NASP - Network for the Advancement in Social and Political Studies

GSSPS - Graduate School in Social and Political Sciences

Academic Year 2014-2015

Political Philosophy Basic

(20h – 3 CFU)

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Objectives

The course primarily aims at providing students with a selective but intensive survey of the major debates and problems that engage political philosophy. More precisely, on the one hand, the course will focus on basic questions concerning the normative character of political philosophy, paying particular attention to its evaluative purposes, and on methodological issues with a view to clarify the meta-theoretical profile of political philosophy. On the other hand, the course is meant to offer an overview of the basic topics discussed in contemporary debates, in order to offer a key to appreciate the specific import of political philosophy and to understand how the major paradigms of political philosophy work.

Short Course Description

The course has a twofold focus. On the one hand, the course will address meta-theoretical and methodological questions. More precisely, in the first part of the course, particular attention will be paid the specific challenges connected to the normative attitude of political philosophy. As a normative – as opposed to descriptive – enterprise political philosophy is indeed committed to evaluate the desirability of observable states of affairs as well as to comparatively assess different possible states of the world. To similar ends, political philosophy puts forward standards whose reliability may be vindicated by endorsing different strategies for dealing with political facts, by pursuing different degrees of objectivity and by appealing to different understandings of

justification. On the other hand, the course will explore some major paradigms in contemporary political philosophy. The analysis of the selected paradigms – Rawls's liberalism, communitarianism and libertarianism – will familiarize students with substantive questions concerning, among others, liberty, equality and justice. Moreover, the investigation of the selected paradigms will allow the students to see at work the methodological issues addressed in the first part of the course. Accordingly, students will gains clues, not only about the substantive content of the selected theories, but also about how to assess merits and limits of different political theories.

The course combines lessons, students' presentations, and discussion. There will be two meetings on each topic: the first one is devoted to provide the students with the key elements necessary to understand the questions at stake and with the relevant tools to fruitfully address the assigned readings; the second meeting is instead devoted to students' presentations and to more in-depth discussion.

Program

Lecture 1

- **Philosophy and politics: descriptive and evaluative aims**

Lecture 2

- **Presentations and discussion**

Lecture 3

- **Facts and Principles**
- **Desirability and feasibility**

Lecture 4

- **Presentations and discussion**

Lecture 5

- **Objectivity**
- **Justification**

<u>Lecture 6</u>

- **Presentations and discussion**

<u>Lecture 7</u>

- **The Rawlsian paradigm**

<u>Lecture 8</u>

- **Presentations and discussion**

<u>Lecture 9</u>

- **The communitarian paradigm**
- **The libertarian paradigm**

<u>Lecture 10</u>

- **Presentations and discussion**

Reference materials

<u>Reading assignments</u>

Reading assignments are divided into required and suggested readings. All students are expected to read in advance the required material for each lecture. Students following the path in Political Theory are invited to read also the suggested readings.

The assigned texts will be available at the following link:

https://www.dropbox.com/sh/53br0kxtckwagja/y3VMlIMdCn

<u>Lecture 1-2</u>

Philosophy and politics: descriptive versus normative aims

- <u>Required readings:</u>
  - Berlin, I. "Does Political Theory Still Exists?", in *Concepts and Categories. Philosophical Essays*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 1980, pp. 143-172.
  - Besussi, A. "Philosophy and Politics", in *A Companion to Political Philosophy. Methods, Tools, Topics*, edited by A. Besussi. Farnham: Ashgate, 2012, pp. 3-15.

- Cohen, G.A. *Rescuing Justice and Equality*, Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press 2008 – excerpt
- Korsgaard, C. "The Normative Question", in *The Sources of Normativity*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1996: pp. 7-21.
- Miller, D. "Political Philosophy for Earthlings", in D. Leopold and M. Stears (eds.) *Political Theory. Methods and Approaches*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 2008 – excerpt
- Walzer, M. *Spheres of Justice: A Defense of Pluralism and Equality*, New York: Basic Books, 1983 – excerpt

- Suggested readings
  - Arendt, H. "Philosophy and Politics", *Social Research* , 71(3), 2004 – excerpts
  - Rawls, J. "Four Roles of Political Philosophy", in *Justice as Fairness: A Restatement*, Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press.

Lecture 3-4

Facts and Principles

- Required readings:
  - Cohen, G.A. "Facts and Principles", *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 31(3), 2003, pp. 211-245 - excerpt
  - Miller, D. "Political Philosophy for Earthlings", in *Political Theory. Methods and Approaches*, edited by D. Leopold and M. Stears. Oxford: Oxford University Press 2008, pp. 29-48,
  - Ronzoni, M. "Facts and Principles", in *A Companion to Political Philosophy. Methods, Tools, Topics*, edited by A. Besussi. Farnham: Ashgate, 2012, pp. 53-63.
- Suggested readings
  - Freeman, S. "Constructivism, Facts, and Moral Justification", in *Contemporary Debates in Political Philosophy*, edited by T. Christiano and J. Christman. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009, pp. 41-60.

Desirability and Feasibility

- Required readings:
  - Estlund, D. "Utopophobia", *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 42(2): 113-134.
  - Galston, W.A. "Realism in Political Theory", *European Journal of Political Theory*, 9(4), 2010, pp. 385-411
  - Nagel, T. "What Makes a Political Theory Utopian?", *Social Research*, 56(4), 1989, pp. 903-920.

- Suggested readings:
  - Berlin, I. "The Pursuit of the Ideal", in *The Crooked Timber of Humanity. Chapters in the History of Ideas*, London: John Murray 1990, pp. 1-19.
  - Räikkä, J. "The Feasibility Condition in Political Theory", *The Journal of Political Philosophy*, 6(1), 1998, pp. 27-40.
  - Williams, B. "Realism and Moralism in Political Theory", in *In the Beginning Was the Deed. Realism and Moralism in Political Argument*. Princeton: Princeton University Press 2005, pp. 1-17.

Lecture 5-6

Objectivity

- Required readings:
  - Nagel, T. "Introduction", in *The View from Nowhere*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986.
  - Rorty, R. "Solidarity or Objectivity?", in *Philosophical Papers. Objectivity, Relativism and Truth*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991, pp. 21-34.
- Suggested readings:
  - Nussbaum, M.C. "Political Objectivity", *New Literary History*, 32(4), 2001, pp. 883-906.

Justification

- Required readings:
  - Chambers, S. "Theories of Political Justification", *Philosophical Compass*, 5(11), 2010, 893-903.
  - Holder, C. "Justification", in *A Companion to Political Philosophy. Methods, Tools, Topics*, edited by A. Besussi. Farnham: Ashgate, 2012, pp. 101-119.
  - D'Agostino, "Public Justification", *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.
- Suggested readings:
  - Macedo, S. "The Politics of Justification", *Political Theory*, 18(2), 1990, pp. 280-304.
  - Rawls, J. *A Theory of Justice*, Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press 1971: pp. 577-587.

Lecture 7-8

The Rawlsian paradigm

- Required readings:
  - Rawls, J. *A Theory of Justice*, Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1971: §1-9; § 20-24; § 68
  - Rawls, J. *Political Liberalism* (expanded edition). New York: Columbia University Press 1993: xii-lx.

o Audard, C. *John Rawls*, Stocksfield: Acumen 2007: pp. 1-24.

<u>Lecture 9-10</u>

The communitarian paradigm

- <u>Required readings:</u>
    - o Sandel, M. "The Procedural Republic and the Unencumbered Self", *Political Theory*, 12 (1), 1984, pp. 81-96.
    - o Sandel, M. "Moral Argument and Liberal Toleration: Abortion and Homosexuality", in *Public Philosophy. Essays on Morality and Politics*, Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2005.
    - o Nagel, T. "Progressive but not Liberal", *The New York Review of Books* , 25 May 2006.
    - o Sandel, M – Nagel, T. "The case for Liberalism: an Exchange", *The New York Review of Books*, 5 October 2006.

The libertarian paradigm

- <u>Required readings:</u>
    - o Nozick, R. *Anarchy State and Utopia*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974: pp. 3-6; 26-35; 150-164; 198-231.
    - o Rand, A. *The Fountainhead*, (excerpt)
- <u>Suggested readings:</u>
    - o Cohen, G.A. "Robert Nozick and Wilt Chamberlain: How Patterns Preserve Liberty", in *Self-ownership, Freedom and Equality*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995, pp. 19-37.
    - o Nagel, T. "Libertarianism without Foundations", in *Reading Nozick*, edited by J. Paul. Oxford: Blackwell, 1982.

Requirements and examination information

Students are expected to attend class meetings consistently and punctually. Students are also expected to actively discuss the subjects and texts under investigation during class discussions and they are therefore strongly invited to read the assigned readings in advance. Students' participation to discussion will be evaluated and, as specified below, it will count as a relevant aspect to define the final mark.

Students will also be assessed on the basis of their presentations. Further insights on this point and on how to organize and schedule presentations will be provided during the first meeting.

At the end of the course, students will be required to deliver a paper (5000 words) on a topic suggested by the instructor. The paper is meant, not just to offer students' the opportunity to show their knowledge

about the specific assigned topic and about the issues addressed during the course, but also their capacity to critically discuss the selected topic, to propose original readings and insights, and to consistently defend their claims.

Final grades will be awarded by weighting participation, presentation and final paper as follow:

- 25% Participation
- 35% Presentations
- 40% Final paper