

# Omar Fakhri

## Political Philosophy

### Course Description

In this course, we will begin by considering political philosophy as a “first philosophy.” By that we mean that it is a discipline that is fundamental in answering other important questions we typically have about the world. This requires us to rethink the way we typically think about doing political philosophy. With this new machinery in place, we will then look at some important topics in political philosophy. These include political authority, distributive justice, equality, liberalism, communitarianism, citizenship, nationalism, and democracy. In this course, we will take on questions, such as: is patriotism good? How should we understand democracy and is it something we should strive for? Is equality a moral ideal that we should aim for? And many other similar questions. The aim of this course is to help you come to appreciate critical thinking and philosophical investigation.

### Learning Goals:

- Be able to clearly and concisely exposit arguments.
- Be able to critically assess arguments by either objecting directly or indirectly to a specific claim, or by exposing a logical mistake.
- Be able to understand, state, and describe the main philosophical problems and positions discussed in the reading and in lecture.
- Be able to write a well-developed philosophy paper that explains the key moves in a given argument and critically evaluate it.
- Be able to articulate and provide reasons for one’s own position or lack thereof.

### Course Requirements:

1. Attendance and Participation 10% - Attendance and participation is mandatory. Come to sections and class having done all the assigned reading.
2. Ten Reading Outlines 15% - You are required to write 10 reading outlines. A reading outline summarizes the *structure* of a given text. Aim at summarizing the main arguments and the author’s train of thought. You must summarize all the main content in the reading that you decide to write an outline on. At the end of each outline, you must include one philosophically critical question that deals heavily with the main points of the text. The entire outline should not be shorter than  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a page or longer than 1.25 pages, *single*-spaced (font 12). You get to pick *any* 10 readings you would like to write an outline on (with the exception of the logic reading assignment). You are not allowed to write an outline on a reading we already covered. That is, when you write an outline, you must write it on the reading that is due the day you wish to turn the outline in.

3. Précis 20% - A précis is a concise and clear summary of the main claims and arguments of a given text. Being able to identify the main moves and arguments in a difficult text and putting them in your own words is an important skill to have. *The précis should not be shorter than 590 words and no longer than 610 words*, double-spaced. The word limit range is important because it will force you to make difficult choices about what to include or exclude in the précis. It will also force you to write concisely and to avoid being verbose. You are also not allowed to quote verbatim from the text. It is important that you put things into your own words.
4. Shorter Critical Paper 25% - This paper should have two clearly identifiable sections: an expository and critical section. The prompt will ask you to exposit an argument or a view and to critically evaluate it. The paper will be about 3 double-spaced pages, with 12pt font and regular margins.
5. Longer Critical Paper 30% - This is the final paper, and it will function as your final for this class. Like the shorter paper, this paper should also contain two clearly identifiable sections: an expository and critical section. The prompt will ask you to deal with the views or arguments of two or more of the readings. The paper will be about 5-6 double-spaced pages, and it will be due the day your final exam is scheduled.

### **Required Text:**

- (1) Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*
- (2) Aristotle, *Politics*

### **Course Schedule**

#### **Part 1: Rethinking political philosophy**

##### **Week 1: Politics as “first philosophy”**

Aristotle: *Nicomachean Ethics*, book 1

Aristotle: *Politics*, book 10

##### **Week 2: Political realism**

Hans Sluga: *Politics and the Search for the Common Good*, introduction

Raymond Geuss, *Philosophy and Real Politics*, pp. 23-59.

#### **Part 2: Political Authority**

##### **Week 3: The state of nature as a state of war**

Hobbes, *Leviathan*, chapters 11, 13, 14, 15, 17, 18, 21

##### **Week 4: The State of nature and the law of nature**

Locke: *Second Treatise*, chapters 2, 3, 8, 9

##### **Week 5: No State or no contract**

Murray Rothbard: *Society Without a State*

Virginia Held: *Non-Contractual Society: A Feminist View*

### **Part 3: Justice**

#### **Week 6: Distributive justice**

Robert Nozick: *Anarchy, State and Utopia*, pp. 160-4, 168-74  
G. A. Cohen: Where the Action Is

#### **Week 7: Equality**

Harry Frankfurt: Equality as a Moral Ideal  
Derek Parfit: Equality and Priority

#### **Week 8: Liberalism**

Michael Sandel: *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice*, pp. 82-95, pp. 175-83  
John Rawls: The Domain of the Political and Overlapping Consensus

#### **Week 9: Communitarianism**

Amy Gutmann: Communitarian Critics of liberalism  
Charles Taylor: Cross-purpose: The Liberal-Communitarian Debate (in *Liberalism and the Moral Life*, pp. 159-81).

### **Part 4: Nationality**

#### **Week 10: Diversity**

Iris Young: Polity and Group Difference: A Critique of the Ideal of Universal Citizenship  
Bhikhu Parekh: Contemporary Liberal Responses to Diversity

#### **Week 11: Patriotism**

Alasdair MacIntyre: Is Patriotism a Virtue?  
David Miller: In Defense of Nationality

### **Part 5: Democracy**

#### **Week 12: varieties of democratic politics**

John Elster: The Market and the Forum  
Joshua Cohen: Deliberation and Democratic Legitimacy

#### **Week 13: The will of the people vs what is right**

Michael Walzer: Philosophy and Democracy

#### **Week 14: Extra time**