that you think symbolizes him or his work. Chance to replace lowest CD grade.

Reading: Mill, *The Subjection of Women*, chaps. III-IV

Due: Short writing assignment #4 due on Wednesday

Week 11 (11/3-5): The liberal feminist case for capitalism

Note: **Priority registration begins 11/7**. Check your schedule here:

<http://louisville.edu/registrar/registration-information/pspring>. Don't delay!

Reading: Cudd, chaps. 1-3 (pp. 3-97)

Due: Critical Dialogue #4 uploaded by Monday. Is "capitalism" justified? Why or why not? What is "capitalism"? Try to note what justificatory strategy your interlocutor is using – appeal to human nature? Good or bad consequences? Rights? Freedom? Environment? Something else? Do they impute causation to anything? If so, how do they support that imputation? Etc.

Week 12 (11/10-12): Responding to feminist objections to capitalism

Reading: Cudd, chaps. 4-6 (pp. 97-130)

Optional: Holmstrom's reply to Cudd (pp. 289-322)

Due: Critical Dialogue #5 uploaded by Monday. Interview a **woman over 30** about her experiences with paid and unpaid work, including (if she is willing to discuss these)

sexual harassment/assault/intimidation at work, equal pay, the division of household labor and care work, and so on. Make sure to note what kind(s) of employer(s) she has/had (e.g. self-employed, private small business, major corporation, public institution, government, etc.) and what line(s) of work she is/was in.

Week 13 (11/17-19): Immigration and Indigenous Peoples

Activity: Guest speaker Wednesday. Meet in Chao Auditorium, Ekstrom Library. Short written response can replace lowest writing assignment grade.

Reading: **Turner**, Introduction, Appendix, and Chap. 1 (pp. 3-11; 123-42; 12-37)
Additional reading on Blackboard under Course Documents.

Due: Critical Dialogue #6 uploaded by Wednesday. **Choice of topic:** #1. Are the terms under which American Indians relate to the United States just? What are those terms? Where did they come from? Should they be changed, and why? **OR** #2. By what right, if any, does the United States control its borders and decide who can live here? Assuming the US has that right legitimately, what would be a fair and just immigration policy?

Week 14 (11/24-6): Toward a Postcolonial Liberalism?

Note: No Class 11/26 (Thanksgiving)

Reading: Turner, chaps. 2-3 (pp. 38-70)

Due: Short writing assignment #5 due on Monday

Week 14 (12/1-3): Toward a Critical Indigenous Philosophy

Activity: Take-home final exam distributed Wednesday

Reading: Turner, chaps. 4-5 (pp. 71-122)

Week 15 (12/8-10): Conclusions

Take-home final is due by Wednesday, December 10 at 2:30 p.m.

Schedule is subject to change; at no point will you be held responsible for anything that is not on this syllabus or a published update to it made available to you at least one week in advance.