

Spring 2012

PH 304: Social and Political Philosophy



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CONTEMPORARY POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

This course examines contemporary debates in Anglo-American political philosophy. Questions considered include the proper method for philosophizing about politics, the value and limits of democracy, problems of race, gender, and ethnicity in multicultural societies, and the promise of justice in the age of global capitalism.

Class Format and Expectations for Participation

Run as an advanced seminar, this course demands much student participation and independent work. You must be prepared each day to discuss the assigned readings. As these are very difficult texts, sufficient preparation entails going over the texts multiple times and having your original thoughts and questions ready to present. The class will consist of discussions that aim at: (a) gaining an understanding of the text at hand; and (b) applying the issues, ideas and concepts that the texts raise to problems and issues both contemporary and historical.

Many of the ideas and texts that we are dealing with in this class are hard to understand on our own. Because of this and because doing philosophy means engaging in discussion, attendance is mandatory and you are expected to take part in all class discussions. This aspect of your performance will be reflected in a portion of your grade that reflects its overall importance to the class. This grade is based upon both the quality and quantity of your participation.

Reading Responses

For each class meeting, it is expected that you will arrive having formulated a response to the reading(s) to be discussed that day. These responses should contain a brief summary of the author(s)' points (noting key passages, concepts, moments, etc.) and should then extend to the formulation of original questions or comments. These can be questions regarding your own understanding of the text (such as an attempt to answer the question: "What is public reason, does it differ from other forms of reason?"). Alternately, these comments can be critical of the text, supportive of its argument, or (best) can link texts together and/or apply their insights. In addition to these two elements, better responses may also include:

- A consideration of the context (disciplinary, historical, geographic, economic, philosophical) that informs the work under consideration.
- Comments on whether the piece is relevant to your experience, in what way, and how. If it is irrelevant, then say why it is so.
- A consideration of the piece's relationship to other texts that we have read in class? Does it compliment them, refute them, or supersede them?
- The reconsideration of earlier responses in the light of the new piece.

Each day, I will call on seminar participants to relate their responses to the class. This does not mean that you need to come to class with a paper to read each day. However, a few paragraphs will be necessary. These responses will be collected weekly, at the end of Thursday's class, and returned on Tuesday. These responses can form part of your other assignments for the class and so care should be taken with grammar, form, and citation when you draft them.

Assignments and Value

- 10% Reflection piece on a "We the People" event.
- 10% Reading Responses
- 10% Class participation (see above for expectations)
- 40% Paper #1
- 30% Paper #2

To pass the class, all assignments must be completed in the order assigned. No late assignments will be accepted without express permission of the instructor obtained at least 24 hours before the assignment's due date. Violations of the Skidmore College Honor Code will result in an "F" for a class grade as well as all penalties imposed by the Honor's Council.

Required Texts:

Course Packet [CP]

GOODIN, R. E., & PETTIT, P. (2006). *Contemporary political philosophy: an anthology*. Malden, MA, Blackwell Pub.

HEDGES, C., & SACCO, J. (2012). *Days of destruction, days of revolt*. New York, Nation Books.

Note

I strongly encourage you to see me if, at any time, you are having problems with the readings, with understanding the class discussions, or if you just wish to further discuss issues raised in the class. I am willing to spend time with you in person to help you get as much out of the course as you desire.

SCHEDULE

Week 1, January 20-26

Tuesday

Introductory: The eclipse of Anglo-American political philosophy in the twentieth century, democracy's crisis, and political philosophy's revival

Thursday:

Reading: Hedges & Sacco (2012), *Days of destruction, days of revolt*, Introduction and Chapters 2 & 3.

Week 2, January 27-February 2

Tuesday

Reading: Hedges & Sacco (2012), *Days of destruction, days of revolt*, Chapters 4 & 5.

Thursday

Reading: Daniel McDermott, "Analytical Political Philosophy" [CP]

We the People, Thursday, January 31 @7:00 pm, *Government By and For the People*, a facilitated discussion of democratic ideals and obstacles led by Jean Ann Kubler '13

New Foundations for Liberalism

Week 3, February 3-9

Tuesday

Reading: John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice, Revised edition* (1999), §§ 1-4, 8, 11-17, 20-30 (long reading) [CP]

Thursday

Reading: John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice, Revised edition* (1999), §§ 33-35, 39-40, 42-44 [CP]

We the People, Thursday, February 7 @ 7:00 pm *Civil Society for Sale, part 1*, a panel discussion with John Brueggemann, Rick Chrisman, Deborah Warnock, Daniel Nathan, and Andrew Cencini

Week 4, February 10-16

Tuesday

Reading: Habermas, "The Public Sphere" (1989) & "Three Normative Models of Democracy" (1999) [CP]

Thursday

Reading: Dahl (1979), "Procedural Democracy"

We the People, Tuesday, February 12 @ 7:00 pm *Civil Society for Sale, part 2*, a panel discussion with John Brueggemann, Rik Scarce, Pat Oles, and Jennifer Delton

Week 5, February 17-23

Tuesday

Reading: Elster (1986), "The Market and the Forum"

Thursday

Reading: Brettschneider (2006), "The Value Theory of Democracy" [CP]

Week 6, February 24-March 2

Tuesday

Reading: Cohen (1989), "Deliberation and Democratic Legitimacy"

Thursday

Reading: Bohman (1998), "The Coming of Age of Deliberative Democracy
[CP]

•••Deliberation and the Public Good paper assigned•••

Justices**Week 7, March 3-9**

Tuesday

Reading: Nozick (1974), "Distributive Justice"

Thursday

Reading: Young (1989), "Polity and Group Difference"

Week 8, March 10-16

Spring Break

Freedoms**Week 9, March 17-23**

Tuesday

Reading: Berlin (1969), "Two Concepts of Liberty."

Thursday

Reading: Cohen (1986), "Are Freedom and Equality Compatible"

Friday

Week 10, March 24-30

Tuesday

Reading: Yong (2011), "Does Freedom of Speech Include Hate Speech?" [CP]

Thursday

Reading: Waldron (1991), "Homelessness and the Issue of Freedom."

We the People, Thursday, March 28 @ 7:00 pm Lecture by Jeffrey Clements
Corporations Are Not People: Responding to the Supreme Court in Citizens United.

Week 11, March 31-April 6

Tuesday

Curator's tour of "We the People," Meet 4PM at Tang Museum Atrium

•••Deliberation and the Public Good paper due•••

Thursday

We the People, Thursday, April 2 @7:00 pm, Crowd-sourced Constitutional Convention**Equality and Oppression****Week 12, April 7-13**

Tuesday

Reading: Williams (1971), "The Idea of Equality"

Thursday

Reading: Sen (1980), "Equality of What?"

Week 13, April 14-20

Tuesday

Reading: Mills (1997), "The Racial Contract" [CP]

Thursday

Reading: Okin (1989) Justice, Gender, and the Family [CP]

•••Sacco and Hedges Response Paper Assigned•••

Week 14, April 21-27

Tuesday

Reading: Fraser and Gordon (1994), "'Dependency' Demystified"

Thursday

Reading: Arneson (1997), "Egalitarianism and The Underserving Poor"

Week 15, April 28-May 4

Tuesday:

Paper workshop

Week 16, May 5-11

•••Sacco and Hedges Response Paper Due••• date TBA