



THE SCHOOL OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

PHI/POL 312

3 credits (45 contact hours)

ETHICS IN SOCIETY

COURSE DESCRIPTION

From the perspective of selected topical issues of politics and society, students will be encouraged to develop an enhanced critical awareness of how major political and social thinkers in the past have treated the relationship between individual and society. The course will thus include the study of prominent texts in moral and political philosophy (from Plato and Aristotle to authors of the twentieth century), but it will also aim directly to improve students' analytical skills for understanding conflicts that commonly arise in the practice of citizenship, while also helping them to develop a finer appreciation the significance of social change and of cultural diversity, in an emergent global society.

RATIONALE

The relationship between ethics and politics has always been a major topic of moral and political discourse in the western tradition, but has now become disputable, and potentially crucial, on a global scale. Ever since the revival in Europe of the fifteenth century of the classical idea of political allegiance as a primary determinant of ethics, political thinkers have laboured to give rational justification for setting limits to political obligation, above all by means of a conception of rights inherent to the human condition, while also treating political authority as a means of improving the human condition, or even perfecting it into an ideal end-state. In our own time the idea of citizenship, associated mainly with a liberal approach to resolving the problematic relationship of individual and society, again faces major challenges, which might be seen to result from deep-seated fissures in previous efforts to give politics an ethical meaning and purpose. For example, if on the one hand the process known as 'globalization' has increased the possibility of conflict between allegiance to community and the assertion of universal rights, on the other hand the priority attached to the utilitarian satisfaction of individual desires, aided and abetted by the economic science of markets, is increasingly seen as threatening core humanistic values by the propagation of 'too much freedom'.

OBJECTIVES

- Explore and dissect the evolution of the idea of citizenship.
- Assess the efficacy of citizenship as a means of defending individual liberty.
- Review the co-existence of diverse loyalties and collective identities.

- Evaluate the significance of new challenges to the idea of citizenship arising from global economic and social transformation.
- Compare new and old responses like “multiculturalism” and “cosmopolitanism”.
- Cherish the diversity of origin and perspective on which the survival of the human species now depends.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

- Students should obtain a better understanding of why politics is a necessary, though problematic, aspect of the human individual’s aspiration to live a good life.
- They should also come away from the course with a greater ability to see the relevance to living in the 21st century of classical “great texts” of moral and political philosophy.
- Students will clarify their own responsibilities and expectations of active citizenship.
- Students will develop and demonstrate strategies for adapting to the demands of living in a globalized society.

TEACHING METHODS

The success of the course will depend on active participation by students in discussion in class, based on prior thorough reading of required texts, and under guidance and mediation of the professor. Students may also be expected to attend guest speaker conferences to augment class work.

ASSESSMENT

Grades will be distributed according to the following assignments:

- Class Participation 20%
- In-Class Presentation and Discussion 20%
- Mid-semester in-class exam 30%
- Final Exam or Term Paper – 30%

Class Participation – 20%

Students are expected to arrive in class having completed the assigned readings and having prepared for discussion. The readings tend to be quite extensive so plan accordingly. We will usually approach these readings with precise questions to consider, most often given to you in advance. Consider these issues in your reading and be prepared to develop during in-class discussions.

In-Class Presentation and Discussion– 20%

Each student will prepare one 20-minute presentation followed by leading a debate/discussion on the chosen subject. Students should prepare their presentations with follow-up questions to present to their

classmates. The student presenting will provide the general topic and questions to consider to their classmates during the previous session.

Mid-Semester In-Class Exam – 30%

This first in-class exam will consist of essay questions based on the readings and on our in-class discussions. Subjects will depend on the topics we cover in student presentations and debates, readings and discussions mediated by the professor. We will review the issues discussed in the sessions leading up to the exam date.

Final In-Class Exam or Term Paper – 30%

Students will have a choice either to take the final in-class exam, a format similar to the mid-semester exam, or to write a 10-12-page term paper on the subject of their choice. Should the student choose the latter, it will be up to them to choose their subject with the professor's guidance.

REQUIRED TEXTS

These will be complemented by a prepared photo-copied selection of reading materials.

BELLAMY, Richard (2008) *Citizenship: a very short introduction* Oxford

MACINTYRE, Alasdair (1998) *A Short History of Ethics* second edition. London and New York

PAREKH, Bhikhu (2002) *Rethinking Multiculturalism: cultural diversity and political theory* Cambridge, Mass.

RYAN, Alan (2012) *On Politics* Allen Lane

SINGER, Peter (2011) *Practical Ethics* Oxford readers, Oxford

ATTENDANCE

One of the primary requirements this semester is that you attend class. This is not a lecture class, and its success depends very much on your coming to class on time, prepared for the lesson, and ready to participate in discussion and activities. Attendance will be part of your final grade.

About attendance, two unexcused absences are tolerated. Any other unexcused absence will affect the final grade. Are considered as excused absences: absences linked to IAU excursions; sickness (a medical certificate is required); emergencies.

CALENDRIER/ CALENDAR: To be announced