

Political Philosophy Spring 2009
PHIL033 CM
Claremont McKenna College
Mondays and Wednesdays 2:45-4:00
Location: Bauer Centre 23

Instructor: Endre Begby
Office hours: Tuesdays and Thursday 10:00-12:00
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Course description

This class is designed to familiarize students with some central debates in contemporary political philosophy. Most of the readings have some bearing on a philosophical perspective which is often referred to as the Social Contract Theory, according to which political life should be thought of in terms of a contractual agreement between the members of society and the powers they elect to represent them. Our guiding question will concern what this perspective can tell us about the nature of social justice and about what we owe to each other as members of society.

For the first few weeks we will be reading material of a mostly theoretical nature, where the validity and consequences of the Social Contract Theory itself is in question. After that we turn to considering more practical questions, all the while keeping the background theoretical issues in mind. Topics to be covered include multiculturalism and religious toleration, feminism, war and humanitarian intervention, citizenship and the rights of immigrants, global poverty, the rights of future generations, and animal rights.

About the readings

There is no textbook for this class. All readings will be distributed via email and Sakai.

Requirements

Your grade for this class will be based on two papers (4-5 pages each), two exams, and participation in class. The breakdown is as follows: 1st paper 20%, Midterm 20%, 2nd paper 25%, Final 20%, Participation 15%. See below for tentative papers deadlines and exam dates.

You will not receive a final grade in this class if you do not complete all the written requirements. You will be graded along the familiar scale from A to F. I expect the average grade in the class to around B, but I reserve the right to employ the entire scale. In other words, you should not expect an A (or a B) in this class unless you do all the work, and do it well.

Papers that are turned in late without a valid excuse will be penalized by one-third of a letter grade per day. That is, a paper turned in one day late can at best achieve an A-, a paper turned in two days late can best achieve a B+, and so on. All calendar days count. This entails that no unexcused late assignment will be given higher than an F if it is turned in more than ten days after the assigned due date, and that late penalties continue to accrue over weekends and holidays.

Late work is not penalized if you have a College-recognized excuse—e.g., illness, family or personal emergency. I reserve the right to request proof of any such excuse. Always keep any documentation—e.g., plane tickets, doctors notes, traffic tickets—that can verify your excuse. Actively seek out such documentation (e.g., by doing to a doctor when sick) if you wish to ensure that your excuse will be accepted.

Other

Academic dishonesty: The college policies on cheating and plagiarism will be followed strictly. These policies – particularly the policies on plagiarism – may be more complex than you realize, and you are responsible for familiarizing yourself with them. Note that I count as plagiarism not just word-for-word copies of other people’s writings, but also unthinking paraphrases of such sources. I reserve the right to consult plagiarism-detecting software such as turnitin. A single paragraph lifted or paraphrased from an outside source can be enough to get you into trouble, so if you are at all uncertain whether you are about to turn in a plagiarized paper, you should ask me first.

This class has a Sakai page (log on through sakai.claremont.edu). This page will be my main venue for disseminating messages, assignments, syllabus updates, comments on the readings, and so on. It is your responsibility to make sure that you receive these messages. The Sakai page also has a discussion board, which I strongly encourage you to use for sharing questions, concerns, and insights about our readings and classroom discussions. I will monitor this forum and post as needed. Thoughtful contributions to the Sakai discussion forum will count toward your participation grade for this class.

Tentative schedule

1. Wed. Jan. 21: Introduction: contractualist approaches to political philosophy
(No readings.)
2. Mon. Jan. 26: Distributive justice: the entitlement theory
Robert Nozick. *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*. Ch. 7, Section 1.
3. Wed. Jan. 28: Distributive justice: the entitlement theory
Nozick cont’d
4. Mon. Feb. 2: Distributive justice: the egalitarian theory
John Rawls. *A Theory of Justice*. §§1-4, 11, 17 (excerpt).
5. Wed. Feb. 4: Distributive justice: the egalitarian theory
Rawls cont’d

6. Mon. Feb. 9: Criticism of the contractualist approach: the communitarian challenge
Charles Taylor. "The Nature and Scope of Distributive Justice."
7. Wed. Feb. 11: Criticism of the contractualist approach: the communitarian challenge
Taylor cont'd
8. Mon. Feb. 16: Can the state be neutral with regard to values?
Michael J. Sandel. "A Response to Rawls' Political Liberalism" (excerpt).
9. Wed. Feb. 18: Can the state be neutral with regard to values?
Sandel cont'd

(First paper due Monday February 23.)

10. Mon. Feb. 23: Toleration, cultural identity, and minority rights
Will Kymlicka. *Multicultural Citizenship*. Ch. 6.
11. Wed. Feb. 25: Toleration, cultural identity, and minority rights
Kymlicka cont'd
12. Mon. Mar. 2: Toleration, cultural identity, and minority rights
Susan Moller Okin. "Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women?"
Martha C. Nussbaum. "A Plea for Difficulty."
13. Wed. Mar. 4: Toleration, cultural identity, and minority rights
Okin and Nussbaum cont'd

14. Mon. Mar. 9: Review session

15. Wed. Mar. 11: *Midterm exam*

(Spring break week.)

16. Mon. Mar. 23: International justice: toleration and human rights
John Rawls, *The Law of Peoples*, Introduction and Part II
17. Wed. Mar. 25: International justice: toleration and human rights
Rawls cont'd

18. Mon. Mar. 30: International distributive justice: the problem of global poverty
Thomas Pogge. "Severe Poverty as a Human Rights Violation."
19. Wed. Apr. 1: International distributive justice: the problem of global poverty
Pogge cont'd
20. Mon. Apr. 6: International justice: can war be justified?
Brian Orend, "War."
21. Wed. Apr. 8: International justice: humanitarian intervention and regime change
Michael Walzer. *Just and Unjust Wars*. Ch. 6.
22. Mon. Apr. 13: International justice: humanitarian intervention and regime change
Walzer cont'd, plus "The Argument about Humanitarian Intervention."

(Second paper due Wednesday April 15.)

23. Wed. Apr. 15: International justice: citizenship and immigration
Joseph Carens, "Aliens and Citizens."
24. Mon. Apr. 20: International justice: citizenship and immigration
Carens cont'd
25. Wed. Apr. 22: Animal rights
Peter Singer. *Practical Ethics*. Ch. 3
26. Mon. Apr. 27: Animal rights
Singer cont'd
27. Wed. Apr. 29: The problem of intergenerational justice
Wilfred Beckerman. "The Impossibility of a Theory of Intergenerational Justice."
28. Mon. May 4: The problem of intergenerational justice
Beckerman, cont'd.
29. Wed. May 6: Review session

Final exam TBA