

POLS 335: Political Philosophy and Theory
Ryan Koch

This course in political thought will pivot around one central question: are politics and ethics mutually exclusive modes of thinking? A related question could also be posed: is it possible to conceive a policy without treating individual persons as somehow equivalent, the same as, or even identical to other persons? It is a frequent occurrence to confront demographic information in political discourse. Persons are commonly categorized along racial, socio-economic, linguistic, sexual and many other identity labels. At every turn, there are thresholds of solidarity and individuality that open onto the question of politics, ethics and action.

In this course, we will survey perennial questions of political philosophy through a roughly chronological treatment of several canonical political thinkers. This question of ethics/politics will provide students with an acute (albeit singular) standard to interrogate the prominent thoughts of several thinkers that students are likely to encounter in life as well as in further studies. After having thought critically through this one question, students will then be in a better position to ask after these thinkers' relations to political history and contemporary thought and events.

This course will lay more importance on depth than breadth. We will do intense readings of short length. We will read short passages multiple times to reveal their complexity and develop unique interpretations. Adopting a format of intense reading aims to equip students with intellectual ownership of the concepts covered. Class time will be used to exercise this ownership. This will be a practical course in politics that focuses on the skills of careful reading, logical argumentation and persuasive oral communications.

Learning Objectives

- This course has a Contemporary Ethical Issues (E) Focus designation. Contemporary ethical issues are fully integrated into the main course material and will constitute at least 30% of the content. At least 8 hours of class time will be spent discussing ethical issues. Through the use of lectures, discussions and assignments, students will develop basic competency in recognizing and analyzing ethical issues; responsibly deliberating on ethical issues; and making ethically determined judgments.
- This course has an Oral Communication Focus designation. Each student will participate in 3 oral communications activities that develop both argumentative dialogue and persuasive expression.

Oral Communications Activities

The three oral communications exercises build upon one another. In the first exercise, students will imitate Socratic Questioning. This method starts from a position of apparent humility and ignorance to guide another into an elaboration his or her own presuppositions. For this assignment, individuals will facilitate class discussion on a difficult piece of text by asking skillful questions that help both interlocutors push their understanding of the concepts further. The second activity, Structured Debate, will model Socratic Questioning, however, the roles of two interlocutors will switch back and forth. This time, participants responding to questions will

be equipped with classic rhetorical skills. These skills will inject a measure of objectivity into structured responses. Higher-order structure trains speakers to impart more reflection and empathy into oral communications. This kind of oral communication is less reactionary and more strategic. The final activity, Research Presentation, completes a progression from Socratic ignorance to an authoritative position in an area of knowledge. By this time in the course, students will have gained a nuanced appreciation for their audience through the practice of asking questions. They will have practiced strategic oral communications through debate. This activity builds upon these previous skills by incorporating the popular genealogical approach to explaining the contemporary condition. A successful final project/presentation will have asked a question that has never been asked, strategically anticipate presuppositions and subsequently explain a taken-for-granted phenomenon of contemporary life in a sustained, informative oral presentation.

Grading

- 60% Oral Communications (dialogue facilitation, rhetorical and argumentative skills)
- 20% Weekly papers (1-page position papers that apply ethical/political analysis of weeks' topics)
- 20% Final paper (5-page persuasive paper that argues both sides of an ethical issue)

Required text

-Wolin, Sheldon S. *Politics and Vision: Continuity and Innovation in Western Political Thought*. Princeton, NJ, United States: Princeton University Press, 2004.

-Supplementary items provided in class

Academic Conduct

Students must fully comply with the University of Hawaii Student Conduct Code Policies and the policies the Department of Political Science. Please review these policies at the following website: http://www.studentaffairs.manoa.hawaii.edu/policies/conduct_code

Course Calendar

Week One: Politics/Ethics

- 1: Introductory lecture on politics and ethics.
In class discussion of Spinoza's *Ethics*
Homework: "Political Philosophy," Reading: Chapter 1, Section 1,2 (What is political philosophy?)
- 2: In class Plato's *Laws* and facilitated Socratic dialogue on Wolin
Homework: Chapter 2, Section 1 and selections of 4 (The origins of political philosophy)
- 3: In class discussion of Plato's *Republic* and facilitated Socratic dialogue on Wolin
Homework: Chapter Two, Section 7 (Holding the state together)
- 4: In class discussion of Epicurean selections and facilitated Socratic dialogue on Wolin
Homework: Chapter 3, Section 3 (Rejecting the state)
- 5: In class discussion of Confucius' *Analects* and facilitated Socratic dialogue on Wolin
Homework: 1 page position paper on self-sufficiency vs. the greater good

Week Two: Homes and Cities

{Contemporary Ethics: Conflict of Interest: Public and Private Life}

- 1: In class discussion of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* and structured ethical debate
Homework: Chapter 3, Section 1 (Politics and empire)
- 2: In class discussion of Xenophon's *Oeconomicus* and structured ethical debate
Homework: Chapter 3, Section 4 (Roman Politics)
- 3: In class discussion of Cicero and his *de Oratore* and structured ethical debate
Homework: Chapter 4, Section 1, 6 (Christianity and politics)
- 4: In class discussion of Augustine's *City of God*
Homework: Chapter 5, Section 7 (Aquinas) and structured ethical debate
- 5: In class discussion of Aristotle's *Rhetoric* followed by full-class debate on the balance of sovereignty
Homework: 1 page position paper refining positions of class debate

Week Three: The Expedience of Politics

{Contemporary Ethics: Ethics and Policing}

- 1: In class discussion of Machiavelli's *The Prince* and structured ethical debate
Homework: Chapter 7, Section 2 (Role of the political theorist)
- 2: Continue discussion of *The Prince* and structured ethical debate
Homework Chapter 7, Section 5, 6 (Violence, society and privacy)
- 3: In class discussion of Hobbes' *Leviathan* and structured ethical debate
Homework: Chapter 8, Section 1, 2 (Science and politics)
- 4: Continue discussion of *Leviathan* and structured ethical debate
Homework: Chapter 8 Section 5 (Humans and the state of nature)
- 5: In class review of Aristotle's *Rhetoric* followed by full-class debate on political necessity vs. the good
Homework: 1 page position paper refining position of class debate

Week Four: Politics, Government and Economics

{Contemporary Ethics: Journalistic Ethics: News or Propaganda}

- 1: In class discussion of Smith's *Wealth of Nations* and structured ethical debate
Homework: Chapter 9, Section 3 (Liberalism)
- 2: In class discussion of Locke's *Two Treatises on Government* and structured ethical debate
Homework: Chapter 9, Section 5 (Accommodating "Nature")
- 3: In class discussion of Malthus' *Essay on Population* and structured ethical debate
Homework: Chapter 9, Section 6 (Darwinism, growth and limits)
- 4: In class discussion of Bentham's *Principles of Morals and Legislation* and structured ethical debate
Homework: Chapter 9, Section 7 (Regulative ideals)
- 5: In class discussion of Rousseau's *The Social Contract* followed by full-class debate on models of governance
Homework: Chapter 10, Section 4 (Community revisited) and 1 page paper

Week Five: Forces Bigger than Politics

{Contemporary Ethics: Ethics and War: Military Superiority as Deterrent}

- 1: In class discussion of Marx's *Communist Manifesto* and structured ethical debate

- Homework: Chapter 12, Section 3 (Organization revisited)
- 2: In class discussion of Nietzsche *Twilight of the Idols* aphorisms and structured ethical debate
Chapter 13, Section 13, 14 (Masses)
 - 3: In class discussion of Weber's *Politics as a Vocation* and structured ethical debate
Homework: Chapter 10, Section 12 (Disenchantment)
 - 4: In class discussion of Dewey's *The Place of Habit in Conduct* and structured ethical debate
5: Chapter 14, Section 8,9,10 (Education and government)
 - 5: In class discussion Arendt's *The Human Condition* followed by full-class debate on balance of security and privacy
Homework: Chapter 4 of *The Human Condition*

Week Six: The Social Sphere

- 1: In class discussion of Habermas' *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*
Homework: Chapter 2, Section 6 in Habermas
- 2: In class discussion of Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*
Homework: Chapter 13, Sections 2, 3 and 6 (Legacy of Nietzsche)
- 3: In class discussion of Deleuze *Postscripts on the Societies of Control* followed by debate on agency and politics.
Homework: Final Papers
- 4: Final Paper Presentations
- 5: Final Paper Presentations