Social and Political Philosophy (Honours College)
Winter 2016/2017 (Semester Ia)
Rijksuniversiteit Groningen, Faculty of Philosophy

INSTRUCTOR

Dr. Titus Stahl
E-mail: titus.stahl@rug.nl (if possible, please use e-mail encryption, see: https://u.fsf.org/zb)
Phone: +31503636152

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Social and political philosophy is concerned with asking philosophical questions about the different ways in which human beings live together. In particular, it focuses on the role which political institutions play in our societies. Political philosophers ask questions such as: What is the ultimate end of politics? How should we decide between different forms of government? Is there one single end that all governments should pursue - such as justice or equality - or should governments be only concerned with protecting the freedom of everyone to live as they please? To what extent may society limit the freedom of individuals? Is it ever justified to resist the state?

In the course, we will focus on the different answers these questions have received throughout the history of philosophy and on how they inform contemporary debates about political issues.

COURSE FORMAT AND GENERAL RULES

This course is an introductory course that presupposes only some general philosophy knowledge. As other philosophy courses, it presupposes independent literature study at home in preparation for the session. During the sessions, we will discuss the literature together. There will also be student presentations that will offer the opportunity to discuss how to apply theories in political philosophy to contemporary political reality. It thus presumes an interest in politics generally and in current events.

One of the core ideas which will be discussed in this course is that relations of mutual respect entail obligations on both sides of a social relationship. In this spirit, I accept the obligation that I will come to each session prepared and on time, that I will try to design the course material and my contributions in a way which leads to all students' learning as much as possible, that I will be approachable for all questions of an academic or administrative nature in person and (to a reasonable extent) via e-mail. I will communicate expectations clearly and evaluate you fairly. My goal is to enable all students to finish the course with an excellent result.

In return, I expect from you to regularly attend all sessions, to excuse yourself in person or via email when you cannot come to a session, to arrive on time, to read all the required material, to come prepared with relevant questions and objections to what I say and to participate in the discussion with your fellow students. I also expect you to refrain from any kind of academic dishonesty and from any behavior which makes it for fellow students more difficult to learn or which makes them uncomfortable.

I am aware that persons learn in different ways and face different challenges and that the general
rules in this course might not be best designed to ensure everyone's success. If you think you might have reason to ask for a modification of the rules for your specific case, please do not hesitate to talk to me in private.

EXAMINATION

The examination of this course has two parts:

a) Group presentation (pass/fail graded, exam condition): In the first session, we will form a number of presentation groups, each of which will prepare and present one text or several texts for the session. The group presentation should be no longer than 15 minutes and focus on the major points raised by the text and to lead over into discussion for the whole group. As part of the presentation, you will prepare a handout giving an overview over the structure of the text(s) that you have prepared. You need to submit the handout and a draft presentation on the Tuesday before the session.

b) Final essay (graded, final exam): You will have to submit an essay of no more than 2000 words, to be submitted on November, 11, 2016. The essay should critically evaluate one or several of theories which we discuss in class in relation to current issues. A list of essay questions of which you are to choose one will be distributed well in advance. The essay is expected to draw on a small amount of primary and secondary literature. I will provide you with a list of recommended sources. You are, however, free to consult other scholarly articles and books related to your argument. There will be a guide outlining the evaluation criteria for the essay and advice on how to write it. This document will also be distributed via Student Portal well before the deadline. If you want to, I am willing to review a rough outline of your essay and give you advice on how to continue with writing it. This does not mean that I will read or comment on a finished essay. Upon receiving your outline, I will need four to five days to send you comments. If you want to take advantage of this opportunity, please see that you have enough time to finish it before the deadline.

The resit date for the essay is December 9, 2016. Please note that I will not be available to give your feedback or answer questions in relation to the essay after the November deadline, unless you have submitted an essay for the original deadline and it was graded as insufficient.

Please note that both explicit plagiarism (copying text from another author without attribution) and implicit plagiarism (appropriating ideas from another author without attribution, even if formulated in your own words) will be considered academic dishonesty and will be sanctioned according to the relevant university regulations.

Essays should be submitted via the Student Portal Dropbox and will be scanned for plagiarism. Please note my general policy that I do not grant retroactive extensions of deadlines except in the most extraordinary circumstances. If you recognize that you will not make a deadline, get in touch with me beforehand! If you do not communicate with me before and submit your essay late, you will fail the exam.
GENERAL READINGS

In addition, to the mandatory literature, I recommend the following three introductions into political philosophy. Each of them is so good that owning all of them is a valuable investment.

- John Christman, *Social and Political Philosophy. A Contemporary Introduction*, Routledge 2002. (Chapters 2, 3 and 5 are especially relevant for our course)
- Will Kymlicka, *Contemporary Political Philosophy. 2nd ed.*, Oxford University Press 2002. (Chapters 2-6 and 9 cover topics from our course)

All required readings for the course and some recommended readings are available on Student Portal, except the book Jonathan Wolf, *An Introduction into Political Philosophy*, Oxford University Press, 2016.

Study load model

The course has 5 EC. The resulting 140 hours are allocated as follows:

- 16h Attending the course sessions
- 25h Reading 179 pages of the Wolff book (difficulty level: easy)
- 46h Reading 228 pages of additional material (difficulty level: medium)
- 18h Reading the presentation material and preparing the presentation
- 35h Writing the final essay
SYLLABUS

Please prepare all texts marked “required reading” for the respective session. Texts marked as “recommended” and “further reading” are not obligatory and are included for students who want to deepen their knowledge about the topic in question.

September 8, 2016: Session 1: The Nature of Politics and the Anarchist Challenge

Required Reading:

- Handout with quotes about politics (will be made available on Student Portal).

Text for Presentation:


Recommended Reading:


Further Watching:

- Steven B. Smith, “Introduction to Political Philosophy” (https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLD319499FC7F5813F), lecture 1.

September 15, 2016: Session 2: Justifying the State I: Happiness

Required Reading:


Texts for Presentation:

- Cass Sunstein, “The Ethics of Nudging”, available online at https://dash.harvard.edu/handle/1/16151743
Recommended Reading:

Further Reading:

Further Watching:
• Steven B. Smith, “Introduction to Political Philosophy” ([https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLD319499FC7F5813F](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLD319499FC7F5813F)), lectures 2-9.

September 22, 2016: Session 3: Justifying the state II: Consent and contract

Required Reading:
• Jean-Jacques Rousseau, “The Social Contract”, available online at [http://www.gutenberg.org/files/46333/46333-h/46333-h.htm#BOOK_I](http://www.gutenberg.org/files/46333/46333-h/46333-h.htm#BOOK_I) (read only Book 1, parts I-VII)

Texts for presentation

Recommended Reading:

Further Reading:
• Steven Kuhn, “Prisoner's Dilemma”, *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*,
Required Reading:

Texts for presentation:

Recommended Reading:

Further Reading:

Further Watching:
- Steven B. Smith, “Introduction to Political Philosophy” (https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLD319499FC7F5813F), lectures 15-17.
October 6, 2016: Session 5: Justifying the State IV - Democracy, Liberty, and Freedom of Speech

Required Reading:

Texts for presentation:

Recommended Reading:

Further Reading:

Further Watching:
- Steven B. Smith, “Introduction to Political Philosophy” (https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLD319499FC7F5813F), 18-20 (Rousseau).

October 13, 2016: Session 6: Justifying the State V – Social Justice

Required Reading:
Text for presentation:

- Elizabeth Anderson, *The Imperative of Integration*, Chapters 7 and 8 (pp. 135-180; will be made available on Student Portal).

**Recommended Reading:**

- Will Kymlicka, *Contemporary Political Philosophy*, ch. 3.

**Further Reading:**


**Further Watching:**


**October 20, 2016: Session 7: Resisting Power I: Marx and Foucault**

**Required Reading:**

- Introductory text about Marx (will be made available on Student Portal)

**Texts for presentations:**


**Recommended:**

- Karl Marx, *On the Jewish Question*, available online at: [http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/jewish-question/](http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/jewish-question/)

**Further reading**


October 27, 2016: Session 8: Resisting Power II – Feminism and Critical Race Theory

Required Reading:
• Jonathan Wolff, An Introduction to Political Philosophy, Oxford University Press, 2006, pp. 181-185 (ch. 6, Rights for Women)

Texts for presentation:

Recommended:
• Will Kymlicka, Contemporary Political Philosophy, chaps 5 and 9.

Further Reading:
• Simone de Beauvoir, The Second Sex, Cape, 1953.