

Department of Philosophy
The Colorado College
Fall 2010 - Block 2

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PHILOSOPHY 341

CONTEMPORARY POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Philosophy 341 will investigate a selection of works by leading contemporary or near-contemporary political philosophers. The course will begin with a brief overview of contemporary political philosophy noting the outsized influence of the recently deceased liberal American philosopher, John Rawls (1921-2002). The course will then turn to an overview of American philosophical liberalism, beginning with Rawls's general restatement of his philosophy, published shortly after his death, and followed by an investigation of one his closest liberal critics, the legal theorist, Ronald Dworkin. Next, the course will consider democratic critiques of liberalism by neo-Marxist (Jürgen Habermas), communitarian (Michael Sandel), and feminist (Iris Marion Young) philosophers. The last section of the course will examine Rawls's attempt to show how mainstream Western-liberal traditions of thought could meet the challenges of globalization. The course will close with an alternative to Rawls, the non-ideal comparative capabilities approach of the Indian Nobel laureate economist-philosopher, Amartya Sen.

The course will seek to introduce students to some of the major debates and problems that engage political philosophers today. The concepts or topics to be discussed reflect concerns central to contemporary political philosophy: justice and liberalism, equality and law, discourse and the public, community and individuality, representation and diversity, nationalism and human rights, and capabilities and globalization. Given the diversity of contemporary thought, however, this survey cannot hope to be comprehensive. Consequently, opportunities will be given for students to explore topics not included in the syllabus.

COURSE GOALS

The primary goal of the course is to give students a selective, advanced 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 due the second 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. 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 second week and later submit a longer research paper, due at the end of the block. Short reaction papers will also be assigned, as explained at the end of this syllabus. The two longer papers are to be typed (i.e., word-processed), double-spaced, and annotated in accordance with the *Chicago Manual of Style*. Unexcused late papers will be downgraded one step per hour tardy.

REQUIRED TEXTS

John Rawls, *Justice as Fairness: A Restatement*, ed. Erin Kelly (Cambridge, MA: Harvard, 2001, 2003).
 Ronald Dworkin, *Taking Rights Seriously* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1978).
 Jürgen Habermas, *The Inclusion of the Other: Studies in Political Theory*, ed. Ciaran Cronin and Pablo De Greiff (Cambridge, MA: MIT, 1988).
 Michael J. Sandel, *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge, 1982, 1998)
 Iris Marion Young, *Inclusion and Democracy* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2002).
 John Rawls, *The Law of Peoples with "The Idea of Public Reason Revisited"* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard, 2001)
 Amartya Sen, *The Idea of Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard, 2009)

ADDITIONAL PROWL READING

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).

This essay, along with other recommended readings, appear on the course PROWL site.:

<https://prowl.coloradocollege.edu/course/view.php?id=1899>

AUTHORS' INFORMATION

John Rawls, born Baltimore, MD, 1921 – died, 2002.
 Ronald Dworkin, born Worcester, MA, 1931.
 Jürgen Habermas, born Düsseldorf, Germany, 1929.
 Michael J. Sandel, born Minneapolis, MN, 1953.
 Iris Marion Young, born New York, NY, 1949 – died 2006.
 Amartya Sen, born Santiniketan, India, 1933.

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., 8 Oct. | 20% |
| 2. | Paper proposal (1 page) | Mon., 18 Oct. | 2% |
| 2. | Research paper draft and workshop | Tues., 26 Oct. | 3% |
| 3. | Research paper (8-10 pages) | Wed., 17 Oct. | 43% |
| 4. | Six reaction papers (1½ -2 pages each) | Various dates. | 12% |
| 5. | 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 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 or mute 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 (124 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 meets 9:20 a.m. to 11:45 a.m. with a 15-minute break, except as noted below.
 * Indicates electronic reserve reading on PROWL.

I. Contemporary American Liberalism: Systematic Imagining

- Monday, 4 October Introduction – The Enterprise of Political Philosophy
 a. 9-9:45 a.m.: Introduction to the course. Break. Then:
 b. 11 am – 12:15 pm: Discussion of:
 *J. Donald Moon, “The Current State of Political Theory,” pp. 12-29.
- Tuesday, 5 October The Rawlsian Revolution (Group A)
 a. John Rawls, *Justice as Fairness*, pp. 1-66.
 b. John Rawls, *Justice as Fairness*, pp. 66-106.
- Wednesday, 6 October Neo-Kantian Liberalism (Group B)
 a. John Rawls, *Justice as Fairness*, pp. 106-79.
 b. John Rawls, *Justice as Fairness*, pp. 180-202.
- Thursday, 7 October Jurisprudence and the Interpretive Ideal (Group A)
 a. Ronald Dworkin, *Taking Rights Seriously*, pp. vii-xv, 1-13, 81-130.
 b. Ronald Dworkin, *Taking Rights Seriously*, pp. 150-83.
- Friday, 8 October Liberalism as Taking Equal Rights Seriously (Group B)
 a. Ronald Dworkin, *Taking Rights Seriously*, pp. 184-239.
 b. Ronald Dworkin, *Taking Rights Seriously*, pp. 240-90.

II. Democratic Critiques of Liberalism: Critical Theory, Communitarianism, and Feminism

- Monday, 11 October Rethinking the Public and Modernity (Group A)
 a. Jürgen Habermas, *Inclusion of the Other*, pp. vii-xxi, 49-101.
 b. *Albrecht Wellmer, “Reason, Utopia, and the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, in *Habermas and Modernity*, ed. Richard J. Bernstein (MIT Press, 1985), pp. 35-66.
- Tuesday, 12 October Writing Day
 Individual appointments during the day.
FIRST PAPER DUE ON PROWL AT 5 P.M
 Topic: How is justice as fairness as a political philosophy? (4-5 pages)
- Wednesday, 13 October Rights, Ethics, and Democracy in an Era of Globalization (Group B)
 a. Jürgen Habermas, *Inclusion*, pp. 165-201.
 b. Jürgen Habermas, *Inclusion*, pp. 239-64.

- Thursday, 14 October Questioning Liberal Individualism (Group A)
 a. Michael J. Sandel, *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice*, pp. 1-65.
 b. Michael J. Sandel, *Liberalism*, pp. 104-32.
- Friday, 15 October Communitarian Morality (Group B)
 Michael Sandel, *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice*, pp. 133-218.
- Monday, 18 October Confronting Injustice (Group A)
 a. Young, *Inclusion and Democracy*, intro., chap. 1, pp. 1-51.
 b. Young, *Inclusion and Democracy*, chap. 2, pp. 52-80.
ONE-PAGE PROPOSAL FOR THE FINAL PAPER DUE
- Tuesday, 19 October Representing Difference (Group B)
 a. Young, *Inclusion*, chaps. 3, pp. 81-120.
 b. Young, *Inclusion*, chap 4, pp. 121-53.

Contemporary Political Philosophy and Globalization

- Wednesday, 20 October The Globalization of Rawls (Group A)
 (Meet 12:45-3 pm) John Rawls, *Law of the Peoples*, pp. 1-128.
- Thursday, 21 October Questioning Reason: Comparative Sentiments and Thinking (Group B)
 a. Amartya Sen, *Idea of Justice*, pp. 1-27, 52-74.
 b. Amartya Sen, *Idea of Justice*, pp. 87-113.
- Friday, 22 October Reading and Research Day
 No class. Read Sen and think about your papers.
- Monday, 25 October The Capabilities Approach and Global Justice (Make-up Group)
 a. Amartya Sen, *Idea of Justice*, pp. 155-207, 225-68,
 b. Amartya Sen, *Idea of Justice*, pp. 321-54, 388-415.
- Tuesday, 26 October Writing Workshop
 Meet in small groups to discuss paper drafts, 10 am – noon.
- Wednesday, 27 October Writing Day
FINAL PAPER DUE BY NOON.
 Topic: Open. (8-10 pages)

SUMMARY AND REACTION STATEMENTS

Over the course of the 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 (½ –1 page); and
- b) explaining your reaction to that aspect of the reading (1–1 ½ pages).

These statements should be the equivalent of 1½-2 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 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 three 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: check, check/minus, minus, zero. I may add no or only a few comments. 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. Checks will gain full credit (2%), check/minus (1.5%) and minuses (1%) partial credit. A check is the equivalent of an “A+” already for 2% of your final grade.

There are seven major works assigned in this block. You must write reaction papers on at least one part of six of these works 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. Sen (2) will be a make-up day, for anyone missing a paper or full credit.

Note: Students will be assigned to one of two groups:

- Group A: Rawls1 (part 1), Dworkin (1), Habermas (1), Sandel (1), Young (1), Rawls2.
 Group B: Rawls1 (part 2), Dworkin (2), Habermas (1), Sandel (2), Young (2), Sen (1).