

**Lingnan University**  
**Department of Philosophy**

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| <b>Course Title</b>                | : Western Political Philosophy   |
| <b>Course Code</b>                 | : PHI3104  |
| <b>Recommended Study Year</b>      | : 3 <sup>rd</sup> Year   |
| <b>No. of Credits/Term</b>         | : 3  |
| <b>Mode of Tuition</b>             | : Sectional Approach   |
| <b>Class Contact Hours</b>         | : 3 hours/week   |
| <b>Category in Major Programme</b> | : Ethics and Political Philosophy Unit -<br>Western Tradition Elective |
| <b>Prerequisite(s)</b>             | : PHI1003 Ethics: East and West  |
| <b>Co-requisite(s)</b>             | : N/A  |
| <b>Exclusion(s)</b>                | : N/A  |
| <b>Exemption Requirement(s)</b>    | : N/A  |

**Brief Course Description**

This course will explore different theories pertaining to the good and sustainable society (including visions of utopia, utilitarianism, social contract theory, political liberalism and republicanism). Different visions of the good society advance different accounts of the rights and duties of citizens, as well as the manner in which power and property are to be distributed. For example, political liberalism has traditionally been concerned with advancing individual liberty on the one hand and the state's neutrality regarding the nature of the good life on the other. This course also examines the implications of different conceptions of individual liberty. Readings are taken from historical sources including Plato, Aristotle, Hobbes, Locke, Bentham, Mill and Rousseau as well as such contemporary philosophers as Berlin, Hayek, Rawls, Nozick and Pettit.

**Aims**

This course is designed primarily to enable the students to gain a basic understanding of Western political thought. Secondly, the course aims to equip the student to formulate reasoned political judgments on problems pertaining to immediate or wider social and political issues. Thirdly, the course aims to allow the student to examine his or her own views on the nature of justice, the individual and the good society. Students in this course will be expected to read texts with a critical eye, to contribute to class discussion and to refine their writing skills.

**Learning Outcomes**

1. To demonstrate an understanding of both classical and contemporary debates surrounding political philosophy.
2. To be able to read and write critically and to reconstruct philosophical arguments.
3. To demonstrate an ability to relate current social and political debates to underlying philosophical arguments.

**Indicative Content**

Plato's *Republic* and the idea of utopia

Social Contract theory

Utilitarianism; the idea of the best outcome

Political Liberalism and its critics

Democracy and the rule of law

Law, society and the individual conscience

Negative, positive and republican conceptions of liberty

### **Teaching Method**

Lecture and class discussion

### **Measurement of Learning Outcomes**

Students' progress toward the desired learning outcomes will be assessed as follows:

1. Students will write and submit an academic paper of between 2,500 and 3,000 words which will be chosen on a selected topic and within the discipline of social and political philosophy (to measure outcomes 1-3).
2. Students will be expected to participate in classroom discussion, in terms of contributing questions and observations in both lecture, or small group discussions (to measure outcomes 1 and 3).
3. Students will take a final examination where they will be able to properly identify specific social and political issues. Students will also be able argue a position on a selected question topic and then move from their premises to conclusion through reasoned arguments (to measure outcomes 1-3).

As a voluntary optional activity, students may opt to volunteer for a service learning component. In the service learning component, students will spend two hours each week during the academic semester at a pre-selected service learning agency within the community. They shall also keep regular entries in a journal and submit an essay at the end of the semester.

### **Assessment**

Continuous Assessment: 25% (entails regularly attending class and engaging in class participation)  
This requirement is done in order to assess learning outcomes 1-3

Term Paper 25% (entails submitting a term paper of between 2,500-3,000 words) This requirement is done in order to assess learning outcomes 1-3.

Examination: 50% (entails submitting a take-home examination) This requirement is done in order to assess learning outcomes 1-3.

As a voluntary optional activity (and to be done in lieu of the term paper requirement) students may opt to volunteer for a service learning component. In the service learning component, students will spend two hours each week during the academic semester at a pre-selected service learning agency within the community. They shall also keep regular entries in a journal and submit an essay at the end of the semester.

### **Required Reading: selections from**

Robert E. Goodin and Philip Pettit (eds.) *Contemporary Political Philosophy: an Anthology*, Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers 1997.

### **Supplementary Readings**

Kymlicka, W., *Contemporary Political Philosophy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press 1990.

Maravall, Jose Maria, & Adam Przeworski, (eds.) *Democracy and the Rule of Law*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.

Nathanson, S., *Should We Consent to Be Governed?* Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1992.  
Pettit, Philip, *Republicanism: A Theory of Government*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997.  
Przeworski, Adam, Stokes, Susan & Manin, Bernard (eds.), *Democracy, Accountability and Representation*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.  
Rawls, John, *A Theory of Justice*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.  
Sandel, Michael, *Democracy's Discontent: America in Search of a Public Philosophy*, Cambridge, MA: Belnap, Harvard University Press, 1996  
Sandel, Michael, *Public Philosophy: Essays on Morality in Politics*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005.  
Sterba, James P., *Contemporary Social and Political Philosophy*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1995  
Waterfield, Robin (trans.), Plato, *Republic*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993.  
Wolff, Jonathan, *An Introduction to Political Philosophy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996.

### **Important Notes**

- (1) Students are expected to spend a total of 9 hours (i.e. 3 hours of class contact and 6 hours of personal study) per week to achieve the course learning outcomes.
- (2) Students shall be aware of the University regulations about dishonest practice in course work, tests and examinations, and the possible consequences as stipulated in the Regulations Governing University Examinations. In particular, plagiarism, being a kind of dishonest practice, is “the presentation of another person’s work without proper acknowledgement of the source, including exact phrases, or summarised ideas, or even footnotes/citations, whether protected by copyright or not, as the student’s own work”. Students are required to strictly follow university regulations governing academic integrity and honesty.
- (3) Students are required to submit writing assignment(s) using Turnitin.
- (4) To enhance students’ understanding of plagiarism, a mini-course “Online Tutorial on Plagiarism Awareness” is available on <https://pla.ln.edu.hk/>