Fall 2015

PHIL 2215

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University of New Orleans

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PHIL 2215: Social and Political Philosophy (3 credits)

SECTION 001: LA 250, Thursday, 4:30 p.m – 7:15 p.m.

Instructor: Dr. Chris W. Surprenant
Office: UNO: LA 387
Office Hours: Monday (via Skype): 2:00pm – 4:00pm
Tuesday (via Skype): 11:00am – 12:00pm
Thursday (office): 1:00pm – 4:00pm
Office Phone: (504) 280-6819
Email: csurpren@uno.edu
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Course Webpages: Accessed via Moodle.

No required texts for purchase. All readings are provided electronically on Moodle.

CATALOG DESCRIPTION: An introduction to theories and problems concerning the nature and justification, if any, of society, authority, and the state.

COURSE OVERVIEW: This course will examine a number of the main figures, texts, and ideas in the history of Western political thought. We will consider such issues as: the relationship between individual rights and democracy, the nature and extent of political obligations, and the value of freedom as compared to other potentially competing goods like community, progress, security, etc., as well as the role of political institutions in both perpetuating and overcoming race, gender, and economic oppression.

This semester, our course will take advantage of the Tocqueville Project’s lecture series in philosophy and political economy, and will meet with a number of visiting scholars who are working on these issues in social and political philosophy. Course readings will revolve around the topics that our visiting scholars will be speaking on, and you will have an opportunity to interact closely with our guests. As a result, you will also be representing the University of New Orleans and our students, and so you have an even greater obligation to come to class prepared, be respectful of your classmates, and so forth.

Upon successfully completing this course, students will be able to do the following:
• recognize philosophical questions
• know the various subfields of philosophy and the sorts of questions dealt with by philosophers in those areas
• understand theories central to philosophy and how these theories can be applied to contemporary problems
• work with philosophical concepts and methods, and to construct and evaluate arguments
• participate in classroom discussion, developing and displaying an ability and readiness to defend one’s own point of view while listening openly but carefully to others
• demonstrate a willingness to entertain criticism, formulate and reply to reasonable objections, and represent opposing views both critically and sympathetically
• read both primary and secondary texts and analyze the arguments contained in them correctly
Attendance and Participation: The University of New Orleans has a strict attendance policy. Attendance and intelligent participation at all class meetings is expected. Attendance will be kept via a sign-in sheet at the front of the room. You are allowed to miss one class without penalty. For each class missed beyond the first, your final grade will be reduced by 1/2 of a letter grade. Your final grade may be raised by no more than a full letter based on intelligent and thoughtful class participation throughout the semester and noticeable improvement in the quality of your contributions and work.

“Op-Ed” Assignment: A short paper of no more than 600 words, written in the style of a newspaper “op-ed” and on a topic relevant both to the course material and contemporary events is due no later than Sunday, September 27 at 11:59pm. Students may choose their own topic. Any student that gets his/her op-ed published in a local paper before the end of the course will automatically receive an “A” on this assignment. This assignment should be submitted online via Moodle.

“Midterm” Exam: The exam will be held in-class on Thursday, October 15. The format of the exam will be discussed in class, but will be open book. Exams are graded blind. The grading procedure will be discussed in-class. Alternatively, a student may submit a short paper in lieu of the midterm. The paper is due by the end of class (7:15pm CST) on October 15. The paper should be no longer than 1000 words, reference at least 3 scholarly articles, and should be submitted online via Moodle. Additional paper guidelines will be provided in class.

Final Paper: A final paper is due no later than 11:59pm on Sunday, December 6. This paper should be approximately 2500 words, address a topic that relates to the course material, reference at least 5 scholarly articles, and be submitted online via Moodle. Additional paper guidelines will be provided in class.

Academic Honesty: Academic integrity is fundamental to the process of learning and evaluating academic performance. Academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. Academic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to, the following: cheating, plagiarism, tampering with academic records and examinations, falsifying identity, and being an accessory to acts of academic dishonesty. Refer to the Student Code of Conduct for further information. The Code is available online at http://www.studentaffairs.uno.edu. Each student is required to pledge that all completed work will be submitting according to the principles of academic integrity as defined in the statement on Academic Dishonesty in the UNO Student Code of Conduct.

Attendance: The University of New Orleans has a strict attendance policy. Attendance and intelligent participation at all class meetings is expected. Attendance will be kept via the response papers due at the beginning of each class.

Disabilities: It is University policy to provide, on a flexible and individualized basis, reasonable accommodations to students who have disabilities that may affect their ability to participate in course activities or to meet course requirements. Students with disabilities should contact the Office of Disability Services as well as their instructors to discuss their individual needs for accommodations. For more information, please go to http://www.ods.uno.edu.

Late Starts: There are no special dispensations for late-start students.
Course Schedule

August 20  Course Introduction
Guest Lecture: John Eden, “Entrepreneurship as Experiment”

August 27  No class, time will be made up at a TBD date at the end of the semester.
You should use this period to start work on your op-ed assignment.

September 3  Markets and Morality
  Marx, “Alienated Labor” (selections)
  Smith, Wealth of Nations and A Theory of Moral Sentiment (selections)
  Sandel, What Money Can’t Buy (selections)
  Brennan and Jaworski, “Markets without Symbolic Limits”

September 10  Guest Lecture: Jason Brennan, “Markets without Limits”

September 17  Markets and Morality
  Bastiat, “That Which is Seen, and That Which is Not Seen”
  Hughes and Cain, “The ‘Prosperity’ of Wartime”
  Higgs, “Wartime Prosperity? A Reassessment of the U.S. Economy in the 1940s”

  Sunday, September 27, 11:59pm CST - Op-Ed Assignment Due

October 1  Toleration and Moral Relativism
  Prinz, “Morality is a Culturally Conditioned Response”
  Rachels, “The Challenge of Cultural Relativism”
  Bloom, Closing of the American Mind (selections)

October 8  Guest Lecture: Kevin Stuart, “Toleration and its Limits”

October 15  “Midterm” Exam / Paper due by 7:15pm CST

October 22  Guest Lecture: Fernando Teson, “Elements of Global Justice”

October 29  Equality of Opportunity and Meritocracy
  Daniels, “Merit and Meritocracy”
  Singer, “Equality and its Implications”

Pick two.”

November 12  Economics and the Family
  Readings TBD
  Horwitz, “The Function of the Family in the Great Society”

November 19  Guest Lecture: Steven Horwitz, “Capitalism and the Family”

November 26  No Class, Thanksgiving

December 3  Course Conclusion
Guest Lecture: Virgil Storr, “Self-Governance and Post-Disaster Resiliency”