PHI 175 Introduction to Social and Political Philosophy

Instructor: Christopher Bousquet, crbousqu@syr.edu
Time: T/Th 5- 6:20 pm
Office Hours: T/Th 11am-12pm on Zoom

Course Goals:

- Arguments about social and political life are regular features of our everyday experience. Whether it's deciding who to vote for, which policies to support, what job to take, whether and where to donate, how to spend one's free time, and how to treat those around you, we constantly confront the challenge of deciding how best to act. This course applies the philosophical method to these issues, focusing on how to develop, deploy, and critically analyze arguments about pressing social and political topics. The goals of this course are therefore twofold: a) gaining an understanding some of the most urgent social and political problems we face today and the most prominent philosophical approaches to those issues and b) learning to apply to philosophical method to analyze and evaluate arguments on these issues.

Grading:

Participation: 20%

- This class will be heavily discussion-oriented, so I expect students to attend every session (barring excused absences) and contribute to conversation by asking/answering questions, making comments, and talking in small groups. This is a critical (perhaps the most critical) part of what it is to "do philosophy."
- I will also ask you to submit a short response about the week's reading each Wednesday before 3 pm on Blackboard. I'll post a question each Thursday after class, to which you should respond in 200-250 words by the following Wednesday. Your response should seek to answer the question, but might also ask questions about the reading or challenge the author's argument. I'll use your responses to orient conversation on Thursday.

Exam 1: 20% (Week 8, October 21)
Exam 2: 20% (Finals Week)

Paper 1: 20% (due Week 5, Friday October 1 at 5pm)
Paper 2: 20% (due Week 11, Friday November 12 at 5pm)

- I'll ask you to write two argumentative, thesis-driven papers during the semester. These papers should reflect your considered opinion on some issue that we've covered in class, arguing in favor or against some view. In the process, you may pose objections to an author's view, resolve a lingering problem, revise an existing approach, etc. The idea is to engage with what you have read and develop your own take. Make sure to pick manageable topic, appropriate for a paper of 4-6 pages. I will give you a list of questions well before the due date, or you may choose your own topic as long as you okay it with me beforehand.

Course Schedule:

Week 1

Tuesday, Aug 31

- Introductions and Syllabus, no readings

Thursday, Sep 2

- Gutting, “Facts, Arguments and Politics”
- Gutting, “How to Argue About Politics”
- Gutting, “On Political Disagreement”

Democracy and Its Discontents

Week 2

Tuesday, Sep 7

- Anderson, “Democracy: Instrumental vs. Non-Instrumental Value”

Thursday, Sep 9

- SEP, Political Legitimacy, Section 4

Week 3

Tuesday, Sep 14

- Brennan, “The Right to a Competent Electorate”

Thursday, Sep 16

- Bradatan “Democracy Is for the Gods”

Distributive Justice

Week 4

Tuesday, Sep 21

- Rawls, “A Theory of Justice” (Sections 1-4, 11, 20, 26)

Thursday, Sep 23

- Tan, “A Defense of Luck Egalitarianism”

Week 5

Tuesday, Sep 28

- Nozick, “The Entitlement Theory of Justice”

Thursday, Sep 30

- Sher, "Effort, Ability, and Personal Desert,”
- ***Paper 1 Due Friday by 5pm***

Equality

Week 6

Tuesday, Oct 5

- Schmidtz, “Equal Respect and Equal Shares”

Thursday, Oct 7
- Anderson, "What is the Point of Equality?"

Week 7

Tuesday, Oct 12
- Frankfurt, "Equality as a Moral Ideal"

Thursday, Oct 14
- Vonnegut, "Harrison Bergeron"

Free Expression

Week 8

Tuesday, Oct 19
- Mill, On Liberty, Chapter 2

Thursday, Oct 21
- ***Exam 1, Thursday in Class***

Week 9

Tuesday, Oct 26
- Lawrence, "If He Hollers Let Him Go"

Thursday, Oct 28
- Gates Jr., "War of Words: Critical Race Theory and the First Amendment"

Political Philosophy and Race

Week 10

Tuesday, Nov 2
- Coates, "The Case for Reparations"

Thursday, Nov 4
- Sowell, "Thomas Sowell on the Origins of Economic Disparities" video

Week 11

Tuesday, Nov 9
- Yancy, "Dear White America"

Thursday, Nov 11
- McWhorter, "The Dehumanizing Condescension of White Fragility"
- ***Paper 2 Due Friday by 5pm***

Immigration

Week 12

Tuesday, Nov 16
- Kukathas, "The Case for Open Immigration"

Thursday, Nov 18
- Wellman, "Immigration and Freedom of Association"

No class November 22, 24 for Thanksgiving Break

Climate Change

Week 13

Tuesday, Nov 29

- Gardiner, "Ethics and Global Climate Change"

Thursday, Dec 1

- Cuomo, "Climate Change, Vulnerability, and Responsibility"

Work

Week 14

Tuesday, Dec 7

- Elster, "Self-Realization in Work and Politics: The Marxist Conception of the Good Life"

Thursday, Dec 9

- Thompson, "Workism Is Making Americans Miserable"

Finals Week

- ***Exam 2 during Final Exam Slot***