PHIL 240
Introduction to Political Philosophy

Wednesday / Friday, 2:35 – 3:55
Stewart Biology Building N2/2

INSTRUCTOR
Carlos Fraenkel, Dept. of Philosophy, McGill University. Email: carlos.fraenkel@mcgill.ca
Office Hours: Tuesday / Thursday 2:30 to 3:30; Office 914; Leacock Building.

TEACHING ASSISTANTS
Frédérick Armstrong and Thomas Colbourne, Dept. of Philosophy, McGill University. Email: frederick.armstrong@mail.mcgill.ca; thomas.colbourne@mail.mcgill.ca

Office Hours:
(1) Frédérick: Location: Ferrier 498. Dates: February 9th; February 13th; March 9th; March 14th; April 6th; April 10th; April 28th; May 2nd. Time: 9:30-11:30.
(2) Thomas: Location: Leacock 934. Dates: February 9th; February 14th, March 9th, March 14th; April 6th, April 11th, April 28th, May 2nd. Time: 3:30-5:30.

COURSE DESCRIPTION
Political philosophy, like ethics, is a normative discipline. It doesn’t describe political orders, but asks how a political order ought to be. It asks, in other words, what a good or just political order consists in. This leads to an inquiry into the most fundamental questions that concern our political lives: Should we join others to form a political community in the first place? If yes, what should the order of this community be? Can we do without a coercive state (as anarchists and some indigenous theorists claim)? If we need a state, how can we justify the rule of some people over others? What is the best state? How should goods be distributed? Is it right that some things are our private property? Is it right that some people own more than others? These issues have not yet been settled. While there is no shortage of answers, they remain contested. Political philosophy is this ongoing debate.

The answers that have been given vary considerable across times and places. Plato argues that a good political order can only be brought about by a philosopher-king. Religious thinkers of various stripes argue that a good political order is one that expresses God’s will. For Confucians a good political order means social harmony that is attained when all members of society—from the ruler to the servant—perform their social roles virtuously. According to Hindu political thought a good political order consists in the caste system. And so on.

In mainstream Western political thought, from the 17th century onwards, the two key political values are equality and freedom. Historically, these values were articulated in opposition to the social, political, and religious hierarchies of the feudal system. Despite this broad consensus, Western political thought is by no means uniform. What it means for a political
order to adequately express the citizens’ equality and freedom has given rise to a wide range of positions: from anarchy to liberal paternalism, from communism to libertarianism.

The main aim of this course is to acquaint students with the core issues and debates as they unfolded in Western political philosophy. The issues we will discuss include the state and its justification, democracy, liberty, distributive justice, culture, and rights.

Note, finally, that political philosophy is not just an abstract, theoretical exercise. Clarifying our views on the normative foundations of the political order also allows us to critically assess existing political orders in light of these norms. Moreover, if we live in a society in which we have political power, we can contribute to shaping the political order on the basis of the norms we have come to endorse.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

(30%) Short essay: of 1000-1250 words, due on Friday, February 17. At the beginning of February, students will be given ca.10 short essay questions. The questions will draw on the topics and readings discussed in the first part of the course up to and including February 10. Students will be required to answer their chosen essay question in light of all of the readings associated with its topic, including supplementary readings. The essay will be assessed on the basis of its (i) clarity, (ii) effort, (iii) relevance to the chosen question, (iv) critical distance from the arguments of the discussed authors, and (v) demonstration of familiarity with the relevant readings. Of particular importance is familiarity with the primary sources, excerpts from which are included in PT.

(50%) Final essay: of 2000-2500 words, due on Thursday, April 13. At the end of March, students will again be given ca.10 final essay questions. The questions will draw on topics and readings included in the entire course, though most will be related to the sections not covered in the short essay. These questions will be more ambitious than those provided for the short essay, in that they will require students to cover more material, and to make a distinct argument of their own. The same standards of evaluation that applied to the short essay will apply here, but as this is a longer essay more emphasis will be placed on critical distance. If students wish to propose a topic of their own for the final essay, including an appropriate set of readings they may do so. Please make sure to get approval from your TA beforehand in this case.

(20%) Essay outlines: In addition to the short and final essays, students must submit two essay outlines. These outlines should be one page each, written in bullet point form, single-spaced, Font size 12. They must also include some short quotes from source texts, which flesh out the proposed argument. One of these outlines (worth 10%) must be submitted along with the short essay, and must sketch an essay response to one of the short essay questions. The second outline (also worth 10%) must be submitted along with the final essay, and must outline an essay response to one of the remaining final essay question. For the outlines you cannot choose the same question that you work on in the essay. The outlines must present a concise summary of the student’s argument, clearly relate that argument to the course reading material, and employ short quotes from the relevant readings to highlight the positions being discussed. Think of the outlines along the lines of handout for an oral presentation. The goal of these outlines is to broaden the student’s familiarity with the course topics.
SUBMISSION OF ASSIGNMENTS

All assignments must be submitted **electronically** as a **Word document** via MyCourses. The essay and essay outline should be submitted as a **single** file.

To ensure unbiased assessment of your work, please submit all work **anonymously**. Name your first document “PHIL240_Assignment 1_Student No.” and your second document “PHIL240_Assignment 2_Student No.” and include the same information in the documents themselves.

EVALUATION OF ASSIGNMENTS

All assignments will be graded by the two TAs for the class. After the add-drop period all students will be assigned to one of the two TAs for the entire course. **Please address all questions concerning the assignments to your designated TA** in the first instance.

The TAs will hold two 2-hour slots of office hours in the week before and in the week of the assignment to discuss any questions about the assignments students may have. They will also hold two 2-hour slots of office hours in the week when the assignment is returned and the following week to discuss any questions students may have about their grades. For the exact dates and times, please see the section “Teaching Assistants” above.

The first essay and essay outline will be returned to students on **Monday, March 6**. The second essay and essay outline will be returned to students on **Thursday, April 27**. The final grades will be submitted on **Thursday, May 4**.

**Note:** Essays and outlines submitted late will be penalized by 1/3 grade per day (e.g. A- instead of A if the paper is one day late).

COURSE MATERIALS

1. You must acquire the following three books at “The Word” Bookstore on 469 Milton Street (payment in cash or cheque only):


2. All other texts, mandatory and supplementary, will be made available on MyCourses for download.
SYLLABUS

JANUARY

4 INTRODUCTORY CLASS SESSION

I. THE STATE OF NATURE

6 HOBBS AND LOCKE:

(2) *PT*, §1-3.

11 ROUSSEAU AND THE ANARCHISTS:

(1) *IPP*, pp. 24-33.
(2) *PT*, §4-10.

II. JUSTIFYING THE STATE

13 SOCIAL CONTRACT THEORY:

(1) *IPP*, pp. 34-49.
(2) *PT*, §18-23.

Supplementary Reading


18 UTILITARIANISM AND FAIRNESS:

(1) *IPP*, pp. 49-61.
(2) *PT*, §24-27.

20 CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE:

(2) *PT*, §30-33.
Supplementary Reading
(a) Kimberley Brownlee, “Conscientious Objection and Civil Disobedience”
Forthcoming in The Routledge Companion to the Philosophy of Law. Andrei Marmor (ed.)

III. DEMOCRACY

25 PLATO’S CHALLENGE:
(1) IPP, pp. 62-77.
(2) PT, §34-35.

Supplementary Reading

27 ROUSSEAU AND THE GENERAL WILL:
(1) IPP, pp. 77-90.
(2) PT, §36-39.

FEBRUARY

1 GENERAL ISSUES:
(1) IPP, pp. 90-103.
(2) PT, §40-48.

IV. FREEDOM

3 THE HARM PRINCIPLE:
(1) IPP, pp. 104-127.
(2) PT, §53-56

Supplementary Reading

8 POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE LIBERTY:
(1) Adam Swift, Political Philosophy, Chapter 2, pp. 57-73, 82-94.
(2) *IPP*, pp. 128-133.
(3) *PT*, §49-52.

**Supplementary Reading**

10 **TOLERATION:**

(2) *PT*, §57-60.

**Supplementary Reading**

15 **The PUNISHMENT OF EVIL AND THE DEATH PENALTY:**

(3) *PT*, §70-72.

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V. JUSTICE

17 **PRIVATE PROPERTY:**

(1) *IPP*, pp. 134-144.
(2) *PT*, §73-81.

22 **THE FREE MARKET:**

(1) *IPP*, pp. 144-153.
(2) Adam Swift, *Political Philosophy*, Chapter 2, pp. 73-82.
(3) *PT*, §82-86.

**Supplementary Reading**
RAWLS AND NOZICK:

(1) IPP, pp. 152-178.
(2) PT, §87-97.

Supplementary Reading
(a) Adam Swift, Political Philosophy, Ch. 1, pp. 11-56.

MARCH

1 READING WEEK

3 READING WEEK

8 JUSTICE FOR EVERYONE, EVERYWHERE?

(1) IPP, pp. 179-215.
(2) PT, §106-108.

Supplementary Reading

VI. CULTURE

10 MINORITY RIGHTS:

(2) PT, §104-105.

Supplementary Reading

15 NATIONALISM AND COSMOPOLITANISM:
VII. RIGHTS

17 THEORIES OF RIGHTS:

(2) *PT, §66-69.*

22 HUMAN RIGHTS:

(2) *PT, §136-140.*

Supplementary Reading
(a) John Stuart Mill, “A Few Words on Non-Intervention” in *Foreign Policy Perspectives*, No. 8, 1859, pp. 2-6.

24 MORAL ARGUMENT ACROSS CULTURES:


Supplementary Reading
VIII. LIBERALISM AND ITS CRITICS

29  CONSERVATIVES AND COMMUNITARIANISM:

*PT*, § 109-117.

Supplementary Reading

31  SOCIALISM:

(2) *PT*, § 118-120.

APRIL

5  SOCIALISM CONT’D:

(2) *PT*, § 121-123.

7  COURSE CONCLUSION

MANDATORY COMPONENTS OF THE COURSE SYLLABUS

Academic Integrity:

“McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore, all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures” (see [www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/](http://www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/) for more information).

Language of Submission:

“In accord with McGill University’s Charter of Students’ Rights, students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French any written work that is to be graded. This does not apply to courses in which acquiring proficiency in a language is one of the objectives.”