

## PHI 3200 SOCIAL AND POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

Dr. Nicholas Power

**Course Overview:** The course will examine the major philosophical aspects of political authority and social reality. These aspects include the moral questions concerning the state's having certain coercive powers and the societal conventions and forces that (for good or bad) make us who we are. Additionally, we will address metaphysical questions regarding the nature of legitimate political authority, of rights, and of the self. Half the course will be a critical survey of the main ways by which the power of the state has been justified. We will survey major western political perspectives of socialism, liberalism, and libertarianism with a focus on liberalism. We will define the variants of the other (leftist and rightist) views via their opposition to elements of liberalism. The course could be described as an attempt to defend or justify our own current form of political structure—a liberal democracy—against broadly Marxist and anarchist critics. A variety of non-western and feminist sources will provide a broader view of our own moral institutions and political conceptions. The rest of the term will be an attempt to step back from the ways we have arranged social reality—from the conditions under which we live and work and are educated—in order to see if there is an alternative that better meets our psychological and physical needs. We will examine utopian schemes of various sorts, and use a text that presents a radical critique of contemporary capitalist culture. We will try to uncover the forces, hidden and apparent, which make us think and act the way(s) we do. No prior knowledge of philosophy (or politics, or sociology) is required for this course. However, some of what you will read here will be most challenging material.

**Required Texts:** James Sterba: *Social and Political Philosophy: Classic Western Texts in Feminist And Multicultural Perspectives*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, (Wadsworth, 1998)  
Michael J. Sandel: *Democracy's Discontent*, (Harvard University Press, 1996)

### Outline of Study:

General Overview; Politics and Morality

The Liberal Conception of Self; The Meaning of Freedom

The Ancients: Plato & Aristotle; The Polis; rise of individual rights in Roman Law; Spelman on Aristotle

Hobbes and the Origins of Property Rights; Clark's Feminist Critique of Property Rights

Mill and Wollstonecraft on the Rights of Women; Shanley on Mill

Marx and the Socialist Critique of Liberalism (and Hartmann)

Liberalism; Rawls' Defense of the Welfare State; Okin on Rawls

Hospers and Nozick and the Libertarian Critique of Liberalism

MacIntyre and Taylor and the Communitarian Critique of Liberalism

Foucault and the Post-Modernist Critique of the State

Sandel's critique of Contemporary US Liberal Democracy

**Homework and Exams:** There will be weekly 'reading comprehension' quizzes and two exams; a mid-term and a final. You will choose one of two options for written assignments: (i) write two short (3-4 page) response papers on assigned reading materials chosen in consultation with the instructor and one 'extra-curricular' micro-essay on some illustration, from within popular culture-movies, music, etc., of theme(s) or concept(s) of the class; or (ii) write a historical research/term paper (12-15 pages) on a topic approved by the instructor. Every student will present to the class either one of their response papers or their research paper. Grad students will complete both (i) and (ii).

<b>Grading Policy:</b>	Quizzes	20%
	Response Papers/Research Paper & Presentation	40%
	Mid-term Exam	20%
	Final Exam	20%

**Class Participation:** Attendance is a must for successful completion of this course; more than 3 unexcused absences (or chronic tardiness) will result in a recommendation that you withdraw from the course. Grades for quizzes and response papers will drop 1/3 of a letter grade for each calendar day they are late (or an entire letter grade for each class meeting). All University policies concerning **withdrawal** from the course, **plagiarism** and other forms of cheating, etc. are in full effect. Consult your *Student Handbook* for details.