

Spring 2024
University of Pennsylvania
PSCI 4996: Politics and Ethics
Professor Roxanne Euben

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Course Description

This course is designed to investigate the relationship, if any, between ethics and politics. During the semester, we'll examine texts of political, social, and feminist theory as well as case studies, dialogues, novels, non-fiction essays, short stories, newspaper and magazine articles and film to critically engage with questions such as: Can politics be a moral enterprise or is it a realm where violence, deception and cruelty are and must be routine? How do we judge whether a political act is ethical or unethical? Does the context of war negate the moral precepts that hold in peacetime? Do national borders mark the place where our moral commitments to others end? Who's included in the "we" that determines the content of moral judgments and the reach of our ethical obligations? How do inequalities of wealth, power and the burden of history help determine whose pain counts and whose voices are heard in moral arguments? Along the way, we'll examine whether and to what extent the diverse genres, style and form of these texts influences how receptive we are the perspectives and arguments they contain. We'll also consider how our class discussions might serve as experiments in what it means to think, argue and act ethically with one another.

Books: Given the increased financial pressures on many students, I've eliminated the need to purchase any reading materials for this seminar. All the readings are available in the 'Modules' (and also 'Files') tab in our Canvas course site. If you prefer to purchase a hardcopy of any of the books from a bookstore or online, please be sure to buy only the translations/editions listed in the course schedule of readings below. We will be referring to specific page numbers in class, so different versions will make it difficult for you to follow along.

SEMINAR REQUIREMENTS AND ASSESSMENT:

Reading: Please take heed: this is a reading-intensive seminar. You must set aside sufficient time, space, and energy for reading and re-reading what are often difficult materials. It's helpful to underline and write questions in the text to assist in remembering what it is you just read, to make sense of what the author is trying to convey, and to think about the reflection/discussion questions I'll pose for each class.

Note: It's imperative that all students are working with the exact same text, so please make sure the translation and edition you are reading are the exact ones listed on this syllabus and available on Canvas. Other translations or editions are not permitted.

It's also essential that you have the texts with you at every class session—either in hardcopy or on a laptop— as we'll be referring to specific passages during the seminar.

Participation and Reading: This is a seminar, so active, reflective participation is necessary for success as well as essential to your enjoyment. Such participation requires everyone to complete all of the assigned reading before class, to come prepared to ask questions, and to listen and respond to the questions and comments of your fellow students and the instructor. Participation also means coming to class prepared with passages from the reading, or answers to discussion questions, whichever has been asked of you, for that seminar session.

In the course of the semester, we'll be discussing a range of difficult, often controversial and sensitive topics. We'll need to be thoughtful with our comments and handle any disagreements with respect. This is part of the participation grade, as discussion is crucial to learning and respectful engagement is essential to productive discussion.

Students are welcome but not obligated to share their pronouns with me and/or their classmates as they feel comfortable, and I ask that all students honor them.

Attendance and Lateness: Because participation is essential to the learning in this class, attendance is required. Repeated lateness will count as an unexcused absence, and more than one unexcused absence will affect your grade.

As per Penn's attendance policy, you must notify me within the first two weeks of classes of any anticipated absences for religious observances. These absences are excused, but please be aware that it's your responsibility to keep up with the assignments and to obtain notes from a classmate.

[Unexcused absences are those resulting from avoidable conflicts, time management issues, and other matters in your control. Excused absences are those resulting from unanticipated crises, illness, and other urgent matters not in your control.]

Writing: Students will write one brief response essay for almost every class session (i.e. two per week). Please refer to p. 8 of the syllabus for detailed instructions.

The other written assignments are two papers of 6-7 pages each. Doing well on these papers requires starting early and writing multiple drafts. Be sure to leave sufficient time and energy to work on them.

You'll find very detailed guidance about how to write these papers in the **"Guide for Writing Political Theory Papers,"** located in the **'Files' section of our Canvas course conference.** Everyone is required to be familiar with this document prior to the first paper deadline. It contains answers to most of the questions you'll have about how to write these kinds of essays and also makes clear what the expectations are for them.

Deadlines/Extensions/Late Papers: Paper deadlines are listed in the "summary of important dates" below. A late paper will be marked down one-third of a grade for up *to* each 24-hour period it's late. Very rare extensions will be granted only in the case of an emergency or documented illness. It's not possible to grant extensions because of time management issues (e.g. there's an exam on the same day as a paper deadline, or a number of assignments are due in the same week as a class paper). All assignment deadlines are posted here at the very beginning of the semester so that you can plan accordingly in advance.

Students with disabilities that will affect the timing of coursework must contact me within the first two weeks of classes.

Paper submissions: All papers will be turned in via Canvas and will be put through TurnItIn. You will not be able to fool our robot plagiarism overlords; please do not try. For a full account of what constitutes plagiarism at Penn, see "Plagiarism" under Policies below.

Office hours: You are always welcome to meet with me, and I will have appointments available each week. I have found that quick email arrangements to meet are a better way to accommodate the variety and complexity of student schedules than set office hours, which may work with my schedule but not yours. Please email me at euben@sas.upenn.edu to arrange for an appointment and we will find a time that work to meet either virtually or in-person. Please don't be shy!

Grading: You must complete each component of the course in order to pass this course. The final grade will be determined as follows:

Reading responses: 25%
Participation: 25%
First essay: 25%
Second essay: 25%

POLICIES:

Email: I will respond to emails between 9 and 5 Monday through Friday. Email should be used to ask short and straightforward questions. Please be sure to check the syllabus and Canvas before writing with a question that may have already been answered. Office hours are an opportunity to discuss more substantive matters that cannot be addressed in email, for example, questions about the lecture, readings, and the like.

All students are required to have an email account that they check regularly, as I will send out emails via Canvas announcements. Be sure that your notifications are set so that you receive an email when an announcement is made via Canvas. These announcements will also be available on Canvas, so checking Canvas regularly will ensure that you do not miss important announcements. Failure to check your email isn't an excuse for not knowing information contained in a Canvas announcement.

Appealing a grade: If you would like to appeal a grade, you must do so in writing to me within two weeks of the assignment being returned. The appeal must respond to the comments and make the case as to why the assignment warrants a higher grade. I read all such appeals carefully in order to reassess the work in question. For that reason, appeals may result in a lower grade than the grade originally given.

Electronic Devices: Laptops or notebooks are permitted to access the readings; all other devices such as cell phones must be switched off for the duration of class (not just silenced). [Research](#) (see here) indicates that you learn less by taking notes on computers, so I encourage you to take notes by hand rather than on your laptop if at all possible.

If laptops or notebooks prove distracting, or if they are used for any purpose other than accessing the readings or taking notes, your participation grade will be affected. A reminder of the obvious: students may not take photos during class. Recording—either audio or with video—is not permitted at any time.

Accommodations: Students with accommodations through Student Disability Services (SDS) should complete their semester request through the [student portal](#). Students can also make appointments to visit SDS in person. The office is located in the [Weingarten Learning Resources Center](#) at Stouffer Commons 3702 Spruce Street, Suite 300. All services are confidential.

Please note: I can adjust the two paper deadlines for individual students who have accommodations. In order for me to do so, students *must* contact SDS well in advance of these deadlines. Students with accommodations should also contact me within the first two weeks of class to discuss the deadlines for the weekly short reflection essays.

Plagiarism: Students are bound to uphold the Code of Academic Integrity and responsible for fully adhering to the code; the details can be found online at <http://www.upenn.edu/academicintegrity/>. Plagiarism is a serious violation of the Code and standards of academic honesty, and is unfair to all other students in the class. Penalties for academic dishonesty, including but not limited to plagiarism, are up to the professor. In this course, the penalty for any such violation is an automatic 0 on the assignment in question and may include failing the course. If you have any questions about what constitutes plagiarism, feel free to speak with me, Clancy, or someone in the library. Please note that ignorance of these guidelines isn't an excuse for failure to comply with them.

COVID protocols: University policy states that rules governing masking in the classroom is up to the instructor. At this time, there is no mask requirement for this seminar. I reserve the right to require masks in class if I determine that it is important to do so. Non-compliance with the policy will affect students' participation grades. Please do not come to class if you have COVID (obviously) and, if you have a cold, please be courteous and wear a mask in both lecture and recitation.

Campus resources:

- [The Tutoring Center](#)
- [Marks Family Writing Center](#)
- [CAPS \(Counseling and psychological services\)](#)
- [Wellness at Penn](#)
- [Penn Violence Prevention](#)
- [Office of Student Disabilities Services](#)

SUMMARY OF IMPORTANT DATES:

January 23: First day of class

March 5: no class (spring break)

March 15: First essay due, 5 p.m. (submit in Word via Canvas)

April 30: Last day of class

May 10: Second papers due, 5 p.m. (Submit in Word via Canvas)

Course Schedule:

I. INTRODUCTION: DEFINING OUR TERMS (January 23)

Reading: PSCI 4996 syllabus

II. POWER AND (A)MORALITY (January 30)

Thucydides, "The Melian Dialogue," *The History of the Peloponnesian War* (McGraw-Hill Higher Education, ed. T.E. Wick, translator Richard Crawley), pp. 349-357

Friedrich Nietzsche, "The Genealogy of Morals," trans. Frances Golffing (New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1990), pp.149- 230 (preface, first and second essays)

III. EMPATHY, MORAL IMAGINATION AND JUDGMENT (February 6-13)

Derrick Bell, "The Space Traders," in *Dark Matter: A Century of Speculative Fiction from the African Diaspora*, ed. Sheree R. Thomas (New York: Warner Books, 2000), pp. 326-355

Jason Silverstein, "I Don't Feel Your Pain: A failure of empathy perpetuates racial disparities," *Slate.com*, 2013
http://www.slate.com/articles/health_and_science/science/2013/06/racial_empathy_gap_people_don_t_perceive_pain_in_other_races.html

Carol Gilligan, "Moral Orientation and Moral Development," in Virginia Held, ed. *Justice and Care: Essential Readings in Feminist Ethics* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1995), pp. 31-46

Martha Nussbaum, "Compassion: The Basic Social Emotion," *Social Philosophy and Policy* 13(1), 1996: 27-58

Sharon R. Krause, "Empathy, Democratic Politics and the Impartial Juror," *Law, Culture and the Humanities* 7(1), 2011: 81-100

IV. FREEDOM, INEQUALITY AND CAPITALISM (Feb. 20-27)

Milton Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2002), selections

Wendy Milling, "Without Question, Capitalism is Supremely Moral," *Forbes Magazine*, March 21, 2013.
<https://www.forbes.com/sites/realspin/2013/03/21/without-question-capitalism-is-surprely-moral/?sh=7269df145b4f>

Yaron Brook, "Economic Equality is an Immoral Ideal," *Harvard Journal of Law and Public Policy* 40(1), 2017: 25-31

Michael Heinrich, "Capitalism and Marxism," *An Introduction to the Three Volumes of Marx's Capital* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2004), pp. 13-20

Wendy Brown, "Educating Human Capital," in *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution* (New York: Zone Books, 2015), pp. 175-200, 259-272

Vincent Lyon-Callo, *Inequality, Poverty, and Neoliberal Governance: Activist Ethnography in the Homeless Sheltering Industry* (Ontario, Canada: Broadview Press, 2004), pp. 9-15, 27-47, 83-99
<https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015062839496>.

V. ETHICS AND POLITICAL LEADERSHIP (March 12-19)

Niccolo Machiavelli, *The Prince*, trans. Luigi Ricci (New York: McGraw Hill, 1950), selections

Max Weber, "Politics as a Vocation," in H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958), pp. 77-128

"Statesman or Sap? Al Gore in Florida in the 2000 Election," in Amy Guttman and Dennis Thompson, *Ethics and Politics: Cases and Comments* (Belmont, CA: Thomson Wadsworth, 2006), pp. 183-190

“Interrogating Detainees,” in *Ethics and Politics: Cases and Comments*, pp. 60-71

“7 Key Points from the C.I.A. Torture Report,” *The New York Times*, December 9, 2014, http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2014/12/09/world/cia-torture-report-key-points.html?_r=0

“Does Torture Work? The C.I.A.’s Claims and What the Committee Found,” *The New York Times*, December 9, 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2014/12/08/world/does-torture-work-the-cias-claims-and-what-the-committee-found.html>

VI. BUREAUCRACY, EVIL AND ‘THOUGHTLESSNESS’ (March 26, if needed, April 2):

Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: The Banality of Evil* (New York: Viking Press, 1964), selections

Samantha Power, *A Problem from Hell: America and the Age of Genocide* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2014), selections

VII. ETHICS IN WARTIME (April 2-9)

Michael Walzer, chapter 2: “The Crime of War,” *Just and Unjust Wars* (New York: Basic Books, 1977), pp. 21-33 (notes, p. 338)

“The Decision to Use the Atomic Bomb,” in *Ethics and Politics: Cases and Comments*, pp. 6-28

Why Attack Iraq?”, in *Ethics and Politics: Cases and Comments*, pp. 45-60

Video excerpt of Alan Oppenheimer in NBC documentary “The Decision to Drop the Bomb,” 1965

Film: “Breaker Morant”

https://digital-films-com.proxy.library.upenn.edu/p_ViewVideo.aspx?xtid=275992

VIII. RESPONSIBILITY AND INNOCENCE (April 16-23)

Herman Melville, *Billy Budd* (New York: Signet Classics/Penguin, 2009)

James Baldwin, “The Fire Next Time: My Dungeon Shook,” and “White Man’s Guilt,” in *The Price of the Ticket* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1985), pp. 333-336, 409-414

Susan Moller Okin, “Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women?” *The Boston Review* 22 (5), October/November 1997, pp. 25-28

Alison M. Jaggar, “Saving Amina: Global Justice for Women and Intercultural Dialogue,” *Ethics & International Affairs*, Volume 19.3 (Fall 2005): 55-75

IX. GLOBAL JUSTICE (April 30)

Jan Narveson, “We Don’t Owe Them a Thing! A Tough-Minded but Soft-Hearted View of Aid to the Faraway Needy,” *The Monist* 86 (3), July 2003: 419-433

Thomas Pogge, “What is Global Justice?” in *Politics as Usual: What Lies Behind the Pro-Poor Rhetoric*, ch. 1 (pp. 10-25, notes, pp. 204-207)

Peter Singer, “Preface,” “Saving a Child,” “Is it Wrong not to Help?” in *The Life You Can Save: How to Do Your Part to End World Poverty*, xi-19; 23-41 (notes, pp. 177-183)

Reflection Essay Questions

Each week, you will be expected to answer two reflection questions that speak to crucial themes or ideas in the reading. I will post a number of questions for every class session in the 'Discussions' section of Canvas, and everyone will normally be expected to choose one to answer for Monday's class and another for Wednesday's class. **Whatever you choose, each response must be posted no later than 9 a.m. on the day of the relevant class (the site will shut down at 9:15 a.m.).**

There may be some class days when I'll ask you to prepare for a different exercise and no posts will be required for that class; these will be announced via email. I'll grade **10** out of the two dozen or so responses you'll be required to post over the course of the semester, and you won't know in advance which ones will be graded.

Your answers to each question should be no longer than 250 words, and must directly answer the question (e.g. avoid unnecessary details such as publication information, extensive scene setting, etc.). Reference to specific passages or pages will strengthen your answer, but you should not use long quotations. Please type or paste your responses into the discussion. You must make clear which question you are answering (identifying the question will not count against the 250 total word limit).

Essays will receive a grade of "Pass" or "Fail." Unedited, sloppy essays, as well as those that restate the language of the readings rather than answering the question, will receive an "F." I will also make note of particularly insightful or well-crafted responses as part of your participation grade. The reflection questions will sometimes overlap with the two paper assignments, but passing grades on your responses do not guarantee a high grade on the papers.

I'll grade one of your answers within the first 2-3 weeks of class so that the expectations for strong responses are clear early in the semester. Please be advised: while these first grades will not count toward the total ten, as they're designed to provide honest feedback conducive to improvement, there may well be some 'fails.' *Similarly, a passing grade for the ten graded posts will only be given to those that demonstrate careful reading of the entire assignment as well as reflection about the question you've chosen to answer. A 'pass' will not be given just because something has been posted.*

These responses constitute 25% of the grade for the seminar. The final grade for the graded reading responses will be calculated as follows:

- A = 9-10 Passes
- B = 7-8 Passes
- C = 5-6 Passes
- D = 3-4 Passes
- F = 0-2 Passes