

Department of Philosophy  
The Colorado College  
Fall 2005 - Block 3

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Philosophy 248

## **SOCIAL AND POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY**

235 Armstrong Hall

### Course Description

This course will be, in part, an introductory survey of Western social and political philosophy and, in part, a historically informed inquiry into the problem of understanding contemporary democratic life. Some contemporary writers have argued that, when judged against the backdrop of a tradition of thought descended from Plato, our age is one of moral decay, intellectual decline, and political disarray, while others assert that the contemporary era is marked by the construction of democratic ways of living that have the potential to be truly rich morally, intellectually, and politically. The course will explore how and why such opposing interpretations have arisen, concentrating especially on what reasonable and unreasonable claims each position entails and why one may or may not come to support either claim.

### Course Goals

The primary aim of the course will be to give students an overview of Western social and political philosophy, focusing on key texts from four historical moments: the ancient Athenian democratic polis; the early modern constitutional state; the modern liberal market order; and contemporary pluralist republics. In each section of the course, we will examine two or more competing philosophical treatises that question the then-dominant understandings of society and politics, that claim to establish some better or truer interpretation of organized human life, and that suggest means for reforming or transforming society and politics in light of that interpretation. Topics to be discussed may include: the problem of truth and the role of justice in politics; the questions of whether natural laws can be identified and of what roles or obligations common people might have in constitutional states; the difficulties of understanding the social and political significance of individuality and the place of equal rights or common goods in the social order; and the problematic roles of intellectuals, patriotism, and diversity in democratic orders. The exact topics examined, however, will be shaped by the questions raised in our discussions.

Along the way, the course will introduce students to the writings of several influential political and philosophical thinkers, including Plato, Aristotle, Hobbes, Locke, Bentham, Marx, Rawls, Nozick, and Beauvoir, as well as two contemporary thinkers, the recently deceased Allan Bloom and the very much alive William Connolly.

In addition to giving an overview of social and political philosophy in the West, the course's historical inquiry will provide the class with historical and philosophical tools useful for examining a contemporary problem that may be as old as any Western tradition of thought: the possible conflict between rational order and democratic expression. To some, including thinkers as ancient as Plato and as recent as Bloom, democracy poses threats to order and reason; while to others, including in some ways Aristotle, Rousseau, Beauvoir, and Connolly, citizen participation and public deliberation promise to make the notion of democratic order a living reality. This course will seek to encourage students to look closely at all sides of such arguments and to begin thinking about what democracy may mean in a contemporary context.

Throughout the term, the course will offer students opportunities to develop their own critical reading, thinking, and writing skills.

### Course Requirements

*Reading.* This course will have a heavy yet quite rewarding reading list. Students will be expected to keep up with the reading throughout the block. Plan to spend a fair amount of time reading *before* attending class and, at times, re-reading after class. In general, texts are to be brought to our meetings so that they may be referred to in our discussions.

*Course Meetings and Discussion.* Most course meetings will consist largely of discussion, with some lecturing from time to time. Individual students may be assigned to lead discussions or to take part in debates on particular topics periodically. Students should expect to attend class meetings consistently and punctually; and to discuss the subjects and texts under investigation in a civil manner. Performance in discussions will strongly influence the participation grade.

*Writing and Examinations.* Students will write two short papers and a take-home final examination. The two papers are to be typed (i.e., word-processed), double-spaced, and annotated in accordance with accepted norms of scholarship (that is, with citations and notes). Unexcused late papers will be downgraded one step per hour tardy.

#### Required Texts

Plato, *Republic*, trans. G.M.A. Grube, rev. C.D.C. Reeve (Hackett, 1992)  
 Aristotle, *Politics*, trans. C.D.C. Reeve (Hackett, 1998)  
 Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. Edwin Curley (Hackett, 1994)  
 Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Basic Political Writings*, trans. Donald A. Cress (Hackett, 1987)  
 Karl Marx, *Selected Writings*, trans. Lawrence H. Simon (Hackett, 1994)  
 Simone de Beauvoir, *Ethics of Ambiguity*, trans. Bernard Frechtman (Citadel, 1996)  
 Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind: How Higher Education Has Failed Democracy and Impoverished the Souls of Today's Students* (Simon & Schuster, 1988)  
 William E. Connolly, *Political Theory and Modernity* (Basil Blackwell, 1988)

#### Additional Readings – on electronic reserve

Jeremy Bentham, selections from *Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* (1789), in *Modern Political Thought: Readings from Machiavelli to Nietzsche*, ed. David Wootton (Hackett, 1996), pp. 585-604.  
 John Rawls, selections from *A Theory of Justice* in *Justice and Economic Distribution*, eds. John Arthur and William E. Shaw, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Prentice Hall, 1978, 1991), pp. 13-60.  
 Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* (1974), in *Justice and Economic Distribution*, eds. John Arthur and William E. Shaw, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Prentice Hall, 1978, 1991), pp. 64-102.

Other supplemental readings may also be assigned as the block unfolds. All additional and supplemental readings will be available as electronic reserves.

#### Grading and Attendance Policies

Grades will be assigned on a 100-point scale and weighted in the following manner:

1. First paper (4-5 pages)	Tues., 8 Nov.	25%
2. Second paper (5-7 pages)	Fri., 18 Nov.	30%
3. Final examination (take-home)	Wed., 23 Nov.	35%
4. Participation		<u>10%</u>
TOTAL:		100%

Regular, timely attendance and active participation in discussion are essential parts of the course. Unexcused absences and regular tardiness will be noted and will affect grades negatively. If you have a good reason to be absent or late, notify me as soon as possible. Be sure to write a note (so that I remember!) as well as speak to me.

The schedule of assignments appears above and below. You will be expected to meet all of these deadlines. Exceptions will be made only in extreme and unavoidable circumstances. If you expect to miss the exam or submit a paper late, contact me immediately. Either see me in my office, or give me a note or an e-mail message explaining your circumstances. If religious observances or other serious obligations conflict with the course schedule, let me know as soon as possible, and we can work out an alternate schedule for you.

Plan to attend class for the whole period, focusing on coursework throughout. If you have a good reason for arriving late or leaving early, please notify me in advance in writing (e-mail is best). If you cannot notify me in advance, do so as soon as you can afterwards.

***As a courtesy to all, please turn off pagers and telephones while in class.*** Note that this entire syllabus is subject to change at the discretion of the instructor.

#### Office Hours/Communication

I will hold office hours on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 1:30-3 p.m. I am also generally be in my office (132 Armstrong) in the afternoon. The easiest way to meet with me would be to make an appointment after class, or via telephone (x6564) or e-mail (dmcennerney@coloradocollege.edu).

## SCHEDULE OF MEETINGS, TOPICS, AND ASSIGNMENTS

Note: All assignments are to be completed *before* class.

Class will meet from 9:20 a.m. to 11:45 a.m., with a 15-minute break

\* Indicates electronic reserve reading

### ***Week 1 : Truth, Justice, and the Athenian Polis***

Monday, 31 October	<u>Introduction – Political Philosophy and the Athenian Polis</u> Reading: Begin reading the Republic as soon as possible!
Tuesday, 1 November	<u>Questioning Common Sense and Searching for Justice</u> a. Plato, <i>Republic</i> I-II, pp. 1-59. b. Plato, <i>Republic</i> III-IV, pp. 60-121.
Wednesday, 2 November	<u>Philosophic Truth and the Problem of Ordinary Life</u> a. Plato, <i>Republic</i> V-VI, pp. 122-185. b. Plato, <i>Republic</i> VII, pp. 186-212.
Thursday, 3 November	<u>Idealism Confronts Politics and Pleasure</u> a. Plato, <i>Republic</i> VIII-IX, pp. 213-263. b. Plato, <i>Republic</i> , X, pp. 264-292.
Friday, 4 November	<u>Nature, the Household, and Civic Orders</u> a. Aristotle, <i>Politics</i> I-II, pp. 1-64. b. Aristotle, <i>Politics</i> III, pp. 65-100.
Monday, 7 November	<u>On Good and Bad Orders, and the Philosophy of Ruling</u> a. Aristotle, <i>Politics</i> IV-V, pp. 101-174. b. Aristotle, <i>Politics</i> VI-VIII, pp. 175-242.
Tuesday, 8 November	<u>Writing Day – No Class Meeting</u> <b>FIRST PAPER DUE AT NOON</b>

### ***Weeks 2-3: Nature, Enlightenment, and Obligation in the Early Modern European State***

Wednesday, 9 November	<u>Man, Reason, Religion, Nature and Government</u> a. Hobbes, <i>Leviathan</i> , Intro. and chaps. 1-6, 9-10 (through sect. 18), 11-12, pp. 3-35, 47-52, 57-74. b. Hobbes, <i>Leviathan</i> , chaps. 13-18, 20-22, 24, 26, pp. 74-118, 127-155, 159-165, 172-189.
Thursday, 10 November	<u>Of Sovereignty, Authority, and Modernity</u> a. Hobbes, <i>Leviathan</i> , chaps. 28-33 (through sect. 3), pp. 203-251. b. Hobbes, <i>Leviathan</i> , chaps. 42 (through sect. 11), 43-44 (through sect. 3), 46, and Review & Conclusion, pp. 333-339, 397-412, 453-468, 489-497. Suggested reading: Connelly, pp. 16-40.

- Friday, 11 November Nature in Question
- Rousseau, "Discourse on the Origin of Inequality," in *Basic Political Writings*, Part One, pp. 25-60.
  - Rousseau, "Inequality," in *Basic Political Writings*, Part Two and Notes (skim the notes), pp. 60-108.
- Monday, 14 November The Modern State in Question
- Rousseau, *The Social Contract* I-II, pp. 17-48.
  - Rousseau, *The Social Contract* III-IV, pp. 79-103.  
Suggested reading: Connelly, pp. 41-67.

### ***Week 3: Philosophies of Market Society***

- Tuesday, 15 November Maximizing Individuals or Emancipating Humans?
- \*Bentham, selections from *Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*, in Wootton, pp. 585-604.
  - Marx, "On the Jewish Question," and "Excerpt Notes of 1844," in *Selected Writings*, pp. 1-26, 40-55.
- Wednesday, 16 November Radicalizing Nature, Philosophy, and Politics
- Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* (selections), and "Theses on Feuerbach," in *Selected Political Writings*, pp. 54-101.
  - Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology* in *Selected Political Writings*, pp. 102-156.
- Thursday, 17 November Reforming Liberalism / Reprising Liberalism
- \*Rawls, selections from *A Theory of Justice*, in Arthur & Shaw, pp. 13-60.
  - \*Nozick, selections from *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, in Arthur & Shaw, pp. 64-102.
- Friday, 18 November Writing Day – No Class Meeting  
**SECOND PAPER DUE AT 5 PM**

### ***Week 4: Democracy, Order, and Diversity in the Contemporary Era***

- Monday, 21 November Confronting Modernity / Contemporary Barbarism?
- Beauvoir, *Ethics of Ambiguity*, pp. 7-159.
  - Bloom, *Closing of the American Mind*, pp. 25-88, 157-194, 336-382.
- Tuesday, 22 November Modernity, Difference, and Democracy
- Connelly, *Political Theory and Modernity*, pp. 1-15, 68-85.
  - Connelly, *Political Theory and Modernity*, pp. 86-175.
- Wednesday, 23 November Final Examination  
**TAKE-HOME FINAL EXAMINATION DUE AT NOON.**