

Political Philosophy
Spring 2005
Phil 351

Objective

In this course we will consider some of the major figures and issues in political philosophy. We will begin by examining the foundations of legitimate state authority and political obligation. In other words, we will ask: why does the government get to order us around and why do we have to obey them (if we do)? Then we will consider the proper scope of state authority, in light of the reality that increased state authority can mean decreased individual liberty. So we will ask: what is it that we should be free to do? Finally, we will consider the problem of distributive justice. One way to conceive of this is as the problem of how to distribute justly society's benefits and burdens. For example, should we let the rich people keep all their money? Or should we make them give some of it away? (Others think theories of justice should be concerned primarily with the relationships of domination and oppression that can exist in society, as opposed to a particular distribution of goods.) We will read from important historical figures such as Locke, Mill, and Marx, as well as influential contemporary theorists such as John Rawls, Robert Nozick, and Martha Nussbaum.

Contact information

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Office hours: Tuesday, 4:50 p.m. – 6:50 p.m., and by appointment.

Course webpage: <http://www.csulb.edu/~jmoriart>. Here you will find the syllabus, notes, paper topics, and study questions.

I may have reason to email you during the semester. Because I have access only to your CSULB email address, you must either occasionally check that address, or set it up so that it forwards messages to the account you normally use. You are responsible for making sure you receive any information I send via email.

Meeting times and places

Tuesday, 7:00 – 10:00 p.m.

LA2 – 101.

Required Text

Political Philosophy: Classical and Contemporary Readings, ed. Louis P. Pojman (McGraw-Hill). Plus one additional reading on e-reserve.

Assignments

1. Two quizzes: 10% each.
2. Reaction paper: 2.5%. 1/2 page.
3. Reading response paper: 2.5%. 1 page.
4. Discussion paper: 15%. 2-3 pages.
5. Critical paper: 30%. 4-5 pages.
6. Final exam: 30%. This exam will be cumulative, but weighted toward material covered after the two quizzes.

Check the schedule of readings for assignment due dates. Assignments that are turned in after the end of class will count as one day late.

I recognize the difficulty of speaking up in class, but it is important to your learning experience. And doing so will be rewarded. Excellent participators will be given up to 3% extra credit toward their final grade.

Papers

The reaction paper is a one-half page reaction to the reading. Pick something about the reading that intrigues you. Make sure you describe the point in enough detail that I know what you are talking about. (Quoting from the text may be useful.) Then comment on it. For example, if you think the author's claim is wrong, say so.

You will pick, or be assigned, a week to prepare and turn the reading response in. Your one-page typewritten response should include a brief summary of the main point of the reading, and should also raise one or two substantive questions about it. In addition to turning this assignment in, you will be required to present—either by reading or summarizing—this work in class.

Paper topics for the longer papers will be posted on this website at least two weeks before the papers are due.

Accommodation policy

It is the student's responsibility to notify me in advance of the need for accommodation of a disability.

Attendance policy

Attendance will not be taken, nor will it count as part of your final grade. Experience has shown, however, that good grades are strongly correlated with regular attendance.

Cheating policy

If you cheat on a test or plagiarize all or even part of a paper, I will give you an 'F' for the course. I am very serious and completely inflexible about this. If you do not know what cheating or plagiarism is, it is your responsibility to inform yourself. See the CSULB course catalog, p. 87, for definitions of these terms.

Late policy/missed exam policy

I recognize all and only the standard excuses for missing an exam and/or turning in a paper late, as provided for in the University's attendance policies. If you are unaware of what these are, it is your responsibility to inform yourself. Check out the CSULB course catalog, p. 75. Documentation for your excuse (e.g., a physician's note) will be required.

If you know you will be absent on the day of an exam, arrange to take it before that day. If you do not, and your absence is excused, you will be allowed to take a make-up exam. If your absence is unexcused, you will not be given a make-up.

For each day a paper is late, it will be marked off 4%. Note, days that class doesn't meet and weekend days are still days. So, if a paper is due on a Friday, and you turn it in on the following Monday, it will be marked off 12%.

Withdrawal policy

The university's withdrawal policy will be followed strictly. I have posted a copy of it here: <http://www.csulb.edu/~jmoriart/withdrawal.html>.

Readings

Below is a *tentative* list of readings. These are subject to change, depending on time and class interest. You are expected to have completed the relevant readings *before* class meets.

1/25: Introduction

Part I: Political Obligation

2/1: Wolff, "In Defense of Anarchism."
Locke, "Second Treatise of Government," selections (TBA).
Reaction paper due.

2/8: Hume, "Of the Original Contract."
Beran, "Political Obligation and Consent."

2/15: Rawls, "Legal Obligation and the Duty of Fair Play."
Feinberg, "The Nature and Value of Rights."

Part II: Rights and Liberty

2/22: Gewirth, "The Epistemology of Human Rights."
Quiz #1.

3/1: Wolgast, "Wrong Rights."
Berlin, "Two Concepts of Liberty."

3/8: Mill, "On Liberty."

3/15: More on Mill.
G. Dworkin, "Paternalism."
First paper due.

3/29: Devlin, "The Enforcement of Morals."
George, "The Central Tradition: Classical Perfectionism."

Part III: Justice and Equality

4/5: Locke, "Second Treatise of Government," selections (TBA).
Nozick, "A Libertarian Theory of Justice."

4/12: Harwood, "Is Inheritance Immoral?"
Quiz #2.

4/19: Rousseau, "Discourse on the Origin and Foundations of Inequality."
Marx and Engels, "The Communist Manifesto."
Marx, "Critique of the Gotha Program."

4/26: Rawls, "Justice as Fairness."

5/3: Fishkin, "Liberty versus Equal Opportunity."
Nussbaum, "The Feminist Critique of Liberalism" (on e-reserve).
Second paper due.

5/10: Mosley, "The Case for Affirmative Action."
Pojman, "The Case Against Affirmative Action."

Final exam: Tuesday, May 17th, 7:15 p.m. – 9:15 p.m.