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Phil 2770
Political Philosophy
M W 1:00- 1:50 Maury 104
Fall 2014

POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY: SYLLABUS

I. TEXTS (in the order in which they will be studied)

Plato, *Five Dialogues*
Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*
Michael Sandel, *Justice*
Debra Satz, *Why Some Things Should Not be for Sale*
Peter Singer, *The Life You Can Save*

II. SCOPE & PURPOSE OF POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

Let me tell you an artless story that may nonetheless hold some interest. That's because *you* are in it. So am I.

I believe that you have behaved quite badly in recent days. To impress on you the error of your ways, I empty out the cash in your wallet and then spend it on purposes of my own. Unfortunately, your conduct doesn't improve, so I apprehend you and lock you away in my basement. "With good behavior you can get out in two years," I cheerily announce. Sure enough, after some 700 days you are let loose. Even then, though, I don't exactly ignore you. I come around periodically to collect 1/3 of all the money you earn, not because you've done anything wrong but because I claim an entitlement to spend it on your behalf and for the sake of the other members of the community. I also tell you what you may eat, drink, smoke, wear, etc., again for what I claim is your good. When you give evidence of being reluctant to accede to my demands, I remind you in a very meaningful way of the basement.

Outrageous? *Of course* it is! There is no way in a civilized society that I would be allowed to get away with such egregious bullying. The institutions of government would stop me right in my tracks. Great! But what is it that the government does to citizens by way of upholding laws and regulations? Precisely those sorts of things that they may not do to each other: involuntary deprivations of property, liberty, even life. If we substitute in that little story *the state* for each reference to me, it sounds a lot like business as usual – specifically, political business. And that raises a philosophical question of great theoretical and practical importance: *What, if anything, is so special about the state that affords it justification for doing the sorts of things that no private party may legitimately do?* Once that question is raised, numerous related ones follow: What are the limits to justifiable state coercion? How can we distinguish between a legitimate political order and a gang of thugs who call themselves the government? What's the proper borderline

between economics and politics? What duties do citizens have to the state? What duties does the state have to its citizens? What duties do states and individuals have to people in other countries? And so on.

The preceding questions fall within the domain of political philosophy. Although they certainly do not exhaust the territory of that branch of philosophy, they are among the most foundational that can be raised. In one way or another, we will be sniffing around them throughout the semester. We begin, as philosophers are wont to do, with *Plato*, who plied his trade some 2400 years ago. But then we skip over all intervening territory to jump into the world of political philosophy works produced since 1970. There are two reasons for the jump. First, if we didn't tear ourselves away from those earlier periods, we wouldn't get around to examining what contemporary theorists are saying. Second, there are quite a few other UVA courses in both the Philosophy and Politics departments that focus on the various intervening historical periods. You are strongly encouraged to fill in those blanks, if indeed they are unfamiliar to you.

III. COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND PROCEDURES

1. *Readings; Classroom work.* Although these books cover a wide range of problems in political philosophy, they be no means are exhaustive of the field. I hope you'll find them an inviting sampler, perhaps persuading you to explore more deeply on some other occasion. Let me give you fair warning, though: you will almost certainly find some of the material difficult to understand, at least on first encounter. Although I don't expect you to sail through these readings effortlessly, I do expect you to give them your best shot. That includes your having carefully read assigned material *in advance of the class in which it will be discussed*, and also your willingness to reread sections that initially prove elusive. Our job in class will be to work together to understand the problems addressed by these philosophers. I think of this as being very much a joint enterprise. My role is one of exploring with you points of special interest, helping to clarify complexities, raising questions implied by the material. Correlatively, your responsibilities are to read and think conscientiously about all texts and to be prepared to tell me what you find perplexing or challenging or worthy of deeper pursuit. Although this is officially a lecture class with rather a large number of bodies in the room, we shall nonetheless strive for a decent amount of discussion. Personally, I can think of nothing duller than a class in which one person (me) does all the talking. I hope you agree. Although I don't grade on the basis of attendance or classroom participation as such, your contributions to the flow of the course will be duly kept in mind as I assign course grades. To state the obvious, if you are not present for a class, you are not carrying your weight. If a grade is otherwise borderline, this is what will tip the balance.
2. *Computers, Phones, etc.* 21st Century electronics are wonderful! I love them as much as you do – well, almost as much. I must tell you, however, that they don't have a place in Phil 2770. If you're carrying a phone, please make sure you turn it off and put it out of

sight (and possibly out of mind) before the start of class. If your ringer goes off, or if you are observed staring intently into a display, you owe a 500-word essay on the topic of the day, due at the next class meeting. If it happens a second time you will be asked to withdraw from the course. With some reluctance I also ask you not to open a computer during class. These machines have wonderful utility, but they also offer powerful temptations. Try taking notes the old-fashioned way: pen in hand. Or you may record class sessions for later review and transcription.

3. *Tests and Quizzes.* The only exam that will be given is a final exam. It will count for approximately 40% of your course grade. It will involve some form of essay questions. Further information concerning the nature of the exam will be supplied in class.

Occasional unannounced quizzes will be given. These will involve very specific questions requiring short answers. No deep understanding is required to do well on quizzes; rather, they will test whether you have done the readings and listened to lectures with some care. **Quizzes cannot be made up**; once missed it's eternally gone. I shall, however, drop your lowest quiz result. (If more than eight quizzes are given, your two lowest scores will be dropped.) This means that if you must miss a class or two during the semester there should not be any significant impact on your course performance even if you happen to be unlucky with regard to quiz timing; more than occasional absences are another story. These quizzes will count cumulatively for approximately 25% of your course grade.

4. *Papers.* I shall ask you at irregular intervals to write short (4-7 pages) papers in response to particular questions I'll toss your way. You are required to write any 2 of them, and you may submit 3, with the 2 best counting toward your course grade. Thus, if one (or perhaps two) of the assignment topics or times doesn't suit you, then you should feel free to skip it. There will be at least 4 papers assigned. These may either address the writings of one of our five theorists or involve comparison between two or more. Unless you have received explicit permission to the contrary, all submissions must be hard copy. Please retain the digital file just in case something goes awry. Cumulatively, they will determine approximately 30% of your Political Philosophy grade.

All paper assignments will involve working through some problem suggested by the assigned readings. Although you are entirely at liberty to consult any sources written or human that you think might help you write a better paper, it is imperative that any borrowings of ideas or language be credited via a citation. You may use whatever style of footnote or endnote you please just so long as full attribution information is provided. Failures to do so, even if not malicious, risk putting you on the wrong side of the plagiarism divide. That is definitely not a place you want to be, especially while you're at UVA!

Paper grades will be based on "content" rather than style or grammatical correctness

(although it should be noted that your ability to express yourself accurately in written English prose very definitely affects the content as it appears to your reader). However, any paper that comes to me with more than a very few errors in spelling, grammar, etc. will either be rejected as failing to meet minimal standards of acceptability or, if I'm feeling especially generous, handed back to you for revision and resubmission. This means that you ought to proofread carefully anything you will be submitting. I very much care about the quality of your writing – and so should you! One final caution: **Late papers will not be accepted.** Thus, if for some reason you must miss a class, it's a good idea to check and see if there has been an assignment.

5. *Discussion sections* You are enrolled in one of the two discussion sessions. (If not, we have a *serious* problem!) These meetings are as integral to the course as the lectures; do not suppose that they are opportunities to catch up on your beauty sleep. You are expected to attend regularly, bringing your questions and interpretations to class. Your TA will provide further instructions.

V. READINGS

Consider this more prediction than declaration. As we proceed I'll get a better handle on what's going to be a good working pace for us and will adjust accordingly. All changes will be announced in class and/or on Collab. If you always read one assignment ahead of where we last left off you should be fine.

WEEK 1

Wed., Aug. 27 What is Political Philosophy?

WEEK 2

Mon. Sept. 1 Plato, *Apology*
Wed. Sept. 3 “

WEEK 3

Mon. Sept. 8 Nozick, *AS&U* Intro, Chap. 1
Wed., Sept. 10 “ Chaps. 2,3

WEEK 4

Mon. Sept. 15 “ Chap. 4
Wed. Sept. 17 “ Chap. 5 (Chap. 6 optional)

WEEK 5

Mon. Sept. 22 “ Chap. 7, Sect. 1 (Section II optional)
Wed. Sept. 24 “ Chap. 8

WEEK 6

Mon. Sept. 29	“	Chap. 9
Wed. Oct. 1	“	Chap. 10

WEEK 7

Mon. Oct. 6	Sandel, <i>Justice</i>	Chaps. 1, 2
Wed. Oct. 8	“	Chaps. 3, 4

WEEK 8

Mon. Oct. 13	NO CLASS - READING DAY	
Wed. Oct. 15	“	Chaps. 5, 6

WEEK 9

Mon. Oct. 20	“	Chaps. 7, 8
Wed. Oct. 22	“	Chaps. 9, 10

WEEK 10

Mon. Oct. 27	Satz, <i>Why Some Things ..</i>	Intro, Chap 1,
Wed. Oct 29	“	Chap. 4, (Chaps. 2 & 3 optional)

WEEK 11

Mon. Nov. 3	“	Chaps. 5, 6
Wed. Nov. 5	“	Chaps. 7, 8

WEEK 12

Mon. Nov. 10	“	Chaps. 9, 10
Wed. Nov. 12	Singer, <i>Life You Can Save</i>	Chap. 1

WEEK 13

Mon. Nov. 17	“	Chaps. 2, 3
Wed. Nov. 19	“	Chaps. 4, 5 (Chaps. 6, 7 optional)

WEEK 14

Mon. Nov. 24	“	Chaps. 8-10
Wed. Nov..26	THANKSGIVING BREAK	

WEEK 15

Mon. Dec. 1	Plato, <i>Crito</i>	
Wed. Dec. 3	“	