

Political Science 206
4 credits, no pre- or co-requisites
Spring 2013
Class meetings: Mondays 8-9:50
Milam 213

Professor Valls
315 Gilkey Hall
andrew.valls@oregonstate.edu
Office Hours: Mon. & Wed., 10-12

Introduction to Political Thought (Hybrid)

This class is an introduction to political philosophy and to the major ideas and issues of selected political thinkers. We focus on the issue of justice: what it is, what it means, what it requires of a society in general and also how it applies to particular public policy issues. Among the questions to be addressed are: to what extent should the market determine distributive outcomes, and to what extent may the state play a role? What should the goal of public policy be in this arena—to establish equality of outcomes, equality of opportunity, provide for a minimum social safety net? What fundamental moral principles should guide us as we consider these issues? We explore these issues through engagement with both historical and contemporary thinkers.

As a hybrid course, the class will meet once a week for an hour and fifty minutes, and will involve a substantial amount of independent and online work. We will use the lectures and other materials provided by Michael Sandel of Harvard University, whose course on justice is very popular among Harvard students (900 sign up for it each year) and is now world-renowned because it became the subject of a series on PBS.

Learning Resources:

The main learning resources for the course are the books on justice—one written, one edited by Sandel (available for purchase at the OSU bookstore)—and the corresponding website:

Michael J. Sandel, Justice: What's the Right Thing To Do? New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2009. (referred to below as “Sandel”)

Michael J. Sandel, ed., Justice: A Reader. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007. (referred to below as “Reader”)

www.justiceharvard.org (referred to below as “the website”)

Statement Regarding Students with Disabilities:

Accommodations are collaborative efforts between students, faculty and Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD). Students with accommodations approved through SSD are responsible for contacting the faculty member in charge of the course prior to or during the first week of the term to discuss accommodations. Students who believe they are eligible for accommodations but who have not yet obtained approval through SSD should contact SSD immediately at 737-4098.

Evaluation of Student Performance:

Students will write two or three papers, take weekly online quizzes, take a final exam, and contribute to an online blog discussion.

Papers: If students write three papers, the lowest of the paper grades will be dropped in calculating the final course grade. The papers will be about 800 words each, and will not require any research beyond the class readings. (Additional paper guidelines will be distributed.) Papers are to be submitted electronically on Blackboard by 5pm on the dates indicated below. Late papers will not be accepted.

Exam and Quizzes: The exam and quizzes will be multiple choice. The weekly quizzes are generously curved: their main point is to make you aware of what you've learned. Quizzes will be available from 8am Wednesday until 5pm Friday. You may take them up to two times, and the higher score will be the one that is recorded. The final will also be curved.

Blog Posts: Blog posts are to be about 250 words. I encourage you to use your blog post to communicate with me and the class about what you find interesting, confusing, troubling, or what have you, about the material in the module. One function of the blog posts will be to set the agenda for our time in class together. What do you want to discuss further? What didn't you understand? Or, how might we apply a particular theory to a public policy issue? In addition, the Discussion Guides on the website provide a wonderful set of questions to get you thinking, and you may use your blog post to start a conversation about one of those questions. (The Discussion Guide questions will also be a good place to look when considering paper topics.) You may post more than one entry, and your entry or entries may be responses to a post by another student, or you may start a new topic. Blog entries are "minimally graded," meaning that I will check to make sure that you are making a good-faith effort to contribute to and participate in the online discussion. Students who do this consistently will receive an A for this portion of their grade.

The final grade will be an average of the two paper grades (20% each), the final exam grade (20%), your average quiz score (20%) and your blog entries (20%). All grades are recorded on a four-point scale, as follows:

A=4.0
A-=3.7
B+=3.3
B=3.0
B-=2.7
C+=2.3
C=2.0
C-=1.7
D=1.0
F=0.0

Learning Outcomes:

The most important learning outcomes, like the most important things in life, cannot be measured. Among the outcomes of the course that I would hope for is that it will help you, years from now, to be a more reflective, thoughtful, informed, and cultivated person. More immediately, however, at the end of the course you will be able to:

1. identify and define some important concepts in political theory;
2. recognize and describe the ideas of some of important political thinkers;
3. recall and analyze some of the major issues in political theory;
4. identify and evaluate some of the main positions on these issues, and the arguments that support them;
5. discuss and make arguments about these concepts, thinkers, issues, positions, and arguments in writing, while demonstrating appropriate writing skills.

The above are the primary learning outcomes of the course. As a bacc core course, however, there are additional, secondary, learning outcomes:

6. Identify significant events, developments, and/or ideas in the Western cultural experience and context;
7. Interpret the influence of philosophical, historical, and/or artistic phenomena in relation to contemporary Western culture;
8. Analyze aspects of Western culture in relation to broader cultural, scientific, or social processes.

Academic Integrity and Expectations for Student Conduct:

Students are expected to abide by all OSU regulations regarding student conduct, especially those pertaining to academic honesty. You must properly cite any sources used in writing your papers (including internet sources) and work alone and without notes on the quizzes and final exam. Violations of academic honesty will result in failing the course, and will be reported to the proper university authorities for further action. For a description of Oregon State's policies on student conduct and academic honesty, see the website at:

<http://oregonstate.edu/admin/stucon/index.htm>.

Schedule:

In the first meeting of the class, Monday of week 1, we will discuss the course content, the requirements and procedures, the ideas behind a hybrid course, and other introductory matters. Then by the end of week 1 (that is, by 5pm on Friday of that week) please do the activities indicated below for Module 1. We will then discuss the material in Module 1 the following Monday. After that, the pattern will be the same. All activities for a module are due by the end of the corresponding week of the term, at 5pm on Friday, and the material will be discussed in

class on the following Monday. Additional blog posts may be made over the weekend, but, as stated above, the quizzes will only be available from 8am Wednesday until 5pm Friday.

April 1: Course Introduction

Module 1: Moral Reasoning

Read: Sandel, chapter 1; and Reader, chapter 1.

On the website: Watch Episode 1, Parts I and 2; and consider the questions raised in the Discussion Guides.

On Blackboard: Take Quiz 1 and post a paragraph on the blog.

April 8: We will discuss this Module together in class.

Module 2: Utilitarianism

Read: Sandel, chapter 2; and Reader, chapter 2 (BUT don't read the whole excerpt from Mill's *Utilitarianism*; read only chapter 2, pp. 16-27).

On the website: Watch Episode 2, Parts 1 and 2; and consider the questions raised in the Discussion Guides.

On Blackboard: Take Quiz 2 and post a paragraph on the blog.

April 15: We will discuss this module together in class.

Module 3: Libertarianism

Read: Sandel, chapter 3; and Reader, chapters 3 and 4 (BUT read only chapters 2, 5, and 11 from Locke).

On the website: Watch Episode 3, Parts 1 and 2 and Episode 4, Parts 1 and 2; and consider the questions raised in the Discussion Guides.

On Blackboard: Take Quiz 3 and post a paragraph on the blog.

April 22: We will discuss this module together in class.

Paper 1 due Wednesday, April 24.

Module 4: The Morality of Markets

Read: Sandel, chapter 4; and Reader, chapter 5.

On the website: Watch Episode 5, Parts 1 and 2; and consider the questions raised in the Discussion Guides.

On Blackboard: Take Quiz 4 and post a paragraph on the blog.

April 29: We will discuss this module together in class.

Module 5: Rights and Duties

Read: Sandel, chapter 5; and Reader, chapter 6.

On the website: Watch Episode 6, Parts 1 and 2 and Episode 7, Part 1; and consider the questions raised in the Discussion Guides.

On Blackboard: Take Quiz 5 and post a paragraph on the blog.

May 6: We will discuss this module together in class.

Module 6: Liberal Egalitarianism

Read: Sandel, chapter 6; and Reader, chapters 7 and 8.

On the website: Watch Episode 7, Part 2 and Episode 8, Parts 1 and 2; and consider the questions raised in the Discussion Guides.

On Blackboard: Take Quiz 5 and post a paragraph on the blog.

May 13: We will discuss this module together in class.

Paper 2 due on the Wednesday, May 15.

Module 7: Ends and Desert

Read: Sandel, chapters 7 and 8; and Reader, chapters 9 and 11.

On the website: Watch Episode 9, Parts 1 and 2, and Episode 10, Parts 1 and 2; and consider the questions raised in the Discussion Guides.

On Blackboard: Take Quiz 7 and post a paragraph on the blog.

May 20: We will discuss this module together in class.

Module 8: Membership and Loyalty

Read: Sandel, chapter 9; and Reader, chapter 12.

On the website: Watch Episode 11, Parts 1 and 2; and consider the questions raised in the Discussion Guides.

On Blackboard: Take Quiz 8 and post a paragraph on the blog.

May 27: Memorial Day. No class. I will try to arrange an alternative meeting time, perhaps Wednesday, May 29 at 8am.

Module 9: Can the State be Neutral?

Read: Sandel, chapter 10; and Reader, chapter 14.

On the website: Watch Episode 12, Parts 1 and 2; and consider the questions raised in the Discussion Guides.

On Blackboard: Take Quiz 9 and post a paragraph on the blog.

June 3: We will discuss this module together in class.

Paper 3 (optional) due on Wednesday, June 5.

Module 10: Course Review

Use the final week of classes, after we meet on Monday, to review the material for the course in preparation for the final exam. The one required activity is to post one blog entry on something related to the course. What did you find most interesting? Most difficult? Also, you can use this as an opportunity to ask questions about things that you are still not sure of—or to answer a question posed by another student. In essence, this is your opportunity to help each other think about what you've learned and to study together for the exam.

Tuesday, June 11, 6pm: Final Exam.