

PHIL 3703: POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

Brooklyn College

Spring 2013

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Objectives for the Course

- 1) Students will become acquainted with literatures of the past and present, and with significant ideas and real life issues presented in these literary works
- 2) Students will understand philosophical literature, past and present, and will acquire a critical appreciation of their contribution to the life of the individual and society
- 3) Students will develop skills of conceptual analysis and argumentation
- 4) Students will be able to express ideas clearly in writing and speaking
- 5) Students will be able to develop a basis for evaluating texts

Description

The course is a historical introduction to the classics of modern and contemporary political philosophy. The course will consist of two halves.

The first half of the class will focus in-depth on the issues raised by the classics of modern political philosophy. The second half of the course will move on to some of the key works in the contemporary political philosophy that appropriate the issues of the classics in light of the contemporary concerns.

The great questions that the classics attempt to answer are the following. How shall we think about the fundamental human nature, as would be useful and appropriate for thinking about the structure and the goal of the political arrangement of the community of human beings? And, what is the structure and the goal of political arrangement that is most appropriate, given that human nature?

There is a certain boldness, honesty and openness, about the way in which the moderns raise and answer the key questions in political philosophy. We do not often find this clarity in the contemporary discourse, yet our understanding would greatly benefit from seeing the contemporary debates in light of these paradigmatic questions and answers offered to us by the moderns. We will find and study a rich spectrum of, often enough conflicting, positions among the classics. We will expose the differences and contradictions in and possible solutions to these conflicts. A brief survey of Locke, Hobbes, Spinoza, and Rousseau gives a clue to the importance of the issues.

Locke starts from that we are by, and in, nature, free, and that governments acquire their legitimacy from the freedom that we surrender to it, with voluntary consent – by a 'social contract', as it were – for the sake of protection of our freedom. Locke's concern, then, is to

delineate legitimate from illegitimate acts of the government.

The considerably darker Hobbes argues that we are by, and in, nature, self-interested, self-preserving (death-fearing), and are, therefore, in a state of perpetual war and conflict with each other. Hence, we rationally consent, again, in a social contract, to being governed by an absolute sovereign (a monarch, for example), as the only way in which conflicts can be settled and war eliminated.

Spinoza argues that we are by nature seeking to expand our capacities, and, therefore, the government's role is to enhance (rather than to merely protect) the expansion of our capacities. Spinoza argues that the development of commerce, arts, sciences, and all other expressions of the mind, must be arranged for and variously supported by the government, in order to generally enhance the growth of all capacities. Notably, Spinoza argues that democracy is the best political regime for this project. Spinoza's vision is that of a liberal democracy.

Rousseau argues that the growth of civilization endorsed by Spinoza corrupts human beings and strays them away from their natural goodness and freedom (into a Hobbsian state of pseudo-nature, it would seem). Rousseau sees the function of education and government in, on the one hand, curing this corruption, and, on the other hand, generation of only those laws in submission to which each person follows his or her own will (the general will, as constituted by a kind of a social contract, once again). Rousseau exposes the problem of reconciliation of freedom and submission to law as the problem of modern and contemporary political philosophy.

The second half of the class will start with the most renowned 20th century American political philosopher – Rawls – who updates and carries forward in his own way the modern social contract tradition. Rawls' critics will, at the same time, demonstrate to us the contemporary criticisms of the by now deeply entrenched social contract mainstream, as well as inform us about alternatives to it, regarding the nature, goal and structure of communal life: libertarianism (Nozick), communitarianism (Taylor), liberalism (Habermas), poststructuralism (Foucault), and feminism (Held, Nussbaum).

Course Assignments and Grading Policy:

I. 3 Written Assignments – PAPERS. 70 % of the Final Grade

- a) There will not be any revisions or rewrite for papers – do your best and incorporate what you learn from writing earlier papers into later papers
- b) All papers will be submitted through ILEARN plagiarism checking software and all plagiarism will be reported to the Dean
- c) The lowest paper grade will be dropped and two remaining ones averaged

II. Weekly QUIZZES – Multiple Choice. 30% of the Final Grade

- short and simple quizzes in the beginning of each class, in order to motivate class preparation and attendance

- 3 lowest quiz grades will be dropped and the rest averaged
- there will not be any make-ups for these quizzes due to *absences* or *latenesses*: the dropping of lowest 3 grades gives sufficient room for all kinds of contingencies related to athletics, ill health, faulty alarm clocks, etc.

III. Participation & discussion in class & attendance

- concerning *class participation*
 - Class participation will either lower or raise the final class grade – as these reflect the effort the students demonstrate in grasping the material.
- concerning *absences*
 - all absences must provide a documented excuse (for example, a doctor's note) or be discussed and arranged with the professor
 - excessive absences especially must be justified medically

Required Text:

- **Title:** Classics of Political and Moral Philosophy / Edition 2
Author: Steven M. Cahn
 ISBN: 9780199791156

Schedule:

Readings and papers will be assigned in the order and on the dates that make sense according to the organic development of the class (pace of comprehension, pace of discussion, relevant tangents of interest, etc.). Papers will be assigned at least a week in advance. All readings and paper assignments will be announced on the Blackboard after each session. Here is the list of planned readings:

1) NICCOLO MACHIAVELLI
 Introduction, Roger D. Masters
 - The Prince
 - Discourses

2) THOMAS HOBBES
 Introduction, Jean Hampton
 - Leviathan

3) BARUCH SPINOZA

Introduction, Steven B. Smith

- Theologico-Political Treatise

4) JOHN LOCKE

Introduction, A. John Simmons

- Second Treatise of Government
- Letter Concerning Toleration

5) JEAN-JACQUES ROUSSEAU

Introduction, Joshua Cohen

- Discourse on the Origin of Inequality
- Of the Social Contract

6) JOHN RAWLS

Introduction, Joshua Cohen

- A Theory of Justice

7) ROBERT NOZICK

Introduction, Thomas Christiano

- Anarchy, State, and Utopia

8) CHARLES TAYLOR

Introduction, Robert B. Talisse

- Atomism

9) MICHEL FOUCAULT

Introduction, Thomas A. McCarthy

- Power/Knowledge

10) JÜRGEN HABERMAS

Introduction, Thomas A. McCarthy

- Three Normative Models of Democracy
- On the Internal Relation Between the Rule of Law and Democracy

11) VIRGINIA HELD

Introduction, Cheshire Calhoun

- Non-Contractual Society: A Feminist View

12) MARTHA C. NUSSBAUM

Introduction, Eva Feder Kittay

- The Feminist Critique of Liberalism

Attendance

- excessive absences result in the grade of UW (Unofficial Withdrawal) in class
 - you will receive a warning either in person or by email
- The state law regarding non-attendance because of religious beliefs (p. 53 in the Bulletin), and your class policies (e.g., attendance, participation, etc)

Plagiarism

- if you plagiarize, you fail – no exceptions!
- University Policy on Plagiarism

The faculty and administration of Brooklyn College support an environment free from cheating and plagiarism. Each student is responsible for being aware of what constitutes cheating and plagiarism and for avoiding both. The complete text of the CUNY Academic Integrity Policy and the Brooklyn College procedure for implementing that policy can be found at this site: <http://www.brooklyn.cuny.edu/bc/policies>. If a faculty member suspects a violation of academic integrity and, upon investigation, confirms that violation, or if the student admits the violation, the faculty member MUST report the violation.

Student Disability Policy

In order to receive disability-related academic accommodations students must first be registered with the Center for Student Disability Services. Students who have a documented disability or suspect they may have a disability are invited to set up an appointment with the Director of the Center for Student Disability Services, Ms. Valerie Stewart-Lovell at 718-951-5538. If you have already registered with the Center for Student Disability Services please provide your professor with the course accommodation form and discuss your specific accommodation with him/her.

IMPORTANT NOTE

- the material is difficult, and YOU WILL BE LOST UNLESS YOU ATTEND CLASS