

POSC 3360: Modern Political Philosophy

Fall 2014
T/R 1:00-2:30 pm
Cooke 113

Office: Old Main 306C
Office Hours: *Last Page of Syllabus*
Office Phone: 325-793-3864
E-mail: olufowote.joel@mcm.edu

1) Course Description:

Why should we obey the law? Are there limits to what the state may demand of us? What is autonomy? Are we free? Does social justice require equality? What do we owe the global poor? This course addresses these and other questions of social and political morality, through the lens of some of the major theories of Western philosophy, including those of Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, John Stuart Mill, Karl Marx, John Rawls, Robert Nozick, and Michel Foucault.

The course is organized around three topical units: **Section I** focuses on Political Authority & Self-Determination and is devoted to the foundation and limits of political authority and the link between individual autonomy and collective self-determination. **Section II** emphasizes Freedom, Justice and scrutinizes the importance of autonomy, liberty and explores the demands of justice. **Section III** takes a look at Global Issues where we examine topics such as world poverty and immigration.

2) Course Objectives:

Upon successful completion of this course, students will sharpen their ability to engage in political philosophical reflection and reasoning. Specifically, they will be able to:

1. identify and understand philosophical concepts, arguments, and theories that are central to modern and contemporary political thought
2. critically assess these concepts, theories and arguments;
3. apply these concepts, principles, and arguments to important questions of political philosophy
4. develop and refine their own views about a variety of social and political issues; and
5. carefully express and defend these views in public and on paper.

3) Course Requirements

- **Class Preparation & Attendance:** Your success in this class depends heavily upon your attendance and participation. You are expected to come to class having read the material assigned for the day.

- **Weekly Assignments:** Most Tuesdays, you will turn in a short paper discussing one of the readings from the previous week or for the reading for that day. Your reaction, which will be turned in, typed and hardcopy, at the beginning of the class, should consist of two short paragraphs (around 300-500 words altogether) in which you will (1) summarize in your own words the author's goal in the text and main claim(s) and reconstruct the author's argument in favor of this (or one of the) claim(s); and (2) offer one philosophically significant reaction to this claim or to the author's argument in favor of this claim. For example, you can raise a question about the author's analysis, or motivate an objection to it.

How credit will be awarded:

- 1) Clarity: What you say should be clear and easy to understand.
- 2) Charity: Try hard to understand the author's point before objecting to it.
- 3) Critical ability: You should demonstrate some degree of critical and logical thinking (note that this can be done even by admitting to not understanding something).

- **Debates:** There will be 3 in-class debates during the semester. Each student will participate in all 3 debates. The assignment is as follows:

A few days before each debate, you will meet up with your "debate prep partners" to reflect on the best philosophical arguments for and against the issue. You should practice presenting each side as clearly and persuasively as you can. On the day before the debate, you will email me a 1-page summary of the best arguments for and against the debate prompt. Your summary should be cut and pasted in the body of the email, and the email's subject should read "Your Name: 3360 Debate # Outline." You will bring copies of this summary along to class for your own reference. On the day following the debate, your debate prep partners will send me an email (Cc'ing all others) reporting on how well prepared and engaged you were during these conversations and suggesting a grade. You will get a debate prep grade for each debate. The rules for the debates will be distributed and explained in class.

- **Philosophy Clip:** The last class will be devoted to viewing students' "Philosophy Clip." You will pair up with another student in the class and together find a short clip (4 min. max) from a movie, TV show, advertisement, or news announcement that illustrates in an interesting way one of the issues (set of issues) or theories that we have discussed during the course. The clip could provide an illustration by, for instance: providing additional support (perhaps empirical evidence) for a philosophical argument put forth by one of our authors; arguing directly against a given argument we talked about; suggesting a different avenue for thinking about a question we raised in class. Excerpts from TV shows and films are particularly welcome and documentaries, lectures, and experts' interviews should be avoided because of their transparency (they mean just what they say—in contrast, it is your analysis of the Philosophy Clip that should bring out the interesting points made by the image-text). Your presentation, which should be shorter than 10 minutes, will follow the following format:

- (a) Introduction: I) introduce the origin/context of your Philosophy Clip; ii) briefly state your thesis, i.e., the main philosophical point that you want to use the clip to make; and (iii) point out certain features of the clip that the audience should pay particular attention to.
- (b) Play your Philosophy Clip.-Analyze the Philosophy Clip: (i) explain how the clip relates to a theory, argument, issue or question; (ii) provide arguments for your thesis: think of your clip as a text, i.e., as material that requires interpretation and contains interesting ideas (in the form of

images, facts, words, characters, effects, etc.)

- (c) Conclude: you may for instance suggest some further questions raised by the clip. A one-to-two page outline of your Philosophy Clip will be due on Thursday, April 17 (hand in one outline per team). The outline should include: -the name and email of each participant-a catchy title for your Philosophy Clip presentation-an indication of the provenance of the Clip (accompanied by a stable web link, if possible)-the Clip's duration-the theory/argument/issue you will be addressing through the Clip-a sketch of the Clip analysis On the day of the presentation, each student in the duo will turn in a 3-page report of the Philosophy Clip. Your grade will be based on both the oral presentation and the written report. Start thinking about it! If you have any trouble at all, please come talk to me at least a week before the outline is due; I'll give you tips on how to find a suitable and exciting Philosophy Clip.

- **Exams:** The midterm exam will be held in class on Thursday, October 16th. The final exam is currently scheduled for the week of December 8th and it will focus on material from the second half of the course. A review session will be held before each exam.

- **Grading:**

Attendance	10%
Weekly Assignments	10%
Debates	30%
Philosophy Clip	20%
Midterm	15%
Final	15%
Total	
	100%

Students should be aware that university policy allows for a plus/minus grading system. This system will be applied in this course. Political Science majors in particular should be aware of this policy, as a minimum grade of "C" must be earned in order to have this course count towards their major. Thus, C- does NOT obtain proper course credit for majors. Non-majors and minors can obtain General Education credit for this course with a D- or higher. Plus/minus grades in this course will be reflected in the following numerical order:

100-93	A	76-73	C
92-90	A-	72-70	C-
89-87	B+	69-67	D+
86-83	B	66-63	D
82-80	B-	62-60	D-
79-77	C+	59-	F

4) Course Policies

- **Absences:** Success in this course is contingent on attendance and participation; therefore, multiple absences will result in a reduction of your overall letter grade, while excess absences

may result in failure of the course. Students are expected to stay current on the readings and lectures, which is possible only by attending class. The university policy is for 2 unexcused absences to be allowed during the semester with no penalties incurred. Any additional absences will result in a significant penalty attached to final grades. For **every** additional class missed without a valid excuse, students' final grade will be lowered 1 numerical point. For example, if a student's final numerical grade is 93 (A), then one additional unexcused absence (after the first one has been used) will result in the student's grade being lowered to 92 (A-).

Excused absences are not penalized, but students must provide documentation for an absence to be considered excused. An example of an excused absence is a university sanctioned field trip. An example of an **un**excused absence is leaving a message on my voice mail indicating a student isn't feeling very well. If you are ill, you will need to see the university nurse for documentation. I also reserve the right to administratively drop without prior notification students who develop a pattern of absences.

Please be aware that being dropped from the course may result in certain financial aid, and/or athletic competition eligibility repercussions, and thus students are strongly advised to keep track of their attendance and progress. If a student wishes to drop this class during the semester, it is the responsibility of the student to make sure that this class is dropped from his or her schedule.

- **Missed Assignments:** Late assignments will not be accepted. Papers are due, typed, at the beginning of the class period. Missed assignments will be counted as a 0 which will inevitably reduce your overall grade for the course.
- **Cheating & Academic Dishonesty:** Any student found to be in violation of the University's policy on plagiarism and academic dishonesty will receive an F in this course and be reported to the appropriate authorities. If in doubt, please consult the university handbook.

5) General Etiquette.

- **Cell phone use:** Students are expected to turn off their cell phones in class. Students receiving calls in class will be asked to leave the room, and will be counted as absent (unexcused) for that day. Students asked to leave the room a second time during the semester will be considered a discipline problem and will be administratively dropped from the course with a "WF" and referred to the Dean of Students as a disciplinary problem (code violation 102) for appropriate punishment.
- **Computer use in the classroom:** Students are expected to use computers in the classroom appropriately. Surfing the net randomly, checking e-mail, playing games, etc, are considered a violation of appropriate tablet use and will be treated seriously. Students violating appropriate computer use or caught using other electronic devices for purposes unrelated to the course will be asked to leave the room, and will be counted as absent (unexcused) for that day. This stipulation includes Facebook, MySpace, blogging, etc.... Students asked to leave the room a second time during the semester will be considered a discipline problem and will be administratively dropped from the course with a "WF" and referred to the Dean of Students as a disciplinary problem (code violations 102 and 117) for appropriate punishment.

- **Food and other items:** Students may bring food and/or sodas or coffee into the classroom, as long as the food or beverage is consumed quietly. Tobacco, however, will not be tolerated. Any student caught with tobacco products will be asked to leave the room, and will be counted as absent (unexcused) for that day. Students asked to leave the room a second time during the semester will be considered a discipline problem and will be administratively dropped from the course with a “WF” and referred to the Dean of Students as a disciplinary problem (code violation 102) for appropriate punishment.
- **Addressing fellow classmates:** In this course, students will be asked to debate ideas and opinions. At times, I will play devil’s advocate on a broad range of controversial topics. However, the tone of discussion must always remain appropriate. Any name-calling or derogatory comments made concerning an individual’s opinion will not be tolerated. Any student engaging in inappropriate speech will be asked to leave the room, and will be counted as absent (unexcused) for that day. Students asked to leave the room a second time during the semester will be considered a discipline problem and will be administratively dropped from the course with a “WF” and referred to the Dean of Students as a disciplinary problem (code violation 102) for appropriate punishment.

6) Textbooks & Class Materials

- There is one required Textbooks for this course available for purchase in the University Bookstore.

It is: Matt Zwolinski. ‘Arguing About Political Philosophy’ 2nd Edition.

- All other relevant course material will be available through Moodle or the Library Reserves.

7) Class Schedule:

PART I (Political Authority and Self Determination)

Week 1: What the heck is Political Science? What is Political Philosophy?

Tuesday, August 26th: Course Overview, Syllabus, Politics & Political Science
Thursday, August 28th: What we do: Subfields and Substance

Week 2: State of Nature

Tuesday, September 2nd: Hobbes, The State of Nature as a State of War: *Leviathan* (Chp 11, 13, 15)
Thursday, September 4th: Locke, The State of Nature and the Law of Nature: *Second Treatise*, (Chp 2, 3, 9)

Week 3: Social Contract

Tuesday, September 9th: Hobbes, From Contract to Leviathan: *Leviathan*, (Chp 14, 17) (A #1)
Thursday, September 11th: Locke, Social Contract and the State as Agent: *Second Treatise*, chap. 8

Week 4: The Duty to (Dis)Obey

Tuesday, September 16th: Plato, *Crito* (pp109-119)
Thursday, September 18th: Martin Luther King, Jr., Letter from a Birmingham Jail (pp 129-138)

Week 5: The Perils of Obedience?

Tuesday, September 23rd: Stanley Milgram (Pp 119-129) (A #2)
Thursday, September 25th: Debate #1

PART II (Freedom and Justice)

Week 6: Justice

Tuesday, September 30th: David Hume & John Stuart Mill (Pp185-211)
Thursday, October 2nd: John Rawls (Pp 211-239)

Week 7: Freedom

Tuesday, October 7th: John Stuart Mill and Isaiah Berlin (Pp 447-488) (A #3)
Thursday, October 9th: FDR and Pettit (Pp 488-505)

Week 8: Midterm Review

Tuesday, October 14th: Review
Thursday, October 16th: **MIDTERM**

Week 9: Equality

Tuesday, October 21st: Vonnegut, Arneson, & Schmidz (Pp 509-553)
Thursday, October 23rd: Rousseau & MacKinnon (Pp 553-574)

Week 10: Political Ideology

Tuesday, October 28th: No readings!!
Thursday, October 30th: Debate #2

PART III (Global Issues)

Week 11: Democratic Deliberation & Voting

Tuesday, November 4th: Gutmann & Thompson (Pp 585-604) (A #4)
Thursday, November 6th: Brennan (Pp 604-621)

Week 12: Immigration

Tuesday, November 11th: Huemer (Pp 625-650)
Thursday, November 13th: Miller (Pp 650-663)

Week 13: World Poverty

Tuesday, November 18th: Singer (Pp 667-683) (A #5)
Thursday, November 20th: Debate #3

Week 14: Philosophy Clips

Tuesday, November 25th: Philosophy Clips
Thursday, November 27th: **NO CLASS**

Week 15: Final Review

Tuesday, December 2nd: Review
Thursday, December 4th: Review

Week 16: Final Examination Period

Monday, December 8th – Friday, December 12th



Dr. Olufowote
CLASS SCHEDULE & OFFICE HOURS

Old Main 306C

Telephone – (325)-793-3864

E-Mail – olufowote.joel@mcm.edu

Fall [2014]

TIME	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
8:00 AM	Contemporary Global Issues (1)	Comparative Politics	Contemporary Global Issues (1)	Comparative Politics	Contemporary Global Issues (1)
8:30 AM					
9:00 AM	Contemporary Global Issues (2)	Office Hours	Contemporary Global Issues (2)	Office Hours	Contemporary Global Issues (2)
9:30 AM					
10:00 AM	Office Hours	Office Hours	Office Hours	Office Hours	Office Hours
11:00 AM					
12:00 PM					
1:00 PM					
1:30 PM		Modern Political Philosophy		Modern Political Philosophy	
2:00 PM					
2:30 PM					
3:00PM					

- In Class (Contemporary Global Issues 1)
- In Class (Contemporary Global Issues 2)

- In Class (Comparative Politics)
- In Class (Modern Political Philosophy)