

PHIL 235 Political Philosophy
Syllabus – keep handy for reference

Fall 2021

Dr. Aeon J. Skoble
341 Tillinghast, x2460
Email: askoble@bridgew.edu Web: <http://webhost.bridgew.edu/askoble>
Office hours: M 10-11, TTH 11-12, or by appointment

Required Texts:

Philosophy, Politics, and Economics, ed. by Anomaly/Brennan/Munger/Sayre-McCord
Additional readings and videos posted online

Overview and objectives:

This course is about the application of *philosophical analysis* to *concepts and institutions* of the political/legal order. Questions of social and political philosophy include things like: what are some different theories of the grounding, nature, and scope of rights? What is meant by “human” rights? What is the relationship between “economic” and “civil” liberties? What, if anything, justifies political authority? Is government a corrective to markets, or is it the other way around? What is the relationship between economics and the political/legal order? What is property? Does democracy work? What are communism and fascism? For that matter, what do words like “liberal” and “conservative” mean? Can liberty and equality coexist? What is justice? Is revolution legitimate? What are power and privilege? We will investigate these and related questions in several ways: our 26 class meetings, most of the 13 chapters of the textbook, some guest speakers, and some online resources.

Course objectives will be to learn about these issues, and to develop improved skill in the following:

- 1, careful reading of philosophical texts from classic and contemporary sources
- 2, analysis and argumentation as applied to philosophical questions about both theories and institutions of the political order
- 3, concise and insightful writing about 1 and 2

Requirements:

First of all, please note that you are required to do all assigned readings and viewings, whether from the texts, on handouts, or on the internet, and to be prepared to comment on them if called on in class to do so. Repeated unpreparedness indicates that you are not taking the class seriously and will result in grade reduction as appropriate. Also, regular attendance is a requirement of the class. This is a reflection of the fact that the primary vehicle for learning the material is the class itself, of which you should see yourself as a part. Obviously there is such a thing as a good reason to miss class, but be sure you limit your absences to such occasions, as absences in excess of three will result in reduction of overall grade no matter what your average is. Excessive lateness will count as one or more absences -- besides being disruptive, you are *missing something*. If you do have to miss class, or a guest speaker, it is your responsibility to get the notes, and any announcements or additional assignments, from a classmate.

In general, try to observe some of the ground rules of civilized society: Anything with an off switch should be off (as should, ideally, hats), eat and drink quietly and discreetly, don't read the newspaper or do homework for another class, don't go to sleep. You are not to use your phone, laptop, or tablet during class. Disruptive behavior will result in your being asked to leave. Conversely, constructive participation will be rewarded. Please be attentive to the distinction between *criticizing an idea* and *personal attacks*. Disagreement is productive, angry fighting is not.

Subject to adjustments as noted above, your grade will primarily be calculated thus:
Weekly response: each week, with one or two exceptions, I will ask you to respond to some question or reflect on some problem. You will reply via email not later than Sunday at noon. Your reply need not be more than a paragraph, but must demonstrate critical reflection and real engagement with the material. Successful completion of all weekly responses=40%

Two short papers (approx. 3 pages) Typically an expansion of a weekly response, these are standard essays. @30% each=60%

Course Outline (subject to change):

The outline below should give you an approximate idea of how things will proceed, but I reserve the right to alter this if it seems necessary or advantageous.

Sept. 2 Introduction to topic and course, discussion of syllabus
Sept. 7-9 Chapters 1-4 plus supplemental material - See Expanded Course Outline
Sept. 14-16
Sept. 21
Sept. 23 – guest lecture, class meets in DMF120
Sept. 28-30 Chapters 5, 6, 9, 10 – See ECO
Oct. 5-7
Oct. 12-14
Oct. 19
Oct 21 – guest lecture, class meets in DMF120
Oct. 26-28 Chapters 7, 8, 11, 12 – see ECO
Nov. 2-4
Nov. 9 (BSU closed 11/11)
Nov. 16-18
Nov. 23 (BSU closed 11/25)
Nov. 30-Dec. 2 Chapter 13 – see ECO
Dec. 7 Conclude (12/9=Reading Day) – last paper due **12/13, 9:00AM**

Other notes:

*If you're finding the subject matter interesting, consider getting involved with the BSU Philosophy Club, which is student-run and meets regularly. They publish a journal also.

* This course counts towards the general major in Philosophy, the Philosophy major with Concentration in Social/Political Philosophy, the minor in Philosophy, and the interdisciplinary minor in Philosophy, Politics, and Economics (PPE). Please see me if you are interested in exploring any of those options. Study in these fields offers excellent preparation for a variety of careers, especially law, public policy, and management.