PHIL 122. Political Philosophy Fall 2016

Class Meetings
Tuesday/Thursday 12-1:15 Douglass Hall 110

Instructor
Kyle Swan | Department of Philosophy | California State University, Sacramento | Mendocino Hall 3030 | 6000 J Street | Sacramento, CA 95819-6033 | (916) 278-2474 | kyle.swan@csus.edu

Office hours
Tuesday/Wednesday 10:15-11:45

Reasonable Accommodation
If your circumstances require accommodation or assistance in meeting the expectations of this course, please let me know as soon as possible. You may need to provide documentation to the University office of SSWD (in accordance with the University policy outlined here: http://www.csus.edu/umanual/acad/UMA00215.htm).

Description
From the catalogue:
A philosophical examination of the individual, the community, and rights; the conflict between individual rights and the common good; various conceptions of justice, equality, liberty and the public good; and the relationship of politics to ethics, economics, law; war and peace.

More!
Governments have significant power to tell us what to do and not to do. But we’re not babies or slaves. We’re full-fledged moral agents with the capacity to settle on ways of living we deem good, right and proper and make determinations for ourselves whether one or another activity accords with our own beliefs, values and other commitments. What if these conflict with a directive from the state? Is the power governments wield over us justified or legitimate? When, and under what conditions, do governments count as legitimate political authorities rather than authoritarian overlords? When, and under what conditions, do the laws they issue count as justified or legitimate rather than oppressive dictates? What makes it true (if anything does) that they do?

Objectives
The course will introduce to students to key concepts relating to the idea of political authority and major theories concerning the grounding of social and political rules. Students will develop an understanding of how philosophers approach questions related to social justice, how they reach conclusions about social and civil matters and how they argue for them. In addition, students will actually do these things. The course will provide students with resources for reflecting on their own views. It will form a solid
foundation for further studies in political philosophy or philosophy generally, as well as complement other intellectual pursuits. The course aims to contribute to an educational program that produces well-rounded graduates who are not only equipped to achieve excellence in science, business, industry or whatever, but who also care about how their work affects others.

**Outcomes**
(1) Students understand how they can employ philosophical tools to answer questions about political authority and social justice. (2) Students understand the nature and methods of political theorizing as well as how political philosophy interacts with cognate disciplines like economics and political science. (3) Students improve their abilities to think critically, analyze complex problems, evaluate arguments, and argue cogently for their own views. (4) Students improve their reading, writing, and oral communication skills. (5) Students understand some of the leading contemporary positions in political philosophy.

Phil 122 is a GE course in area C4. Here’s the information I found about this part of the GE program:

**Area C- 4 Further Studies in the Arts and Humanities**

1. Courses in this category, need not be introductory, and need not be as broad in scope as courses included in C2 or C3.

2. Courses may have as prerequisites courses listed in C2 and C3 or similar courses.

3. Courses in this category shall comply generally with the criteria for courses in categories C2 and C3.

   a) Develops a comprehensive understanding and appreciation of the heritage being studied and transmits a knowledge of Western and Non-Western cultural heritage in the arts and humanities.

   b) Introduces history or a method of analysis in order a) to increase understanding and appreciation of the art forms being studied or b) to study the principles on which aesthetic judgments are made or focuses on ideas and values of various cultures and traditions as expressed in their literatures, philosophies or religions.

4. If the courses have for primary goal the development or application of skills to develop aesthetic sensitivity, it must be done through active participation in one of the arts or through inclusion of a significant cultural component.

5. Develops an understanding of and appreciation for the diversity of the human community.
6. Presents the contributions and perspectives of women; persons from various ethnic, socio-economic, and religious groups, gays and lesbians; and persons with disabilities. [At least two of these groups should be included in the course.]

Students will:

1. Apply processes of critical analysis to the text-based courses within this category.

2. Demonstrate basic skills in the performance courses within this category.

3. Demonstrate a comprehension of the aesthetic/cultural values and historical developments within the content of the course.

**Class procedures and conduct**

Once we get up and running, I will lecture on Tuesday of each week. These lectures will be fairly scripted, but it won’t be out of place for me to pepper you with questions about your reading and you should always feel free to stop me whenever you have a question. Thursday meetings will be mostly unscripted (at least, by me). These will be “Card Talk” sessions. Come to these meetings with one or two questions, challenges or objections related to material presented or covered in the lecture or the reading assignments that the lecture was based on. Write your question(s) on a 3x5 index card. I will open the floor or call on students at random to present one of their questions. At the end of the meeting you will submit your card with your questions on it, which will be used to take roll. Your questions must be such that they give evidence that you have done some careful thinking about the material in order for you to receive attendance credit.

Please avoid disrupting class meetings and other ways of being rude. This means that you shouldn’t use electronic devices, carry on private conversations with people around you, sleep, read, arrive late or leave early.

**Text**

Jason Brennan, *Political Philosophy: an introduction* plus other essays available on the internet or SacCT. See schedule below.

Brennan’s text is available as a .pdf on SacCT. Also here: [http://www.libertarianism.org/books/political-philosophy-introduction](http://www.libertarianism.org/books/political-philosophy-introduction).
Schedule

Aug 30, Sept 1 Introduction to the course

Part I: The general problem of social organization
6, 8 The problem of disagreement, Brennan Ch. 1
13, 15 Centralizing solutions and decentralizing solutions, Brennan Chs. 2 and 3
20, 22 An example: paternalism, Brennan Ch. 7
27, 29 Another example: religion, John Locke, “A letter concerning toleration” Sections 1-5 and 9-10. www.earlymoderntexts.com

Part II: Political authority and legitimacy
11, 13 Where does political authority come from? Brennan Ch. 9
25, 27 An international example: immigration, Brennan Ch. 10 and Michael Huemer, Is There a Right to Immigrate? http://spot.colorado.edu/~huemer/immigration.htm

Part III: Social justice?
Nov 1, 3 Property rights, John Locke, Second Treatise of Government Ch. 5
8, 10 Property rights, Brennan Ch. 4
15, 17 Social justice, Brennan Chs. 5 and 6.
22 A theoretical application: egalitarianism, yes or no? Brennan, Ch. 8 and
Harry Frankfurt, “Equality as a moral ideal”
https://www.law.upenn.edu/institutes/cerl/conferences/prioritarianism_papers/Session3Frankfurt.pdf

29, Dec 1 A practical application: the welfare state, Brennan Ch. 11

6, 8 Wrap and review

Final exam: Tuesday Dec 13, 12:45-2:45

Assessment
Please do not plagiarize or cheat. At a minimum, you would be marked with a zero on the assignment. Multiple and/or flagrant violations will lead to me assigning a failing grade for the course and initiating disciplinary action through the Office of Student Affairs. Familiarize yourselves with the University’s Academic Honesty Policies and Procedures document (here: http://www.csus.edu/umanual/AcademicHonestyPolicyandProcedures.htm)

Your writing assignments will be vetted through Turnitin in SacCT. Here is the CSUS policy regarding Turnitin:

“Consistent with Sacramento State’s efforts to enhance student learning, foster honesty, and maintain integrity in our academic processes, instructors may use a tool called Turnitin to compare a student’s work with multiple sources. The tool compares each student’s with an extensive database of prior publications and papers, providing links to possible matches and a ‘similarity score’. The tool does not determine wither plagiarism has occurred or not. Instead, the instructor must make a complete assessment and judge the originality of the student’s work. All submissions to this course may be checked using this tool.

You may choose to submit papers to Turnitin assignments without identifying information included in the paper (e.g. name or student number). The system will automatically show this information to faculty in your course when viewing the submission.

Turnitin services are now integrated in the Assignment function of SacCT. More information is available here http://www.csus.edu/atcs/tools/turnitin/index.html.”

I also recommend the use of the Smarthinking tool for your paper assignments. Smarthinking is a FREE on-demand, live person, writing assistance service provided by Pearson Publishing. This allows students to submit their written work and receive constructive feedback to improve their writing, typically within 24 hours. It is available as a link at the top of the SacCT page.
Your final course mark is based on the following:

a. preparation for, attendance at and relevant participation in all meetings (12). This includes your submitted questions for Thursday Card Talk.

b. reading summaries (18). These are short (about 200 words), summaries of the assigned readings. You summary:
   • should be thoughtful and grammatical
   • should **not** be simply a point-by-point, blow-by-blow, surface-level summary of the reading assignment. Rather it should be a focused presentation of what you take to be the (or a) key argument the author makes in advancing his or her thesis. Your emphasis should be on clarifying it and explaining how it is supposed to work
   • should use the method of successive elaboration described in the document in SacCT.
   • are due before the accompanying Thursday Card Talk meeting in your SacCT Journal. You are assigned 1 point, .5 or zero for each entry/summary based on my judgment of the care you took in preparing it.

c. 2 short (about 1500 words) analytical essay assignments (20 each = 40). There will be (probably) weekly essay prompts. You must choose 2 of them to write. The prompts will be announced at the Tuesday meeting. You will have until the third Thursday (so over 2 full weeks) from the release of the prompt to write and submit the essay through Turnitin. Your first essay must be an essay from a prompt in Part I of the course. Your second essay must be an essay from a prompt in the remaining parts of the course. You can be submit essays early, but I will not accept them late.

Your papers should be presented relatively free of spelling and grammatical errors. I will assign marks based on the cogency of your analysis in your response to the prompt. Spelling and grammatical errors will also affect your grade if they are frequent enough to become distracting. In addition to the Turnitin-generated suggestions and the Smarthinking report, the following resources will be useful:

http://www.csus.edu/phil/Guidance/How%20to%20Write%20an%20Analysis.htm
http://www.csus.edu/phil/Guidance/WritingGuidelines.html
http://www.csus.edu/phil/Guidance/Grading%20Standards.html

d. final exam (35).

\[ a + b + c + d = \text{final course mark} \]

Grading scale:
93 and above = A
90-92 = A-
87-89 = B+
83-86 = B
80-82 = B-
77-79 = C+
73-76 = C
70-72 = C-
67-69 = D+
63-66 = D
60-62 = D-
59 and below = F