

PHIL 162 SC-01: Political Philosophy

Scripps College, Fall 2020

Professor: Dr. Aleksy Tarasenko-Struc

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Office hours: Monday, Wednesday, and Thursday, 2h–3h PM PT, and by special appointment

Course Meetings: Monday and Wednesday, 9h15–10h30 AM PT

Course Description

How must a society be organized to be just? In this course, we will address this question by closely reading some classic works of political philosophy, both historical and contemporary. We will begin by considering the problem of political legitimacy—how could the State have authority over us?—and the solutions to it proposed by standard-bearers of the social contract tradition. We will then examine the merits of five influential theories of justice: utilitarianism, libertarianism (and classical liberalism), ‘justice as fairness’, socialist communitarianism, and social conservatism. In arriving at an assessment of these views, we will be guided by three sets of questions. First, what sorts of functions and powers belong to a legitimate State? Should the State be restricted only to protecting people from being coerced or defrauded by others, or can it also justifiably aim at alleviating poverty, providing health insurance, and funding the arts? Second, what exactly is the relationship between justice and other, apparently attractive political ideals, such as security, liberty, and equality? Does justice require making people equal along some significant dimension? Is fostering equality a threat to freedom or a condition of it? In fact, (how) does equality matter in the first place? Finally, to what extent can the theories of justice studied so far yield fruitful proposals for eliminating gender- and race-based oppression? In particular, is the State entitled or obliged to promote an egalitarian model of family or social life?

The only prerequisite for this course is the permission of the instructor. The course is ideal for students with some familiarity with politics and/or philosophy. However, I am happy to admit anyone who is open-minded and willing to work hard to come to grips with difficult material on important topics. Please contact me if you have any questions concerning whether or not this course is suitable for you.

Course Goals

This course is oriented around four goals. By the time you finish the semester, you should be able to

- identify substantive political views in both philosophical and nonacademic texts/media;
- understand, articulate, and evaluate the main arguments for competing visions of a just society;
- characterize and critically engage with these views, in writing, in a clear and cogent manner; and
- conduct political discussions with others in a way guided by the virtue of intellectual humility.

Required Texts

There are three required texts for this course:

John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Note: You may purchase either the original or the revised edition.)

Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* (New York, N.Y.: Basic Books, Inc., 1971)

G.A. Cohen, *Why Not Socialism?* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University, 2000)

Each is relatively inexpensive and can be ordered online. The majority of the readings for this course, however, will consist in articles or book chapters, which will be made available on the course website (cgu.instructure.com).

I also recommend that you obtain these two books, parts of which we will read this semester:

Susan Moller Okin, *Justice, Gender, and the Family* (New York, N.Y.: Basic Books, 1989)

Thomas Nagel, *Equality and Partiality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991)

Course Requirements and Grades

Every student is required (1) to participate thoughtfully and respectfully in discussions and other assigned activities; (2) to submit three papers; and (3) to complete all six online reading quizzes.

Here is how each component of your final grade will be weighted:

- 15%: *Participation*
- 25%: *Reading Quizzes* (X 6): due periodically throughout the semester
- 15%: *Paper 1* (4–6 pages), due October 4
- 20%: *Paper 2* (5–7 pages), due November 1
- 25%: *Paper 3* (6–8 pages): due December 4

Except in special circumstances, to pass this course all written work must be submitted to the instructor. In addition to the above assignments, there will be occasional opportunities for extra credit.

- **Participation:** Participation is very important in this course—as reflected by the fact that your participation score accounts for a significant proportion of your final grade. Everyone is expected to contribute to class discussion. I especially encourage you to ask clarificatory questions about the material: if you are confused about some topic that we are studying in this course, it is *very* likely that other students are, too! This means that not only will you be penalized for failing to participate in course discussions, you will also lose out on an essential source of philosophical understanding: dialogue with others, the clash of differing points of view.

Course meetings will be conducted through Zoom. Here's the key login information:

Meeting link:

<https://scrippscollege.zoom.us/j/92873924174?pwd=enFwbmdSVmtUWlVCYTIxTk9oSkRiUT09>

Meeting ID: 928 7392 4174

Password: 662284

The instructor has discretion over whether to excuse an absence. Yet, as a general rule, absences are excused in case of illness, mental health issues, death of a friend/family member, or job interview, among others. Here are the standard penalties for multiple *unexcused* absences:

- 0–4 absences = 0 points deducted from final score
- 5–7 absences = 2 points deducted from final score
- 8–10 absences = 3 points deducted from final score
- >10 absences = failure of the course

- **Reading Quizzes:** You will complete six quizzes, all on Canvas, over the course of the semester. The aim of these quizzes is to ensure that you are reading regularly by testing your comprehension of the material. You will generally have about a week to complete online quizzes.
- **Papers:** You will write and submit three papers on topics that I will assign. These will be tightly structured argumentative essays with a substantial interpretive component. They will be graded according to how well they exemplify the virtues of philosophical writing: clarity of expression, cogency of argument, accuracy of interpretation, focus and efficiency of language, and charity.

Your paper should be uploaded to Canvas, unless it is late or you have received an extension.

Here is the grading scheme for the papers:

| | | | | | | | |
|--------------|-----|--------------|----|--------------|----|-------------|----|
| A+ | 100 | B+ | 89 | C+ | 79 | D+ | 69 |
| A+/A | 98 | B+/B | 87 | C+/C | 77 | D+/D | 67 |
| A | 96 | B | 85 | C | 75 | D | 65 |
| A-/A | 94 | B-/B- | 83 | C/C- | 73 | D/D- | 63 |
| A- | 92 | B- | 81 | C- | 71 | D- | 61 |
| A-/B+ | 90 | B-/C+ | 80 | C-/D+ | 70 | F | 60 |

- **Extra Credit:** I am especially keen to know what your own personal interests in politics and political theory are—what moves, intrigues, and frustrates you in the political domain—so that, if possible, I can build it into the content of the course. For this reason, I am offering extra credit: 1 point will be added to the final score of any student who meets with me during my office hours to discuss any interests pertaining to the course, as long as the meeting is scheduled within the first two weeks of the semester. Any students who are interested should schedule a 15-minute meeting with me on Calendly (see below) by Sunday, September 6 at 11h59 PM.

Course Policies:

- **Respect:** Discussions in this course should be respectful, constructive, and inclusive. We will follow the NYU Guidelines for Respectful Philosophical Discussion, which can be found [here](#).

- **Plagiarism:** You are encouraged to discuss the material with your peers outside of class, but all work must contain your own thoughts, written in your own words. Feel free contact me if you would like clarification concerning what counts as plagiarism or what proper citation consists in.

Common forms of plagiarism in this course include:

- borrowing wording from a handout (without quoting and citing it);
- borrowing wording from one of the readings (without quoting and citing it);
- borrowing wording from the essay prompt;
- borrowing wording or ideas from an online source (without quoting and citing it);
- borrowing wording or ideas from another student's paper; and
- recycling material from work that you have completed in other courses.

Note: My definition of plagiarism is broader than the one found in Scripps College's [plagiarism policy](#).

- **Readings:** This is a reading-intensive course. You can expect to have ~50 pages of reading each week. Required readings should be completed *before* the session for which they are assigned.

Some selections will be dense and difficult, so you may have to reread them once or twice.

- **Extensions:** Extensions for any valid reason will be granted *only if* they are requested at least one full day before the due date. Keep in mind that *extensions will not generally be granted on the third paper*.

Note: If you take an extension, you effectively waive your right to receive comments on time!

Note: If you take an extension, please send me your paper by email directly, at the above address.

- **Late Work:** It is important that you submit your work on time. Except in unusual circumstances, late work will be penalized 1/3 of a letter grade per day (e.g. from A to A-, etc.).

Note: If you submit work late, you effectively waive your right to receive comments on time!

Note: If you submit work late, please send me your paper by email directly, at the above address.

- **Drafts:** If you want me to look over a draft, send it to me *at least four days* before the due date.

- **Accommodations:** Students who require special accommodations for a documented disability should contact me immediately, so that necessary arrangements can be made in a timely manner. You may find out more information and obtain the requisite documentation [here](#).

- **Office Hours:** Office hours are three hours set aside each week for speaking with students about matters related to the course and/or their intellectual trajectory more generally. Everyone should feel encouraged to meet with me, individually or in a group, for any academic reason, and especially if they want to discuss my comments on their work. You can make an appointment with me [here](#).

Office hours will be conducted remotely through Zoom. If you schedule a meeting with me, I will send you an invitation ahead of time through your Scripps College email account. Please message me to see about alternative meeting times if you cannot make my office hours.

- **E-mail:** I will strive to answer your e-mails within two business days, where this excludes weekends and holidays. If you have not yet received a response in this time, please remind me.

Schedule of Meetings and Assignments

August 24: [No Readings: Introduction to Topics and Mechanics of Course]

1. The Anarchist's Challenge

August 26: Robert Paul Wolff, *In Defense of Anarchism*, chs. 1–3

2. The Social Contract Tradition

August 31: Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, chs. 13–16

September 2: John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, chs. 1–5
Recommended: David Hume, ‘Of the Original Contract’

September 7: Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, Book I, chs. 1, 5–8 and Book II, chs. 1–3

3. Utilitarianism

September 9: John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*, chs. 1, 4

Sunday, September 13: Quiz 1 Due by 11h59 PM

4. Libertarianism

September 14: Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, chs. 1–3 [skim/skip: 35–50]

September 16: Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, ch. 5

September 21: Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, ch. 7, §1 (“The Entitlement Theory”)

September 23: Thomas Nagel and Liam Murphy, *The Myth of Ownership*, ch. 2, §VII (“The Problem of Everyday Libertarianism”)
Thomas Nagel, ‘Libertarianism without Foundations’

Sunday, September 27: Quiz 2 Due by 11h59 PM

September 28: [No Readings: Workshop on Philosophical Writing]

5. Justice as Fairness

September 30: John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, §§1–4, 11, 13

Sunday, October 4: Paper 1 Due by 11h59 PM

- October 5: Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, §§17, 24–26 [skim §25]
Recommended: G.A. Cohen, ‘Justice, Incentives, and Selfishness’
- October 7: Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, §14
Recommended: Richard Arneson, ‘Against Rawlsian Equality of Opportunity’

6. Justice, Gender, and the Family

- October 12: Susan Moller Okin, *Justice, Gender, and the Family*, chs. 2, 5
October 14: Okin, *Justice, Gender, and the Family*, ch. 5, continued

Wednesday, October 14: Quiz 3 Due by 11h59 PM

7. Social Conservatism

- October 19: Roger Scruton, *The Meaning of Conservatism*, ch. 2 (‘Authority and Allegiance’)

8. Socialism

- October 21: G.A. Cohen, *Why Not Socialism?*, chs. 1–2
Recommended: Karl Marx, ‘Estranged Labor’
Cohen, ‘The Structure of Proletarian Unfreedom’

Sunday, October 25: Quiz 4 Due by 11h59 PM

- October 26: Cohen, *Why Not Socialism?*, chs. 3–5
October 28: Milton Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom*, chs. 1–2
Recommended: Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, ch. 8 (‘Equality, Envy, ...’)

Sunday, November 1: Paper 2 Due by 11h59 PM

9. The Status of Equality

- November 2: F.A. Hayek, *The Constitution of Liberty*, ch. 6 (‘Equality, Value, and Merit’)
November 4: [No Class: Catch-up, Office Hours]
- November 9: Elizabeth Anderson, ‘What is the Point of Equality?’, pp. 312–326
Recommended: Debra Satz, ‘Equality, Adequacy, and Education for Citizenship’
G.A. Cohen, ‘A Note on Regarding People as Equals’

10. Gender and Race: Oppression and Emancipation

November 11: Marilyn Frye, 'Oppression'

Iris Marion Young, 'Five Faces of Oppression'

Wednesday, November 11: Quiz 5 Due by 11h59 PM

November 16: Sally Haslanger, 'Oppressions, Racial and Other'

November 18: Tommie Shelby, 'Justice, Deviance, and the Dark Ghetto'

November 23: [Topic to Be Determined by Class]

Sunday, December 4: Quiz 6, Paper 3 Due by 11h59 PM