

## Political Philosophy

In this class, we'll discuss what a just political system would look like. We'll begin by discussing the values of freedom and equality. Many people agree that respect for these is at the center of political justice, but they disagree about how to understand them and about what they require. Are they complementary, or in conflict? What kind of political and economic system do they require? We will then discuss what to do when we are confronted by *unjust* social structures. If we live in a democracy with unjust policies, are we required to follow the law and work within the system? If not, what measures for fighting injustice are appropriate? Finally, we'll discuss a number of particular controversial political issues. Which ones we discuss will be affected by feedback from members of the class.

**Tentative Course Outline (often only specific sections of articles will be assigned--check the reading instructions on Sakai for details):**

### I. Freedom, Equality, and Justice

Anita Allen, "Moralizing in Public"  
John Rawls, excerpts from chs. 2 and 3 of *A Theory of Justice*  
Amartya Sen, "Equality of What?"  
G.A. Cohen, *Why Not Socialism?*, chs. 1-3  
Iris Marion Young, "The Five Faces of Oppression"  
Elizabeth Anderson, "What is the Point of Equality?"  
Robert Nozick, excerpts from *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*  
John Tomasi, excerpts from *Free Market Fairness*  
Elizabeth Anderson's review of *Free Market Fairness*

### II. Political Authority and Protest

Michael Huemer, excerpts from *The Problem of Political Authority*  
"A Call for Unity," by eight Birmingham clergymen  
Martin Luther King Jr., "Letter from Birmingham Jail"  
Robert F. Williams, "Can Negroes Afford to be Pacifists?"  
Martin Luther King Jr., "The Social Organization of Non-violence"  
Bernard Boxill, "Self-respect and Protest"

### III. Applied Political Philosophy

Depending on how quickly we move, the first two sections of class should take up about half or two thirds of the course. Whatever time is left will be taken up by trying to apply the general

discussion of justice we undertook earlier in the course to specific, controversial contemporary political issues. I will take a vote to see what people want to discuss, and then make a decision that balances the interests of class members and my own judgments about which topics are most important and interesting. Potential topics might include things like free speech, international relations, foreign aid, humanitarian military interventions, gay marriage, immigration, criminal justice, animal rights, separation of church and state, affirmative action, abortion, euthanasia, or anything else people want to talk about.

### **Texts:**

Readings for this class will be posted on Sakai. Oftentimes, you will not be responsible for the entire piece; this is both because I want to keep the length of your readings manageable and because many texts include parts which aren't too important for our purposes (for instance, those parts may address objections which we won't focus on, or attack a view which we won't discuss.) However, I will usually post the whole thing in case anyone is interested in reading non-assigned parts of it, or in case anyone would find having the entire piece helpful when writing their papers. (E.g., I may post an entire article, but you may only need to read one or two sections of it.) I will post "reading instructions" on Sakai which will tell you which parts of the assigned materials are required reading. In the case of difficult pieces, these instructions may also include a brief explanation to help you understand what the author is arguing for, some definitions, and so on. Doing the readings ahead of time will help you understand the material better and participate in class more fully. If I think people are not doing the readings, I may give pop quizzes on them which will count towards your participation grade.

### **Assignments and rubric:**

Your grade will be calculated as follows:

Participation: 20%  
First exam: 18%  
Second exam: 22%  
First paper: 18%  
Second paper: 22%

*Participation:* A major part of your participation grade will just be showing up. After two unexcused absences, your participation grade will seriously suffer. However, to get an A in participation, you should also (naturally) participate in class. A big part of philosophy is just *talking* to people. You understand your own views better by learning to articulate them to other people; you get a sense of alternatives by listening to other people articulate their views to you; you refine your views by listening to how people who disagree with you respond to them, and by responding to their responses; and so on. Each of you has different skills, different perspectives, and a different set of life experiences, and so has unique things to contribute to our investigation of philosophical issues. I know that some people *really* don't like talking in class, even when

they understand and are interested in the material; if this is your situation, talk to me and we'll work something out.

During discussions, you should also practice good classroom etiquette. We will talk about some sensitive and controversial topics in this class. Some of the authors we read, and some of the students in the class, will hold views which other students find silly, morally wrong, offensive, and possibly hurtful. It is fine to disagree, and to *passionately* disagree, with the authors we read, or other students, or me; the fact that people disagree about philosophical questions is why we have to work so hard on them. But it's important, insofar as it's feasible, to state one's own views, and to express one's disagreements with others, in a way that's considerate and respectful towards the other participants in the conversation. At the same, if something happens in class that makes you uncomfortable, let me know and I'll see what can be done about it.

*Exams:* You will have two exams, each of which will consist of a combination of multiple choice, short answer, and short essay questions. The exams exist to test your knowledge of the material we've read. At least a week before the exam, you'll get a study guide which points out particular things which you ought to know.

*Papers:* You'll also have two papers due, each of which should be about 1800 words long. The papers exist to give you a chance to *do* philosophy. You'll be asked to select an author we've read whose position you disagree with, argue against their position, and anticipate and argue against the response they might give to your objection. At least two weeks before the papers are due, you'll be given a more specific prompt with guidelines about how to write the paper and the criteria I'll use when grading it. If you have questions during the paper writing process, or if you want feedback on a draft, I'll be happy to answer any questions you have during my office hours.