

University of New York/Tirana

Classics of Political Thought

Fall 2007

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REQUIRED TEXT

Steve M. Cahn. Ed. Classics of Moral and Political Philosophy. (Oxford University Press, USA, 2001). ISBN 0195140915

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course will analyze some of the most paramount themes and figures of western philosophy spanning from the early ancient Greek philosophers to the late 1800's. The material that we will cover can be divided into three major groups: (i) ancient Greek philosophy (ii) middle ages, (iii) and modern philosophy. Since the time period is so wide and the material so voluminous, we will concentrate on just a few major philosophical issues, the main one being the idea of justice. What is justice? How can one lead a just life? How can a society build a just state? The readings that we will pay particular attention to will provide us with differing views on justice and differing paths on the road to achieving it. This course will also pay particular attention to the relationship of the individual with the state, the individual with morality and the relationship of the state with justice and morality. As we explore these different philosophical theories, we shall seek to have a better understanding of the dilemmas and contemporary political debates which often are the by-product of the different philosophical theories that we shall survey. By the end of this course we should have a more clear idea about the concept of justice in general and that of a just state in particular.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Become familiar with the theories of some of the most influential classic political philosophers.
- Introduce students to the main concepts of political philosophy concerning the idea of justice and the theories of state formation.
- Understand how and why some important philosophical concepts have evolved over time.
- Become familiar with various methods of studying political philosophy.
- Practice thinking critically about each of the above in relation to historical events, people's actions, popular attitudes, and texts of various kinds.
- Gain experience in reading, discussing and writing about academic texts that analyze philosophical and political phenomena.
- Develop writing skills and refine oral communication skills.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

- Weekly reading assignments.
- Two papers and one in-class essay style final exam.
- In-class presentation
- Seven homework assignments (credit/no credit).
- Participation in class discussion
- Regular and on-time attendance.

GRADING POLICY

Each aspect of your work for the course will receive a letter grade. Each grade will be converted to a numerical value, multiplied by the appropriate percentage, and added to your other grades to arrive at a final grade.

A (94-100)	B (83-86)	C (73-76)	D (63-66)
A- (90-93)	B- (80-82)	C- (70-72)	D- (60-62)
B+ (87-89)	C+ (77-79)	D+ (67-69)	F (0-59)

PAPERS/EXAM

(80% of your final grade):

- Paper one: TBA (20%).
- Paper two: TBA (20%).
- Final Exam: an in-class essay style exam that will focus largely on the final unit of the course, but that will include some reference to earlier concepts as well. (30%).

PRESENTATION

(10% of the final grade)

Every student is required to deliver **ONE** class presentation. The purpose of the presentation is to encourage you to go beyond the assigned reading. You will choose one of the topics that you are most interested in and deliver a 10-15 minute presentation in class. Since the assigned readings deal with a multitude of issues, you should choose a particular point that you find intriguing and elaborate on that. You should also end the presentation with a question that will serve as the launching pad for further class discussion.

HOMEWORK

(10% of your final grade):

Homework assignments are designed to prepare you for discussions and papers. Homework must be typed. If you complete all **seven** assignments satisfactorily and on time, you will receive at least a B for your homework grade; above-average work will earn you a higher grade. Each missed homework assignment will drop your grade five percentage points (e.g., 6 completed homework assignments would give you a 75%/C). To receive full credit, your response must integrate a quotation from the assigned reading(s). Work that appears hasty (e.g.,

not proofread), superficial, copied, or severely flawed will receive partial or no credit. No late work will be accepted without prior approval.

To get the most out of these short writing assignments, you should strive to gather, focus, and organize your ideas before you commit them to paper; the result should be carefully organized and proofread, not random, undeveloped notes. Your response should demonstrate that you actually read the assigned material. Length: 250-500 words.

CLASS PARTICIPATION

(10% of your final grade):

There will be frequent class discussions and occasional small group work. For an A, you must participate frequently and in a meaningful way, demonstrating that you have read the assigned material. For a B, you must make fairly regular contributions to discussions. For a C, you should be attentive, on time, and make occasional contributions to discussions. Asking questions is a highly valued form of participation. A pattern of socializing, arriving late, sleeping, or leaving early will prevent you from earning more than 5 points here (an F).

Absences: The class lasts three hours so if one student is absent for the entire lecture, he/she will receive three absences for the day. After a student has accumulated six absences (e.g. has missed two full lectures), I will report that to the records office which will make the necessary verifications and inform the appropriate university structures. If a student has nine or more absences (e.g. has missed three full lectures), he/she will automatically fail the course. I strongly recommend that you attend class regularly because the university policy on absences is very stringent and I will enforce it. Notes from a doctor or university official constitute accepted excuses.

Late Papers: Late papers will result in up to a one-grade drop (A- to B-). After one week, a late paper can get no better than a C. If I allow you to rewrite a "D" or "F" paper, the best grade that it can receive is a "C."

Lost Papers: Keep copies of your work. If you use a computer, save your work often.

Plagiarism: All of your work for this course should be your own. Plagiarism (the attempt to represent the work of another as your own) will be grounds for failure. Note that plagiarism includes using phrases or sentences from a published work without putting that material in quotation marks and documenting the source.

DOCUMENTING SOURCES

Since the two papers that you will have to write will deal with analyzing the ideas of other people, quite often you will have to quote or paraphrase information that you read in the different texts that we will survey. Whenever you quote, summarize or paraphrase, you will need to document that source in MLA style. If you need any assistance with your paper please contact the university's Writing Center.

PAPER FORMAT (Read this before you turn in your first paper)

Papers should be typed, double spaced, with 1 inch margins, on white paper. Use a standard (i.e., no italics) 10 or 12 point font (around 15 words per line). Do not put extra spaces between paragraphs. The cover page should include your name, the date, and the course number; please do not put your name on any page other than the cover page. Put a paper title at the top of the first page of text, number each page, and end with a word count. Use MLA documentation

style. Keep in mind that, writing is one of the more difficult forms of communication, largely because the reader cannot ask questions. I am always happy to read a draft of your paper or help you in any way possible so that you write a clear and well organized paper.

SCHEDULE

This schedule gives you the dates on which papers and reading assignments are due. Complete these assignments **before** coming to class. Any changes to the syllabus will be announced in class. You are responsible for keeping up-to-date on changes.

Week 1 Introduction to the class and to Moral and Political Philosophy

Week 2 *Plato*: The Republic. Books I-IV
Homework: Analyze Plato's "three parts of the soul argument" and discuss how they relate to the justness of the city.

Week 3 *Aristotle*: Nicomachean Ethics book I-II and book VII
Politics book I (1-9); II (1-5; 9) III (1-2; 4-5)
Homework: Is there any truth in the view that some human beings are by nature slaves? How would Aristotle answer this question?

Week 4 *St. Augustine*: City of God
Aquinas: On Kingship and Summa Theologica
Homework: How do both St. Augustine and Aquinas defend, or lay the ground work, for the theory of divine law?

Week 5 *Machiavelli*: The Prince and Discourses
Homework: How would Machiavelli resolve the dilemma of whether a good ruler for good purposes could break his word or engage in acts usually thought of as immoral?
First paper will be assigned

Week 6 *Hobbes*: Leviathan: On Man
Homework: How does Hobbes envision the state of nature and does that vision lay the ground work for the kind of Commonwealth that he will support?
First paper due at the beginning of class

Week 7 *Hobbes*: Leviathan: On Commonwealth
Homework: Describe the kind of government that Hobbes supports. Why does he believe that only that particular kind of government will be successful?

Week 8 *John Locke*: Two Treatises of Civil Government
Homework: How does Locke's conception of the state of nature differ from that of Hobbes'? How do these different conceptions influence the kind of government they support?

- Week 9** *Rousseau: On the Social Contract*
Homework: According to Rousseau, why is the existence of civil society necessary? How can that goal be achieved?
- Week 10** *John Mill: On Liberty*
Homework: There seems a first look to be a fundamental incompatibility between Mill's political theory of rights expressed in *On Liberty* and Mill's moral theory expressed in *Utilitarianism*. In *On Liberty*, he claims that government should never interfere with an individual, except to prevent harm to others (i.e., never be paternalistic). But in *Utilitarianism* he claims that the right thing to do is whatever will maximize utility. These two positions would seem to be incompatible. How would Mill answer to such criticism?
Second paper assigned
- Week 11** *Marx: Estranged Labor and the Communist Manifesto*
Homework: Both Rousseau and Marx identified communitarianism as the value that would in fact provide humanity freedom. However, Marx is more optimistic than Rousseau in the practicability of this theory. Why?
Second paper due at the beginning of class
- Week 12** *Kant: Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*
Homework: Analyze and compare Kant's motivating and justifying reasons and provide examples that support your position. Lastly, summarize the three different types of motivating reasons that Kant identifies.
- Week 13** Nietzsche: *On the Genealogy of Morals*
- Week 14** Course Review
- Week 15** *In-class exam*