**Phil102 POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY**

**(Semester two 2015 – 16)**

**Module Convenor:**

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**Aims of the Module**

The aim of this module is to introduce students to some of the most important philosophers and themes of the western tradition of political thought.  The first questions raised on the course will be:  What gives some people the right to rule over others? Why should citizens obey the law? These are questions about the concepts of political authority and obligation.  After a brief consideration of responses, including democratic responses, to them the course will proceed in a more or less historical order to introduce the views of Aristotle, Machiavelli, Hobbes, Locke, Marx, and Mill.  Other key concepts raised and discussed along the way will include justice, community, ethics in politics, rights, liberty, equality, property, exploitation and ideology.

Political philosophers have examined such issues as authority, democracy, justice, liberty and equality since ancient times.  They have thought of them in very different ways and offered conflicting answers.  The main point of studying such thinkers is the degree of insight and thoroughness they bring to the exploration of issues lying behind questions that most thoughtful people ask about politics. Acquaintance with some major thinkers and texts will enable students to gain a more thorough understanding of many of the principles and ideas of the western tradition of political thought.  Through an introduction to the conceptual approach of political philosophy, students will be better able to subject political thinking to critical analysis.  Students completing the course should be able to distinguish, and discuss the relative merits of, different senses of such terms as 'freedom', ‘justice’ and 'equality'.

**Structure**

This is a 15 credit module. The contact teaching is delivered through two weekly lectures and one weekly seminar (starting in week 2), with students required to attend each. *To get the most out of the course it is essential that you follow the lectures and seminars as outlined below and do the associated reading.* The lecture and seminars times have been scheduled by ORBIT.

Lectures in weeks 1-3 and 10-12 will be taught by Attila Tanyi. The remaining lectures will be taught by me (Jan Jobling). The seminar groups will be taught by me, Attila Tanyi, Oliver Downing and Juan Arana Cobos. See your timetable to find the time and location of your seminar group. ***Please note that lectures start in week 1 and seminars start in week 2.***

The module content is structured roughly in the following order, but you should bear in mind that there are many interconnections between the weekly lecture topics for which you should be on the lookout (bear in mind also that the seminar discussion will typically focus on issues related to the previous week’s lecture topics).

**Weekly lecture topics:**

Week 1 Political philosophy, obligation and philosophical anarchism

Week 2 Theories of obligation; democracy

Week 3 The value of democracy; Plato against democracy

Week 4 Aristotle, politics and the good

Week 5 Machiavelli – the People, the Prince and ‘virtue’

*Week 6 Independent study week (no philosophy teaching sessions)*

Week 7 Hobbes, the state of nature and social contract

Week 8 Locke and property

Week 9 Marx, historical materialism and ideology

Week 10 Mill on utilitarianism

Week 11 Mill on liberty

Week 12 Mill and feminism

**Reading**

In addition to attending the lectures and seminars, all students are expected to do their own core-reading and some further research. *The lectures will be very hard to follow if you do no reading.* See also the section on presentations below.

The essential reading for this module is:

**Jonathan Wolff, *An Introduction to Political Philosophy***

This book, written to be accessible to students, covers very well every topic on the module except Aristotle, Machiavelli and Marx. I will recommend reading on those topics and further useful secondary texts at the appropriate times. Wolff’s book also covers important and relevant topics (such as Rousseau) that are not covered in any detail in the lectures.

Important primary texts include:

Plato, *The Republic*

Aristotle, *Politics* (Books I-III)

Hobbes, *Leviathan* (Parts 1-2)

Locke, *Second Treatise of Civil Government*

Mill, *On Liberty*

Marx & Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*

**Assessment**

The assessment of the module is by examination, constituting 60% of the total assessment, and one 2,000-word essay, constituting 30%, and one assessed seminar presentation, constituting 10%.

**Presentations**

The required reading for the seminar presentations will be posted on VITAL the week before the presentations: **everyone should read these each week, not just those doing the presentations.** In some weeks the readings will be chapters of Wolff’s book mentioned above; in other weeks the required readings will be other documents posted to VITAL. These readings will vary in length and complexity: this will be borne in mind by the tutors assessing the presentations.

***Points to bear in mind when preparing seminar presentations:***

They should be 10-15 minutes in length (no longer)

When the reading is complex and covers a range of views and arguments do not try to report every point; pull out and focus on those you think most important.

Try to present (briefly) your own views on the material you present.

If you find aspects of the reading obscure it is acceptable to mention this in your presentation: one of the main points of the presentations is to generate a discussion and asking for clarification of the material is a way of doing this.

**Essays**

The essay questions will be made available by February 19th; that is the Friday of week 3. There will be two questions of which you answer one. ***The deadline for essay submission is 14.00 on Friday March 18th; that is the Friday of week 7*.**

***All essays must be submitted electronically via VITAL and are passed through plagiarism detection software before being marked.***

Guidance in writing philosophy essays and the philosophy marking descriptors will be available in the assessment part of the module on VITAL.

**Exam revision**

The exam paper will have 6 questions of which you answer two in two hours; which 2 is your choice. That’s in 2 hours, so you should reckon on approximately 1 hour per question/answer. To make sure you go into the exam able to answer two questions I suggest you revise at least 4 topics where ‘topic’ means either a philosopher’s overall theory or political philosophy or a concept (e.g. freedom, human nature, democracy etc). The latter approach involves considering what the range of philosophers covered on the module think about the concept in question. Make sure you answer the question that’s there in front of you and be prepared to *critically* discuss the material you use in your answers: you should say whether or not you agree with the views you are discussing (rather than just describe them) and why. In other words, don’t just learn the material you are revising, but think about it too.

There are past papers in the Sydney Jones library. Here are some sample questions from a previous year (the module content will be roughly the same this year, but the exam questions will not be the same):

Should we live in a state of nature?

What is special about democracy?

How does Mill argue against the subjection of women?

With reference to the views of Aristotle discuss the importance of community.

‘History is the history of class struggle’. Discuss the significance of this claim for political thought.

Discuss the role of ‘consent’ in Locke’s political philosophy. How plausible are his views on this topic?

**Feedback to students**

Shortly after your presentation your seminar tutor will provide a mark and some feedback via VITAL. Once they have been marked and moderated, feedback, not just a mark, will be provided on your essays, also via VITAL. ***For both forms of assessment you should read the feedback provided, not just the mark!***

Towards the end of the semester there should be an opportunity for you to individually discuss your essay feedback with me, so you can ask questions about it and ensure you understand any advice it contains. It is important that you do consider and understand the feedback provided so that you are better prepared for the exam and for the philosophy essays you will write in the future. Feedback on exam performance will be provided in the form of generic comments posted to the module email list, should that be appropriate.

**Feedback from students**

Towards the end of the semester a module questionnaire will be made available on VITAL. Please take advantage of this opportunity to comment on the module.

If you need to discuss any aspect of the module with me, please come to my office hours (see VITAL) or email me to make an appointment.

My office is room 346 in the Philosophy Department, on the third floor of Mulberry Court.

My email address is [jjobling@liv.ac.uk.](mailto:jjobling@liv.ac.uk.)