

PHILOSOPHY 1178
INTRODUCTION TO POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY
Fall 2025

MEETINGS: Tuesdays, Thursdays 11:35–12:50 in WLH 113

Prof. Thomas Pogge, office hours Tuesdays 1-3pm and by appointment

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

Political philosophy is part of moral philosophy, which is philosophical reflection on morality or moralities. Moralities are a part of ordinary life, namely practices of producing certain assessments and prescriptions. Moral philosophy reflects upon the substance and status of such assessments and prescriptions, that is, on the reasons, arguments, and generalizations that are offered for and against them (substance) and on their knowability, objectivity, and on the reality of what moral terms such as rightness, justice, goodness might be taken to denote (status). This course will deal mainly with issues of substance: content and justification.

Political philosophy reflects on the assessment of social structures and on how we should conduct ourselves as officials or citizens in the public domain. Social structures can be assessed through conceptions of social justice, of which the main types are common-good, impartiality/fairness, and mutual-advantage conceptions. Political philosophy is related, on the one hand, to ethics, the other main branch of substantive moral philosophy, which reflects on the assessment of persons' character and conduct, on the lives we should lead and the persons we should try to be. It is related, on the other hand, to political science and, more generally, social science and social philosophy, which deal with the same subject matter in a descriptive and explanatory vein.

Through engagement with prominent texts in political philosophy, this course aims to introduce its participants to some of the enduring debates in political philosophy. We shall discuss justifications for private property, for different forms of government, and for state authority in general; purported sources of the obligation to obey the law; conceptions of liberty, equality, and democracy; and different defenses of diverse forms of inequality.

In studying the great political thinkers of the Western tradition, we will also learn to read with care difficult texts from a different era, to master complex concepts, to reconstruct and to assess philosophical positions and arguments, and to display these skills in lucid and elegant prose.

COURSE BOOK LIST (available at Barnes & Noble at 77 Broadway):

Required readings (estimated prices in parentheses, often much cheaper used):

Plato: *Republic*, Hackett (\$12)

Aristotle: *Politics*, Hackett (\$16)

Thomas Hobbes: *Leviathan*, Penguin (\$11)

John Locke: *Two Treatises of Government*, Cambridge UP (\$16)

Jean-Jacques Rousseau: *The Basic Political Writings*, Hackett (\$14)

Immanuel Kant: *The Metaphysics of Morals*, Cambridge UP (\$27)

Mary Wollstonecraft: *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, Oxford UP (\$11)

G.F.W. Hegel: *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, Cambridge UP (\$32)

Robert C. Tucker, ed.: *The Marx-Engels Reader*, Norton (\$27)

John Stuart Mill: *On Liberty and Other Essays*, Oxford World Classics (\$8)

John Rawls: *A Theory of Justice*, Harvard UP 1999 (revised edition) (\$34).

Recommended readings:

John Rawls: *Political Liberalism*, Columbia UP, esp. chs. 1, 4, 6. (\$22)

Will Kymlicka: *Contemporary Political Philosophy*, Oxford UP, esp. chs. 3-7 (expensive, buy used if at all)

Susan Okin: *Women in Western Political Thought*, Princeton UP (\$22)

Susan Okin: *Justice, Gender, and the Family*, Basic Books. (\$17)

Additional readings, hand-outs and PPTs will be available on the course website.

You are asked to read each assigned text carefully, critically, and completely before its discussion in class (which you are expected to attend). Try to reconstruct each author's views and especially any arguments s/he provides for these views or against objections to them.

FIVE COURSE REQUIREMENTS (with their weightings in the final grade):

1/6 — A short paper ca. 1200 words on one or two authors up to and including Rousseau

due on the second Saturday after the last lecture on the last author you cover. Topic suggestions to be provided as/if needed. Be sure you understand the variable due date. Last possible due date is 11 October (if you write on Rousseau). If you use AI, add a note on how you have used it.

1/3 — A scheduled interview around the end of October.

1/6 — A longer draft paper ca. 2500 words on one or two authors up to Marx due on the second Saturday after the last lecture on the last author you cover. Topic suggestions to be provided as/if needed. Be sure you understand the variable due date. Last possible due date is 15 November (if you write on Marx). If you use AI, add a note on how you have used it.

1/6 — Much improved version of the preceding, helped, I hope, by my comments, due one week after receipt of said comments. If you use AI, add a note on how you have used it.

1/6 — Regular contributions to class.

We can do an optional end-of-term interview for those who believe their grade does not adequately reflect their learning.

While a straight A is the highest final grade, I'll happily give component grades of A+ (when merited) which will then pull up your final grade.

LATE WORK: Get permission from the relevant Dean and pass it on to me, if possible before the due date of the assignment in question. Unexcused late work will be marked down 1/3 grade per 36 hours (e.g., from A- to B+, then B etc.).

SCHEDULE:

8/28 General Introduction

9/2 General Introduction concluded and Plato *Republic* 327-368e on Justice (pp. 2-39 in our book); and 369-473c on the Ideal Republic (pp. 39-133 in our book)

9/4 Plato concluded: 473c-541b on Philosophy (pp. 133-191 in our book) and Aristotle *Politics* Bks I-III, Bk IV Chs. 1 and 8-11, Bk VII 1-3 (esp. Book I:1-3,5-8,12-13 and Book III all; recommended: his *Nicomachean Ethics* Bks I and V)

9/9 Aristotle concluded, and introduction to the social contract tradition

9/11 Social contract tradition concluded and Hobbes *Leviathan* Parts I and II (read at least Chapters 10-17, 27, 29-30; esp. 13-15!)

9/16 Hobbes continued

9/18 Hobbes concluded

9/23 Locke *Second Treatise on Government* (esp. Chapters 1-13, 16, 19; esp. 1-5) with David Hume: "Of the Original Contract," at <https://davidhume.org/texts/empl2/oc> (recommended: Locke *Letter on Toleration*, at: www.constitution.org/jl/tolerati.htm).

9/25 Locke/Hume concluded

9/30 Rousseau *Discourse on Inequality* (with notes, esp. 9 & 17)

10/2 Rousseau *Of the Social Contract*

10/7 *Federalist Papers* 9 (Hamilton), 10, 48, 49, 51, 62 (Madison), 78 (Hamilton) and the current political system of the United States.

10/9 Kant *Metaphysics of Morals*, Part I (Doctrine of Right; skip sections 22-40)

10/14 Kant concluded

10/21 Wollstonecraft *Vindication*, Chapter 1-5, 9.

10/23 Hegel *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* (esp. Preface and §§29-33, 141-157, 182-208, 215-274, 330-360, with additions).

10/28 Hegel concluded

10/30 Marx *Reader* 40-6 ("According to Bauer..."), 70-86 (Estranged Labor), 93-105 (The Meaning of Human Requirements), 521-48 (Against Personality Cults), 725-27 (Engels On Morality) on Alienation/Money & Rights

11/4 Marx *Reader* 319-388 (Capital I, The Fetishism of Commodities), 403-438 (from Ch.15), [rec. 203-217 (Wage Labor & Capital)] on Economics

11/6 Marx *Reader* pp.3-6, 53-65, 133-135, 143-165, 172-200, 291, 431-434, 734-768, [rec. 469-491, 496-500] on Materialism, History, Morality

11/11 Introduction to utilitarianism and Mill *Utilitarianism*

11/13 Mill *Utilitarianism* concluded

11/18 Mill *On Liberty*, esp. chs. 1-3

11/20 Rawls *A Theory of Justice* (esp. §§ 1-4, 9, 11-14, 24-26, 32-39, 77, 79, 82, 87)

12/2 Rawls continued (recommended *Political Liberalism*, chs. 1, 4, and esp. 6)

12/4 Joker for flexible insert

Some Suggestions

... on how you might get the most from this class. First and foremost, you should be conscientious about the assigned readings. With a precise schedule ahead of time, you should always be able to come to class prepared. Read things slowly and carefully, taking notes as you go along. It is not enough to get the flavor of a text; you need to understand the arguments — both the author's conclusions and the reasons given in their support. If you come to class well-prepared, you will be able to get much more out of it, and to participate in, the lectures and discussions. If you also jot down some notes during or after each class, you will acquire a complete record of your work; this will save you a lot of time before finals when, presumably, you need it most.

... on writing the three papers.

1. Choose a topic that interests you, that you genuinely want to resolve. You need not strive for comprehensiveness. Try to find some aspect of the reading that you can critically engage with – an argument to be clarified or refuted, an ambiguity to be resolved, an objection to be rebutted, a target of the author's to be defended against her/his attack, etc. Try to write something that would be interesting for people who know the text well (e.g., your fellow students).
2. Be clear about your main idea. Here your main thesis may be interpretive ("Socrates holds that all three parts of the soul are immortal"), critical ("Socrates' argument for the tripartite structure of the soul is based on a false premise / an invalid inference") or substantive ("The human soul in fact has seven parts"). State your central claim clearly at the beginning and/or end; and try to make clear how each section, paragraph and sentence is relevant to your topic and contributes to supporting your thesis. If some sideline is too exciting to exclude, best to place it in a footnote.
3. Besides presenting a clear (well-structured and surveyable) argument, try to anticipate possible objections, counterexamples, alternative views. Always ask why other reasonable people might not see it your way. The strength of your paper depends in good part on the quality of the intellectual resistance it can overcome.
4. Aim to engage the reader: use clear, grammatical sentences without typos, include some illustrative examples, try for a little elegance, humor and style.
5. You are not expected to be familiar with any secondary sources. However, if you do consult such sources, you should list them at the end of your paper and cite them throughout as you draw upon them. If you take any text from someone else, you must make it clear the text is being quoted and where the text comes from. You must also cite any sources from which you obtain numbers, ideas or other material. If you have any questions about what does or does not constitute plagiarism, ask! Plagiarism is a serious offence and will not be treated lightly. Fortunately, it is also easy to avoid; and if you are careful about giving credit where credit is due, you should not run into any problems. You can find a fuller discussion of using sources and avoiding plagiarism at <http://ctl.yale.edu/writing/using-sources>. If you use AI, add a note on how you have used it.