

PHIL235 Expanded Course Outline

We will begin by exploring some fundamental philosophical disputes about the political order, as well as introducing some concepts from the social sciences, esp. economics, that we will need in order to understand the political/legal order more clearly. This involves the first 4 chapters of the textbook as well as some supplementary material. We will look at questions including the following: regarding the perennial problem of *authority*: what, if anything, creates it? What are its bounds? Why have “the state” in the first place? What is “the state”? What are rights? What do “liberal” and “conservative” mean? What is “rational choice”? Do economists use the word “rational” differently than philosophers? In what way does this present us with competing conceptions of altruism? What accounts for social cooperation? Can human decision making be modeled? To what end? What are incentives? What is cost? Do economists use the word “value” differently than philosophers? What is “property”? You’ll notice that not only are there differences between philosophers and economists on how to understand property, there’s not even a consensus among philosophers. This first few weeks’ stretch will include our first visiting speaker.

We will then consider the social phenomenon known as markets. How do they work? What are their advantages and disadvantages? What does “market failure” mean? What are some arguments for and against government action as a corrective? What is socialism? What do we learn from social science about things like “collective action problems” and “regulatory capture”? What is “cost-benefit analysis” and how might it inform philosophical analysis? This involves material in chapters 5, 6, 9, 10. Our second visiting speaker will come around this time.

What are some of the leading theories of justice? What is the best way to understand equality? What about inequality? What is democracy, and what are some arguments for and against it? Can democracy and liberty coexist? Is paternalism justified? This material involves the readings in chapters 7, 8, 11, 12. We have a 3rd guest speaker during this block.

The last week or two we will spend considering issues such as in chapter 13, where we can see how both the philosophical theories we’ve studied and the insights we’ve garnered from the social sciences combine to give us enhanced ability to understand and make judgements about different policies.