

# PH201C Political Philosophy

## 2023-2024

Department of Philosophy  
School of Divinity, History, Philosophy and Art History  
University of Aberdeen

Course Coordinator & Lecturer: Dr Eilidh Beaton

### Course Description

In this course, we will sample a range of topics in Western analytic political philosophy. Examples of questions we will address include: What, if anything, makes states legitimate? Are mainstream accounts of state legitimacy grounded in an objectionably idealistic picture of political history? What does it mean to be free, and what kind of freedom is properly a matter of political concern? Do states have obligations to redistribute wealth from the affluent to the less well-off? If inequality does matter, what kind of inequality should states seek to regulate and why?

Along the way, we will engage with a range of historical and contemporary texts. Students will be encouraged to reflect on how their views on topics in political philosophy develop as the course progresses.

### Intended Aims and Learning Outcomes

1. Introduce students to central topics in analytic Western political philosophy.
2. Develop skills in reading and understanding the content and structure of philosophical arguments.
3. Enhance skills in critical thinking and logical argumentation.
4. Establish practices of charitable critical engagement in tutorial discussion and written work.
5. Develop philosophical writing skills, including:
  - a) the ability to clearly, concisely, and accurately reconstruct other scholars' philosophical arguments, and
  - b) the ability to articulate and systematically defend original critical arguments relevant to essay prompts provided.

### Lecture Programme and Required Readings

Required readings are listed next to their associated lectures in the chart below. These readings should be read along with the lectures ahead of discussion in the following week's tutorial. E.g. the texts from Wolff and Hobbes are associated with Week 1 lectures, and will be discussed in Week 2 tutorials.

All readings in this course will be available through MyAberdeen. You are not required to purchase any books for this course (though you are, of course, welcome to purchase your own copies of the texts if you wish to do so).

Week	Topic	Readings
<b>Week 1</b> 18-22 Sept	The Social Contract: Hobbes	Jonathan Wolff, <i>An Introduction to Political Philosophy</i> (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996). Chapter 1: The State of Nature, pp. 6-18 (up to the end of the section on Hobbes).  Thomas Hobbes, <i>Leviathan</i> . Selected passages.
<b>Week 2</b> 25-29 Sept	The Social Contract: Locke	Jonathan Wolff, <i>An Introduction to Political Philosophy</i> (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996). Chapter 1: The State of Nature, pp. 18-26.  John Locke, <i>Second Treatise of Government</i> . Selected passages.
<b>Week 3</b> 2-6 Oct	The Social Contract: Rousseau	Jonathan Wolff, <i>An Introduction to Political Philosophy</i> (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996). Chapter 1: The State of Nature, pp. 26-36.  Jean-Jacques Rousseau, <i>Discourse on the Origin of Inequality and The Social Contract</i> . Selected passages.
<b>Week 4</b> 9-12 Oct	The Racial Contract	Charles Mills, <i>The Racial Contract</i> (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2022), pp. 9-19, 41-89.
<b>Week 5</b> 16-20 Oct	Liberty	Isaiah Berlin, 'Two Concepts of Liberty', in his <i>Liberty</i> ed. by Henry Hardy (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2002) – introduction, sections 1-2: pp. 166-181.  Philip Pettit TED Talk: How Do You Know if You are Truly Free? <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1rTEOU67zCo">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1rTEOU67zCo</a>  Philip Pettit, <i>Republicanism: A Theory of Freedom and Government</i> (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997). Chapter 2, 'Liberty as Non-Domination'.  Dorothea Gädeke, 'Does a Mugger Dominate?: Episodic Power and the Structural Dimension of Domination', <i>The Journal of Political Philosophy</i> 28:2 (2020), pp. 199-221.
<b>Week 6</b> 23-26 Oct	<b>Reading week</b> – no classes	
<b>Week 7</b>	Democracy	Amartya Sen, 'Democracy as a Universal Value', <i>Journal of Democracy</i> 10:3 (1999), 3-17.

30 Oct–3 Nov		Elizabeth Anderson, ‘Democracy: Instrumental vs Non-Instrumental Value’, in <i>Contemporary Debates in Political Philosophy</i> ed. by Thomas Christiano and John Christman (Malden MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2009), 213-227.
<b>Week 8</b> 6-10 Nov	Democracy	Jason Brennan, ‘The Right to a Competent Electorate’, <i>The Philosophical Quarterly</i> 61 (2011), 700-724.  Alex Guerrero, ‘Against Elections: The Lottocratic Alternative’, <i>Philosophy &amp; Public Affairs</i> 42:2 135-178. Critique of Lottocracy
<b>Week 9</b> 13-17 Nov	Distributive Justice	John Rawls, <i>A Theory of Justice: Revised Edition</i> (Cambridge MA: Belknap Press, 1999). Chapter 1, sections 1-4. Chapter 2, section 11.  G. A. Cohen, ‘Where the Action Is: On the Site of Distributive Justice’, <i>Philosophy and Public Affairs</i> 26:1 (1997), pp. 3-30.
<b>Week 10</b> 20-25 Nov	Distributive Justice	Robert Nozick, <i>Anarchy, State and Utopia</i> (New York: Basic Books, 1974). Chapter 7, pp. 149-164 and 167-174.  Iris Marion Young, ‘Displacing the Distributive Paradigm’, in her <i>Justice and the Politics of Difference</i> (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), pp. 15-38.
<b>Week 11</b> 27 Nov– 1 Dec	Equality	Elizabeth Anderson, ‘What is the Point of Equality?’, <i>Ethics</i> 109:2 (1999), 287-337.

## Summative Assessment

Ten 250-word journal entries (10%) and two 1500-word essays (45% each).

If you submit your work on time, you can expect that feedback will normally be provided within three working weeks (excluding vacation periods) of the submission deadline.

## Word Limit Policy

Please include a word count in all submissions. Your work will be penalised if the word count of your essay exceeds the limit. While essays and journal entries that are far shorter than the word limit will not be penalised for being shorter, they are unlikely to gain as high a mark as essays that approach the word limit, due to the fact that the essay is less likely to be well-developed and thorough.

## Essays (45% each)

You will submit two essays in this course. Essay prompts will be posted on MyAberdeen. The due dates are as follows:

- **Essay 1 due:** Friday 3<sup>rd</sup> November, 3pm
- **Essay 2 due:** Friday 15<sup>th</sup> December, 3pm

The word limit for each essay is **1,500 words**. This includes quotations, footnotes, and citations, but excludes the reference list/bibliography.

## Journal Entries (10%)

You will also submit 10 journal entries on MyAberdeen.

The first five entries should be completed at the beginning of term, before engaging with any course material. At this time, you should respond to a series of prompts asking you to share your current opinions about topics in political philosophy. You are not required to demonstrate any knowledge of philosophy at this stage. You are simply required to provide a thoughtful, relevant response to each of the five prompts, describing what your opinions are, and explaining why you have these opinions.

Then, at the end of weeks 5, 7, 9, and 11, you will write a response to each of your original five entries, reflecting on how your thoughts about each topic have developed as a result of engaging with the course material. These entries should critically engage with your original post, and demonstrate an understanding of course material.

The word limit for each journal entry is **250 words**. The deadlines for these posts are as follows:

- **Friday 22<sup>nd</sup> September, 3pm:** five posts due, on (i) state legitimacy, (ii) freedom, (iii) democracy, (iv) distributive justice, and (v) equality. Prompts will be provided.
- **Friday 20<sup>th</sup> October, 3pm:** reply to post (i) on state legitimacy due.
- **Friday 3<sup>rd</sup> November, 3pm:** reply to post (ii) on freedom due.
- **Friday 17<sup>th</sup> November, 3pm:** reply to post (iii) on democracy due.
- **Friday 1<sup>st</sup> December, 3pm:** reply to posts (iv) *and* (v) on distributive justice *and* equality due.