

Department of Philosophy
The Colorado College
Fall 2006 - Block 3

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Philosophy 303 – Advanced Topics in Philosophy

CONTEMPORARY POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

Course Description

Philosophy 303 will investigate a selection of works by leading contemporary or near-contemporary political philosophers. The course will begin with a brief examination of some competing conceptions of political philosophy, followed by a survey of major works. Authors read will include Leo Strauss, Sheldon Wolin, Charles Taylor, John Rawls, Jürgen Habermas, Ronald Dworkin, Anne Phillips, Giorgio Agamben, Chantal Mouffe, and William Connolly. The concepts or topics discussed reflect concerns central to contemporary political philosophy: justice and liberalism, discourse and the public, equality and law, representation and diversity, sovereignty and human rights, and democracy and pluralism.

The course will seek to give students an overview of some of the major debates and problems that engage political philosophers today. Given the diversity of contemporary thought, however, this survey cannot be said to be comprehensive. Nevertheless, since students will write a paper (10-15 pages) requiring research beyond the assigned texts, there will certainly be opportunities for addressing topics or problems not included in the assigned readings.

Course Goals

The primary goal of the course is to give students a selective, but intensive survey of contemporary political philosophy. In addition, it will seek to enable students to gain some expertise on a problem or topic central to political philosophy today, while they also develop their own perspective on that problem or topic, or on the literature concerning that problem or topic.

The course will aim to develop students' abilities to read, interpret, and respond to complex texts. Refining and developing interpretations of the texts we read will be emphasized through a number of brief writing assignments, combined with discussion and presentations in class. A short paper after the first week will give students a quick introduction to a topic central to contemporary political thought (Rawlsian justice), while one longer paper, due at the end of the block, will allow students to develop and defend their own judgments about contemporary political philosophy in relation to problems or literatures that interest them.

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 one short paper in the first week, several brief reaction papers, and a longer research paper due at the end of the block. The two longer 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. Requirements for the reaction papers appear at the end of the syllabus.

Required Texts

John Rawls, *Justice as Fairness: A Restatement*, ed. Erin Kelly (Cambridge, MA: Belknap/Harvard UP, 2001, 2003).
 Jürgen Habermas, *The Inclusion of the Other: Studies in Political Theory*, ed. Ciaran Cronin and Pablo De Greiff (Cambridge, MA: MIT UP, 1988).
 Ronald Dworkin, *Sovereign Liberty: The Theory and Practice of Equality* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2000, 2001).
 Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, Trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1998).
 William E. Connolly, *Pluralism* (Durham: Duke UP, 2005).

Additional Readings – photocopies on regular reserve (or make your own photocopy)

Anne Phillips, *The Politics of Presence*, chaps. 1-3, 6-7, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford UP, 1995, 1998).
 Chantal Mouffe, *Democratic Paradox* (New York: Verso, 2000).

Additional Readings – electronic reserve

Leo Strauss, “What Is Political Philosophy?” in *What Is Political Philosophy? and Other Essays* (Free Press, 1959).
 Sheldon Wolin, “Political Philosophy and Philosophy,” in *Politics and Vision: Continuity and Innovation in Western Political Thought* (Boston: Brown, Little, 1960).
 Charles Taylor, “Interpretation and the Sciences of Man,” in *Philosophy and the Human Sciences: Philosophical Papers 2* (New York: Cambridge UP, 1971, 1985).
 J. Donald Moon, “The Current State of Political Theory: Pluralism and Reconciliation,” in *What Is Political Theory Today?*, ed. Stephen K. White and J. Donald Moon (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2004).
 James Tully, “Political Philosophy as a Critical Activity,” in *Political Theory* 30:4 (August 2002).
 Ronald Bleiker, “Globalizing Political Theory,” in *What Is Political Theory?*

Other supplemental readings may also be assigned as the block unfolds. All additional and supplemental readings will be available as electronic reserves. The website for this course E-Reserve readings may be accessed directly by going to:

<http://coloradocollege.docutek.com/eres/coursepage.aspx?cid=455>

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)	Fri., 3 Nov.	20%
3. Research paper (10-15 pages)	Mon., 23 Oct.	48%
3. Six reaction papers (1½-2 pages each)	Various dates.	12%
4. Participation		<u>20%</u>
TOTAL:		100%

Regular, timely attendance and active participation in discussion are essential parts of the course – worth 20% of your final grade. Unexcused absences and regular tardiness will be noted and will affect grades negatively. Students who miss three or more classes for any reason may be required to withdraw from the course. 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 to 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 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. “Attending for the whole period” means, among other things, that you will not leave class to visit the restroom, get a drink of water, chat with friends, and the like. We will take a break about after about an hour and 15 minutes – that is when you may leave class (except in an emergency, of course). If you have a good reason for arriving late or leaving early, please notify me in advance. ***As a courtesy to all, please turn off all telephones and electronic devices while in class, and if you bring a notebook computer to class, please do not surf the web while we are in session.***

Honor Code

Students will be expected to abide by the Honor Code. Among other things, the Honor Code specifies that you will be responsible for producing all of your own work and that you will always cite the works or ideas of others used in your work. However, discussing your ideas and your writing with others is *not* a violation of the Honor Code. In fact, it is a good idea to compare your ideas and writings with those of others and to ask others for criticisms of your work. And using other people’s ideas can also be a good idea – ***if*** their ideas are good ***and*** you credit the authors for developing the ideas.

Disability Accommodations

If you believe you are eligible for learning accommodations as the result of a qualified disability, please contact me privately. If you believe you may have a disability that impacts learning, and you have not self-identified to the College’s Disabilities Services Office, please do so immediately. You will find their office in the Colket Student Learning Center at Tutt Library. You may also contact the College’s learning consultant, Dr. Bill Dove, at the Learning Center or directly at extension 6168. I will make appropriate learning accommodations in accordance with the Disabilities Service Office’s instructions.

Office Hours/Communication

I will hold office hours on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 1:30-3 p.m. I am also generally in my office (130 Armstrong) in the afternoon. The easiest way to meet with me would be to make an appointment after class, or contact me via e-mail (dmcennerney@coloradocollege.edu). I can also be reached at my office phone (extension 6564).

Note that this entire syllabus is subject to change at the discretion of the instructor.

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

I. Justice and the Grounds of Contemporary Thought

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| Monday, 30 October | <u>Introduction – Political Philosophy</u>
Leave for the Baca Campus, 1 p.m. |
| Tuesday, 31 October | <u>What Is Political Philosophy?</u>
a. *Strauss, “What Is Political Philosophy,” pp. 9-55; and
*Wolin, “Political Philosophy and Philosophy,” pp. 1-27.
b. *Taylor, “Interpretation and the Sciences of Man,” pp. 15-57;
and *J. Donald Moon, “The Current State of Political
Theory,” pp. 12-29. |
| Wednesday, 1 November | <u>The Rawlsian Revolution (Group A)</u>
a. Rawls, <i>Justice as Fairness</i> , pp. 1-66.
b. Rawls, <i>Justice as Fairness</i> , pp. 66-106. |
| Thursday, 2 November | <u>Neo-Kantian Liberalism (Group B)</u>
a. Rawls, <i>Justice as Fairness</i> , pp. 106-79.
b. Rawls, <i>Justice as Fairness</i> , pp. 180-202. |
| Friday, 3 November | <u>Writing Day</u>
a. Return from Baca at 1 p.m.
b. Paper due via e-mail at 11 p.m. |

II. Discourse and the Post-Marxist Enlightened Public

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| Monday, 6 November | <u>Discourse Ethics and Reconstruction of the Public (Group B)</u>
a. Habermas, <i>Inclusion of the Other</i> , pp. vii-xxi, 3-46.
b. Habermas, <i>Inclusion of the Other</i> , pp. 49-101. |
| Tuesday, 7 November | <u>Nations, Globalization, Law, and Democracy Today (Group A)</u>
a. Habermas, <i>Inclusion of the Other</i> , pp. 130-53, 165-201.
b. Habermas, <i>Inclusion of the Other</i> , pp. 239-64. |
| Wednesday, 8 November | <u>Reading Day</u>
a. Individual meetings to discuss paper topics.
b. Read Dworkin. |

III. Equality and Law

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| Thursday, 9 November | <u>The Need for Equality (Group A)</u>
a. Dworkin, <i>Sovereign Virtue</i> , pp. 1-64.
b. Dworkin, <i>Sovereign Virtue</i> , pp. 65-119. |
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- Friday, 10 November Liberty in the Liberal Community (Group B)
 a. Dworkin, *Sovereign Virtue*, pp. 120-83.
 b. Dworkin, *Sovereign Virtue*, pp. 184-284.

IV. Representation and Sovereignty: How Do People Count?

- Monday, 13 November Representing Difference (Group B)
 a. Phillips, *Politics of Presence*, chaps. 1-3, pp. 1-83.
 b. Phillips, *Politics of Presence*, chaps 6-7, pp. 145-91.
- Tuesday, 14 November Humanity and the Sovereign Concentration Camp (Group A)
 a. Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, parts 1-2, pp. 1-115.
 b. Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, pp. 119-88.
 Suggested: *James Tully, "Political Philosophy as a Critical Activity," pp. 80-102.
- Wednesday, 15 November Reading & Writing Day
 a. Meetings to discuss research and drafts.
 b. Get ahead on readings.

V. Democracy and Philosophy in an Age of Uncertainty

- Thursday, 16 November The Challenge of Contemporary Democracy (Both Groups)
 a. Mouffe, *Democratic Paradox*, pp. 1-79.
 b. Mouffe, *Democratic Paradox*, pp 80- 140.
- Friday, 17 November Student Presentations
 a. Students present drafts to the whole class.
 b. Small group meetings to read papers.
- Monday, 20 November Postmodern Ethos? (Both Groups)
 a. Connolly, *Pluralism*, pp. 1-96.
 b. Connolly, *Pluralism*, pp. 97-169.
 Suggested: *Ronald Bleiker, "Globalizing Political Theory," pp. 124-44.
- Tuesday, 21 November Writing Day
 a. No common meeting.
 b. Individual meetings to discuss drafts.
- Wednesday, 22 November Papers Due by Noon

Two-Page Summary and Reaction Statements

Over the course of the first block, students will write at least six short, informal summary-and-reaction statements. These pieces should be divided into two parts:

- a) stating in summary form what strikes you as the most significant or interesting point (or two points) made in the assigned text or texts ($\frac{1}{2}$ – 1 page); and
- b) explaining your reaction to that aspect of the reading (1 – 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ pages).

These statements should be the equivalent of 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ - 2 word-processed, double-spaced pages – so about 375-525 words long. The format is informal: your statement should list your name, the date, the assignment (the authors, titles, and chapters/pages discussed), and your own title at the top. You should divide the statement into two parts (“Summary” and “Discussion”), one summarizing the reading's most important point or points and the other giving your reaction to the reading. You need neither quote nor cite the text, though you can, if you think it important to do so. The statements should be written in clear, Standard English prose. The style may be informal.

As you write, don't try to summarize *all* the points made in the reading. Focus on one or two points that seem highly significant *to you*. This point or these points ought to have led you to think about something that seems important, significant, or meaningful. This point or these points need not be central to the reading, although in most cases I expect they will be. You may well write about some minor aside that an author makes, if that aside has led you to begin thinking. Just be sure to explain clearly and accurately what the authors say when you claim the authors argue something. Also, explain your reaction, your interest, your thought process. When I say, “explain,” I don't mean saying that something is “interesting” or it has “made you think.” Instead, identify what *in particular* strikes you as interesting, or what *specific problems or ideas* the reading raised for you, and then give the reader some sense of why any of these ideas seem important or significant to you. What has led you to react in the way you have?

This assignment is meant to be focused both on the reading and on your thoughts insofar as they relate to the readings. For the second half of the papers, you may explain why the authors' claims seem to you wrong-headed, or really cogent; why they excite or repel you; why they have made you think of something in a new way, or why they seem to point to a dead end. You may explain why the piece seems really bad or really good to you. This assignment lets you think aloud, as it were. However, the first part of the paper should accurately summarize what the author says.

The assignment also, I hope, will further four other aims. First, it will give you a chance to work on mastering the readings, as well as to demonstrate to me that you have done the reading. If there are parts of the readings that you don't understand, then write about the problems you have in seeing the author's points. I'll try to address those problems, either directly, by commenting on your paper, or indirectly, in class. Second, these assignments are designed to give you some easy practice in writing clearly and coherently. The more you learn to clarify your thoughts on paper, the better off you will be as a writer and student. Third, your comments may provide food for thought for you and your fellow students in class discussion and when you prepare to write essays that are more formal.

These papers will be graded minimally: plus, check, check/minus, minus, zero. I may add no or only a few comments.

- Plus: a) the paper clearly and coherently develops an idea; b) it also accurately and fully summarizes what the readings say; and c) it convincingly and clearly shows why this point or line of thought is significant to you.
- Check: the paper is a serious effort that contains a reasonably accurate summary and a serious reaction.
- Minus: the paper is just thrown together, it lacks careful thought, or it is wildly inaccurate about the reading.

Pluses will earn extra credit (2.5%), with checks gaining full credit (2%), check/minus (1.5%) and minuses (1%) partial credit. I give pluses very rarely. A check is the equivalent of an “A+” already for 2% of your final grade.

There are six major works assigned in this block. You must write reaction papers on one part of the first four works of them, but you may write on additional parts – in which case only the six best grades will be counted for the final grade. No late papers will be accepted. Finally, all papers will be e-mailed not only to me, but also to the entire class, for use in our discussions.

Note: Students will be assigned to one of two groups, each of which will be assigned days and readings to write about.

Group A: Rawls (1), Habermas (2), Dworkin (1), Agamben, Mouffe, Connolly.

Group B: Rawls (2), Habermas (1), Dworkin (2), Phillips, Mouffe, Connolly.