

Political and Legal Philosophy

[Sample Syllabus: Suitable for 300-level undergraduate course with 20-30 students]

Professor Information

Email Address: finestone@chapman.edu
Office Hours: TH 11:00 AM - Noon
Office Location: Wilkinson Hall 221

Class Information

Class Time: TTH 1:00-2:30 PM
Class Location: Wilkinson Hall 230

Course Description: This is a survey course exploring the sources of legitimate political authority and those limits imposed by historical and natural liberties, covering topics such as the origin of sovereignty, the basis for the rule of law, freedom of conscience, and the right to revolution. The aim of this course is to help students apprehend the philosophical foundations for our political order and provide them the opportunity to critically evaluate the extent to which modern political institutions ranging from the Federal Reserve to the United Nations exemplify and further principles of justice. We will be reading primary sources from the High Middle Ages all the way through to the present day.

Learning Goals:

- Students will gain familiarity with canonical texts, philosophical and political concepts, and ongoing political disputes and institutional arrangements.
- Students will critically and charitably engage with primary sources.
- Students will gain improved proficiency in analytical writing, oral communication, and independent research.

Texts:

All texts will be made available via Canvas. The schedule below is subject to change. In the event of changes, I will send a class-wide email and announcement on Canvas.

Course Requirements:

- **Participation (10%):** Participation in class discussions will be assessed on (1) grasp of and depth of reflection on the assigned readings; and (2) ability to attentively listen and charitably respond to other students' comments and questions. Consistent and constructive participation will weigh in favor of the higher grade in the case of a borderline final grade based on your work.

- **Discussion Questions (10%):** For every reading you will be responsible for crafting a discussion question regarding some aspect of the reading which you found to be confusing, disconcerting, provocative, or simply worth discussing in greater detail. Discussion questions will be submitted *before* the start of class and be used to organize discussions.
- **Writing (10%; 20%):** During the semester, you will be responsible for completing a short essay pertaining to each of the thematic topics. These **topic essays** must be written in response to one of the assigned prompts and critically engage with the primary literature. In addition, each essay must also provide an explanation for *why* you choose that specific prompt rather than the alternatives provided. You will also be responsible for completing a semester-long **research paper**. To complete the research paper, you will need to complete (1) the verbal topic discussion, (2) the research proposal, and (3) the term paper. More details pertaining to all writing assignments can be found on the *Writing Handout*.
- **Presentation and Commentary (10%; 5%):** Before starting to write the term paper, each student is required to present their research to a peer who will provide commentary on the presentation. Presentations will last 8 minutes and should involve either a visual presentation or a handout, followed by 2 minutes for commentary. More details can be found on the *Presentation Handout*.
- **Constitutional Conventions (25%):** Twice during the semester, you will be called to a class-wide convention where everyone will be tasked with writing and ratifying a new political compact. Through discussion, you will have the opportunity to enact a political and economic program which reflects your own conception of political authority and liberty. At the end of the convention, everyone will be required to vote on the proposal and defend that choice in a written “letter to the people”. More details can be found on the *Convention Handout*.
- **Expanding the Canon (5%; 5%):** During the semester you will read many canonical texts from the “Western” tradition, but to better understand our modern political order it behooves us all to understand multiple traditions and look outside the canon. Because of this, you will identify and analyze a political philosophical text from “outside the canon” which deals with issues of authority, legitimacy, and liberty and write an essay detailing how it deals with these issues. At the end of the semester, we will read all of the essays and then discuss them and how best to contextualize our political order within a broader intellectual tradition. More details can be found on the *Expanding the Canon Handout*.

Course Arrangements:

- **Revise and Resubmit:** I will provide extensive and actionable comments – critical and constructive – to all papers you hand in. The expectation is that you can make use of these comments to improve both your arguments as well as your general writing. For the topic essays, you are encouraged to revise and polish the papers

once in order to strengthen the paper and receive a better grade. For the term paper, you are encouraged to revise and resubmit the paper up to three times. Good writing and good thinking require time, persistence, and multiple perspectives. If your initial grade is disappointing, take the time to rethink your argument, explore additional texts, and refine your writing. All rewritten work will be held at the same standard and grading scale as initial submissions.

- **Topical Discussion:** We will start every class with a pre-class mini discussion regarding current events, specifically with regard to news stories which relate to our current discussions. For example, if there has been a political scandal, a military *coup d'état*, or a trade war, we will see if we can connect up our philosophical reflection with real-world concerns and events.
- **Extended Office Hours:** In addition to the regular office hours, I will offer extended office hours two weeks prior to the deadline for the term paper so as to help you wrestle with your research topics, discuss writing strategies, and provide feedback.

Grading Scale

A+: 95% and up; A: 93-95%; A-: 90-92%; B+: 87-89%; B: 83-86%; B-: 80-82%; C+: 77-79%; C: 73-76%; C-: 70-72%....

Academic Integrity

Cheating and plagiarism will not be tolerated. Students suspected of violating the Chapman Academic Integrity Policy will be required to participate in the outlined procedures. For concerns with AI writing aids, see the *AI Policy Handout*.

Disability Resources

If you have a disability that requires special accommodation you should contact the Chapman Disability Services at ds@chapman.edu as soon as possible.

Schedule:

Class 1	Introduction: What makes authority legitimate and are there limits to it? No readings
Class 2	Authority and Sovereignty Lecture – <i>Divided Authority</i>
Class 3	Dante, “Of Monarchy”
Class 4	Writing Workshop
Class 5	Lecture – <i>Sovereignty and Obedience</i>
Class 6	Hobbes, “Leviathan”
Class 7	Lecture – <i>Contracts and Limits</i>
Class 8	Hobbes, “Leviathan” Locke, “Second Treatise”
Class 9	Lecture – <i>The People and Classes</i>
Class 10	Rousseau, “The Social Contract” Marx & Engels, “The Communist Manifesto”

Class 11	Law and Liberty Lecture – <i>Rule of Law</i>
Class 12	Montesquieu, “Spirit of the Laws”
Class 13	Lecture – <i>Thoughts and Conscience</i>
Class 14	Mill, “On Liberty” Chapter I
Class 15	Lecture – <i>Political Limits</i>
Class 16	Mill, “On Liberty” Chapter III
Class 17	Political Constitutional Convention No reading
Class 18	Political Constitutional Convention No reading
Class 19	Property and Regulation Lecture – <i>Property Rights</i>
Class 20	Locke, “Second Treatise” Smith, “Wealth of Nations”
Class 21	Lecture, “Regulation and Power”
Class 22	Smith, “Wealth of Nations” Marx, “Capital”
Class 23	Economic Constitutional Convention
Class 24	Economic Constitutional Convention
Class 25	Revolution and Disobedience Lecture – <i>Methods of Revolt</i>
Class 26	Lenin, “What is to be Done?” Luxembourg, “Dialectic of Spontaneity and Organization” King, “Letter from Birmingham Jail”
Class 27	Globalism and War Lecture – <i>Anarchy or Law</i> Selassie, “Speech to the League of Nations”
Class 28	Expanding the Canon No reading