

# Political Philosophy<sup>1</sup>

Spring 2023

New College of Florida - CRN 24222 - PHIL 2170

Prof. Nicolas Delon

Mon & Thurs, 12:30 am - 1:50 pm, ACE 201

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## Course description

This course provides a broad introduction to political philosophy, both its history and contemporary issues, and covers some issues in philosophy of law. Topics covered include theories of justice, political legitimacy, democracy, liberalism, the private-public distinction, urban policy, policing, positivism and natural law, and ideals and utopia. At the end of this class, the student should have a solid command of central issues, concepts, and theories in political and legal philosophy; be able to write and communicate effectively about these issues, and relate them to the views of central figures (both historical and contemporary); be able to appreciate the social and historical context in which those views were shaped as well as their relevance to contemporary social issues.

**Attributes and requirements fulfilled:** CYC Breadth - Humanities, CYC Ethical Reasoning, CYC Inquiry & Analysis, CYC Teamwork, Environmental Studies eligible, First-Year Appropriate Course, Gender Studies eligible, Humanities, Philosophy (Value Theory)

## **Recommended introductory texts (not required)**

- Jonathan Wolff, *Introduction to Political Philosophy*. Revised edition. Oxford UP, 2006.
- Will Kymlicka, *Contemporary Political Philosophy: An Introduction*. Second edition. Oxford UP, 2001.

## Course Evaluation

**Please refer to Canvas for deadlines and announcements.** You are expected to complete all assignments unless they are marked as optional. Most of the assignments should be submitted to Canvas. Don't wait until the last minute to submit in case you face technical issues, and always save and back up your drafts. Don't write in Canvas first; draft, save, and back up on your own device and ideally cloud-based storage, then copy to Canvas. Check your email daily and Canvas frequently. I will communicate with you via your New College Gmail account and Canvas announcements, so make sure it is up and running and that you receive notifications for new Canvas announcements.

**For reading and writing purposes,** Jim Pryor (NYU) offers valuable guidance on his website.

- Philosophical terms and methods (<http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/vocab/index.html>)
- Reading philosophy (<http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/reading.html>)
- Writing a philosophy paper (<http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/writing.html>)

One of the goals of this class is to develop. Finally, this class will have you **work in teams** to collectively explore a topic of public importance under a philosophical light. Teamwork consists in the coordination of individual team members to achieve a joint goal and is assessed in terms of three main components: the collective process, its outcome, and each individual's contribution (timely completion of assigned tasks, communication with the group, participation in integrated efforts, and written reflection). Teamwork involves meetings,

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<sup>1</sup> Materials and dates subject to change. Please refer to the most up-to-date version of the syllabus available on Canvas. Thanks to Spencer Case, Alan Levinovitz, JP Messina, Jake Monaghan, Felipe Pereira, and Marcus Schultz-Bergin for their recommendations.

coordination, distribution of tasks, constructive contributions, and independent work outside of team meetings. In this class you will deploy course materials *and* research to present your project to the class. The purpose of teamwork is to train students to work together and to achieve collective outcomes that would be infeasible or harder individually. It seeks to foster valuable dispositions to coordinate action, distribute tasks, integrate content from multiple sources, contribute to joint projects, and respond to conflict and challenges. These subskills are essential to a lot of jobs as well as academic research and administration.

Another goal is to learn about and cultivate **ethical reasoning**. Ethical reasoning concerns ethical concepts (good/bad, just/unjust, right/wrong, value, obligation) as they are deployed in theories, arguments, and choices. Ethical reasoning straddles theory and practice and helps students apply their intellectual skills to matters of moral significance and appreciate a plurality of values. The purpose of ethical reasoning is to develop an intellectual toolkit to think and reason about ethical issues in context and across contexts, to illuminate unquestioned practices from an ethical perspective. Rather than teaching how to act ethically, we aim to think about ethical issues (critically, considering various perspectives and arguments) and integrate abstract theories, case studies, and perhaps look at ways of living ethically.

Finally, this class will foster the skills of **inquiry and analysis**. *Inquiry* is a systematic process of exploring issues, objects or works through the collection and analysis of evidence that results in informed conclusions or judgments. *Analysis* is the process of breaking complex topics or issues into parts to gain a better understanding of them.

You will develop these CYC skills through a series of readings, discussions, and assignments. Activities will include balanced, constructive class discussions, essay questions, reading responses, and essays.

**Evaluation criteria:** a balance of structure, rigor, and clarity; a solid command of references and course-related materials; critical thinking; originality. Most specifically, and in relation to CYC skills:

- Clear writing and effective and competent oral communication
- Clearly laid out arguments and evidence
- A demonstrated effort to unpack and explicate assumptions
- The consideration of objections and of multiple theories and values
- The application of such theories and their implications to the case at hand
- Contributing respectfully and constructively to discussions and group meetings
- Timely completion of assigned tasks

Tests are graded on a numerical basis. Papers and presentations are graded on a qualitative (SAT) scale.

## **Assignments (see Canvas modules for details and dates)**

**3 quizzes** (multiple-choice questions) (5% each)

**Midterm exam** (take-home, essay questions) (15%).

Quizzes will help you assess your command of materials (central concepts, theories, and facts), which are essential for doing well on other assignments and for applying the course materials to real-world problems. You will receive detailed instructions for the exam, which will test your reasoning and analytical skills rather than your command of content. You will be asked to apply theories, arguments, and, if possible, facts, to a new case study (real or fictional) to illuminate the ethical issues at hand and offer possible approaches.

Tests cover all materials up to test day. SAT  $\geq$  60% avg.

**Commentaries** (20%): There will be at least five commentaries, i.e. short assignments, to be submitted the evening before the class for which they are due. Missing two or more may be grounds for an unsatisfactory evaluation. Students are encouraged to adopt and defend positions at odds with their personal opinions. One of the assignments will involve having a conversation about a politically controversial topic with an acquaintance you expect will disagree with you and reflecting on it beforehand and afterward.

**Response papers** (20%) Two 1,000-word essays (10 pts each), due one week after the date they are assigned. One of the essays will be a letter concerning political disagreement (details tba). Points deductions for each day late. Each essay will be in response to a question designed to assess your critical understanding of the material and ability to apply concepts from the class to selected case studies.

**Collaborative project** (20%) The project seeks to offer a valuable experience researching in depth a case study or practical application in light of concepts, arguments, and theories discussed in class, along with classmates who may share an interest in the topic but not necessarily their moral or political beliefs. The topic will not have been extensively discussed in class, to allow students to apply and transfer learning to a new context: it can be any specific issue of public interest. The project includes a proposal, periodic check-ins, an oral presentation with slides and/or another deliverable, and individual reflection essays. Creative, innovative, multimedia, field-based projects are welcome.

**Participation** (10%) I will assess your demonstrated capacity to engage with arguments, verify assertions, research facts, unpack implicit assumptions, critically examine your positions, and work with the class with mutual respect, concern and dedication. Most importantly, we're all here to learn what can make our lives better, so be an active participant and help others achieve this goal. Missing classes mechanically affects your participation, and therefore your evaluation. That said, there may always be good reasons to miss a class, in which case your performance will not be negatively affected. It's understandable that some of you are shyer than others, and less willing to speak their mind in class. You should not. There is no such thing as a silly question (unless it's clearly answered in the syllabus), a view not worth sharing because it's not popular, or an authorized point of view that students should take. Please feel welcome to express yourself as long as you do so respectfully, in good faith, and following course policies.

## Policies

**Laptop use is discouraged. Cell phones must be silenced and stowed away.** Electronic devices cause serious distractions for yourself and others, except if they are necessary for note-taking. Handouts will be provided regularly, and slides made available after class. You will need a computer or smartphone for some class activities. I will notify you in advance in such cases.

**Lateness/Extensions:** Out of fairness to other students and out of concern for my schedule, plan ahead and advise early if you anticipate that you will be unable to complete an assignment in time. Extensions will only be granted in exceptional circumstances **and** if requested with a minimum of a week's notice. As a rule, do not count on extensions as they will only be granted on a case-by-case basis. "Technical issues" will not normally be accepted as excuses (again, plan ahead).

**Attendance** is mandatory. Missing more than three classes without permission will normally result in an UNSAT and any unjustified absence will affect your evaluation. I will keep track of absences. Please email me **before missing class whenever possible (or ASAP after class)**. You are solely responsible for catching up with missed materials and pertinent information. Please seek help from me or your classmates and never hesitate to ask questions, consult resource centers (writing resource center, library, quantitative reasoning). Really, needing help is expected and there are no silly questions. Silly is not asking questions when you need.

**Disability services and accommodation:** I am committed to providing an inclusive and effective learning environment for all students regardless of ability status. I will do my best to provide alternatives for materials and tests when applicable. Students in need of academic accommodations for a disability may consult with the office of Student Disability Services (SDS) to arrange appropriate accommodations (<https://www.ncf.edu/disability-services-ncf>, HCL3, (941) 487-4496, [disabilityservices@ncf.edu](mailto:disabilityservices@ncf.edu)). To ensure that I can work with Student Disability Services to provide the resources that you need, please alert me of your accommodation eligibility as early as possible and request testing accommodation in writing at least 10 days before scheduled date of the exam listed on the syllabus. If obtaining accommodations from the SDS is itself challenging for you, let me know so I can help you. To increase accessibility, especially in the event of students having to stay home

for illness or COVID-19 symptoms, I will attempt to record class meetings. I will maintain recordings for at least the entire academic year. Students reserve the right to access the recordings.

**Academic honesty:** Students are expected to be familiar with the college's [academic dishonesty policy](#). Any violation of this policy, including plagiarism and cheating, may result in academic sanctions, up to and including, dismissal.

**Religious observance:** Please alert me as soon as possible if an assignment is due on a day or at a time when you are prohibited from participating by your religious beliefs. I will gladly accommodate any missed day for religious reasons.

**Title IX:** New College of Florida is committed to equal access to education pursuant to Title IX of the Educational Amendments of 1972. The law protects all individuals on our campus from gender-based discrimination or exclusion or instances of sexual misconduct. All full-time faculty, full-time staff, and resident advisors are Responsible Employees required to report any known instances of sexual misconduct or gender discrimination to the Title IX Coordinator. Please contact our Title IX coordinator ([titleix@ncf.edu](mailto:titleix@ncf.edu)) or visit the [website](#) for more information. Sexual assault awareness is important for our community to be vibrant and to have free exchange of ideas in a safe environment. The Victim Advocate number is (941) 504-8599; with 24-hour availability for assistance with crime, sexual assault, and partner violence. Sexual Assault does not discriminate between age, gender, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, ethnicity, or race. It is important to have a clear understanding of what sexual assault is and is not, as well as the resources available for sexual assault prevention and survivor support. More information is at [www.ncf.edu/sexual-assault-awareness](http://www.ncf.edu/sexual-assault-awareness).

**Equity, Diversity, and Equal Opportunity:** New College's commitment to academic excellence can only be realized in a learning environment that is inclusive, characterized by openness to diverse perspectives, and marked by mutual respect. Anything short of this aspiration is inconsistent with our commitment. Equal access, and the opportunity to participate fully in all of our programs and facilities, without regard to race, color, creed, religion, political ideology, national origin, age, marital status, disability, public assistance status, veteran status, gender identity, gender expression, or sexual orientation, is essential to that commitment and will be the standard to which we expect all members of our learning community to adhere.

**HB 233** ("Viewpoint Diversity" bill): Students may record classroom lectures without a requirement for prior notice and without the faculty member's consent, with specific limitations on where and how those recordings can be use. In particular, "a recorded lecture may not be published without the consent of the lecturer," and it may be employed only "for a student's own personal educational use", "in connection with a complaint to the public institution of higher education where the recording was made", and/or "as evidence in, or in preparation for, a criminal or civil proceeding". Recorded lectures used for other purposes may allow the faculty member to seek "damages plus court costs and reasonable attorney fees." A class lecture does not include student presentations, academic exercises involving student participation, assessments (quizzes, tests, exams), or private conversations between students in the class or between a student and the instructor during a class session.

## Schedule

*see Canvas modules for complete details*

### **UNIT 1: The basic problems**

#### **The state of nature and the social contract** (Weeks 1-2)

- Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ch. 13-21
- Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, bk V, ch. 7
- Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, ch. 1-10
- Rousseau: *The Social Contract*, bk I
- Also discussed: Rousseau, *Discourse on the Origins and Basis of Inequality Among Men*; Hume, "Of the Original Contract"; Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*

#### **Political authority and the rule of law** (Weeks 3-5)

- Huemer on the problem of political authority
- Plato, *Laws*, bk III, *Crito*, *The Apology*
- Aristotle, *Politics*, bk I, §1-7
- Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, bk II
- Machiavelli, excerpts from *The Prince*
- Confucius, Mengzi, Han Feizi, excerpts
- Burke, excerpt from *Reflections on the Revolution in France*
- Brennan, on the case for epistocracy (Vox interview)

#### **Justice and fairness** (Week 6)

- Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, bk V, ch. 2
- Smith, Excerpt from *Theory of Moral Sentiments*
- Rawls, Excerpt from *A Theory of Justice*
- Martin Luther King, Jr., excerpts from *The Trumpet of Conscience*

### **UNIT 2: Liberalism and its discontents**

#### **Feminism and liberal society** (Weeks 8-9)

- Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*
- J.S. Mill, *On the Subjection of Women*
- Pateman, *The Sexual Contract*, ch. 1
- Chambers, "Against Marriage"

#### **Liberty, equality, property** (Weeks 9-10)

- J.S. Mill, *On Liberty*, ch. 1-4
- Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, lectures 1, 2 and 4
- Kymlicka, "Liberalism and communitarianism"
- Nozick, "Distributive justice", from *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*
- Anderson, excerpts from *Private Government*

### **UNIT 3: Cities, laws, and policing**

#### **Cities and urban policy (Week 11)**

- Schafran, Noah Smith, Hall, experts from *The Spatial Contract*
- Del Pozo, "The Heartbeat of the City"
- Young, "City life and difference"

#### **Natural law and positivism (Week 12)**

- H.L.A. Hart, excerpts *The Concept of Law*
- Dworkin, excerpts from *Taking Rights Seriously*

#### **Ideals, Idealization, Policing (Weeks 13-14)**

- Mills: "'Ideal theory' as ideology"
- Monaghan, "Idealizations and ideal policing"
- Shelby, *The Idea of Prison Abolition* (excerpts/interview)
- Del Pozo on police discretion (*Hi-Phi Nation* podcast)
- Butler, "The Book of Martha"