



Philosophy 226  
**Political Philosophy**

Fall 2024  
Amherst College

Professor: Rafeeq Hasan  
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Office: 209 Cooper House  
Office Hours: Tu 5:30-6:30pm; W 1:30-3:30pm;  
Th 1-2pm; or by appointment  
Class Room: Chapin Hall 203

Meetings: Tu/Th 10:00-11:20am

**Course Description**

States are made up of individuals. Yet states have powers that no individuals have. They collect taxes, put us in jail, draft us into the army, and tell us what we can and cannot own.

In this course, an introduction to Western political philosophy, we seek to understand what, if anything, could justify the state in wielding such extraordinary power over us. We will ask questions like: Why should I obey the law? Should the state tax the rich in order to give to the poor? Turning from these classical questions to the contemporary world, we will ask how states and citizens should respond to the contemporary realities of homelessness, workplace oppression, and systemic racism. Readings will include works by Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, John Rawls, Elizabeth Anderson, and Tommie Shelby, among others.

**Required Texts [Provided by the College for all enrolled Amherst Students]**

1. Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (Hackett, 1994). ISBN: 9780872201774
2. John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government* (Hackett, 1990). ISBN: 9780915144860
3. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Major Political Writings* (Chicago, 2014). ISBN: 9780226151311

Copies of each book are also on reserve at Frost Library. Readings for the second half of the course will be collected in a course reader. When the time comes, you can pick up the reader from the Alumni House.

Please bring hard copies of the relevant readings to class. **Philosophy is not best read from a screen, or while checking email, reading the news, etc.**

**Assignments/Grading:**

Essay 1 800-1000 words (~3 pages)	Due: 10/4	20%
Midterm exam (in-class)	Due: 10/24	15%
Essay 2 1000-1200 words (~4 pages)	Due: 11/22	30%
Final exam (in-person)		15%
Class participation		15%
Homework	Occasionally	5%

## Policies/Requirements<sup>1</sup>

### 1. Academic Honesty

According to the Honor Code's Statement of Intellectual Responsibility, "the College considers it a violation of the requirements of intellectual responsibility to submit work that is not one's own or otherwise to subvert the conditions under which academic work is performed by oneself or by others."<sup>2</sup>

I expect you will adhere to the Code. Therefore, everything you turn in should be *your own work* and *in your own words*. If your discussions of class topics with your friends, parents, etc., are helpful, cite them. Credit all sources appropriately, even (especially) Wikipedia, AI, and anything from your Googling bounty. **Use of generative text programs (such as ChatGPT) to actually write your papers constitutes plagiarism. I reserve the right to submit any written work to random testing for plagiarism.**

Please also consult the information contained in 'Intellectual Responsibility and Plagiarism' on the Dean of Students website: <https://www.amherst.edu/offices/student-affairs/community-standards/intellectual-responsibility-and-plagiarism>. Particularly helpful is: <https://www.amherst.edu/offices/student-affairs/community-standards/intellectual-responsibility-and-plagiarism/using-sources>

If questions remain about what constitutes academic honesty or dishonesty, please ask me.

**The penalty for plagiarism in my course is failure, absolutely no exceptions. Don't risk it.**

### 2. Deadlines

Late policy: If you find that you are unable to complete an assignment by the deadline because of a crisis or emergency, you must contact me no later than 2 days before the due date. I MAY be able to grant a slight extension. **Work that is submitted late and without an extension will be marked down .3 down (see #8 for grading scale) for every day of lateness. This means that even one day of lateness turns a B+ into a B.**

**Assignments received late may not receive full comments.** This is not about punishing you for getting in late work. It's about enabling me to schedule my time.

Finally, keep in mind first, that I am here to help. Get in touch if you're worried about anything. Second, when it comes to assignments, late > never > plagiarized.

### 3. Communication

Important announcements and assignments will sometimes be communicated to you via email, usually through Moodle. It is your responsibility to make sure you are up to date with the latest news. Get in the habit of checking your email at least once daily and don't miss class. If you do miss class, check with your classmates.

Of course, you are always welcome to email me with any questions. But please keep in mind that there are a lot more of you than there are of me and modern email demands are crazy-making. To stay sane:

- I do not answer emails in the evening (after 5pm Eastern) or on weekends.
- I respond as promptly as I can, but not always on the same day.

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<sup>1</sup> Some of what follows is borrowed from syllabi from two friends and colleagues, Katia Vavova (Mt. Holyoke) and James Wilson (University of Chicago).

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.amherst.edu/academiclife/provost\\_dean\\_faculty/fph/policies/sir](https://www.amherst.edu/academiclife/provost_dean_faculty/fph/policies/sir)

- I can't guarantee a response to emails about assignments that are due within 24 hours of the email.

These rules are here so that I can respond promptly to questions that do need to be answered via email.

#### 4. Attendance

Attending class, on time, and well-rested is a crucial aspect of engagement with this course. I take attendance at the *beginning* of every class.

However, it is important for your well-being, and the well-being of your classmates, that you stay home if you are not feeling well or need to isolate. If you need to miss class because of illness, family emergency, or some other pressing matter, please let me know by email before class begins. Excused absences will not negatively affect your participation grade, but you do need to get caught up with the material.

**You are permitted one unexcused absence. There will be a .2 reduction in your overall participation grade for each additional unexcused absence.**

*I couldn't attend class. Did I miss anything important?* Of course you did! To learn what you missed, contact your classmates, check Moodle for handouts, and make sure you get caught up. *After* you've done all that, feel free to come see me in office hours with questions and comments on the readings.

Things happen. **But you are expected to attend every class.**

#### 5. Participation

In order to get full credit for participation, you must also regularly *participate* in class. Be ready to explore ideas critically, boldly, and creatively with others.

Your participation grade turns on the quality, not the quantity, of your contributions, and the extent to which you exhibit the respect and care necessary to promote good discussion. Contributions do not have to be in the form of "answers" or completed "theories" about a text or position—thoughtful questions are highly encouraged, and you will certainly not be penalized for a spirit of humility. While good contributions obviously vary immensely, I especially value comments and questions that pay close attention to the relevant text and those that build on, and reflect attention to, others' contributions. A collaborative spirit, as well as sincerity and intellectual openness, matter to me far more than 'brilliance.' We are all just trying to figure out and evaluate the texts together.

***Why do I have to participate in class?*** Philosophy is a communal activity, and you've chosen to join our community this semester. Don't talk just for the sake of talking, but also don't wait for brilliance or insight to hit you before raising your hand. Shy? Nervous? Me too. Participation is more difficult for some of us than others, but writing papers, understanding the readings—these too are more difficult for some of us than others. And all of these are skills we must work on. If you have trouble speaking in class, please see me and we will work on it together—just as we would on any other aspect of the class that you find difficult.

#### 6. Office Hours

*Office hours:* I will hold office hours from **5:30-6:30pm on Tuesdays, 1:30-3:30pm on Wednesdays, and 1-2pm on Thursdays** (EST). To meet with me, please schedule a 20-minute appointment at:

<https://calendly.com/rafeeqhasan>

You can schedule up to 14 days in advance. Since there are many more of you than there are of me, I ask that you please not schedule more than one meeting with per week unless we've made prior arrangements. My office hours fill up, so try to book at least one week in advance.

Office Hours will be in person UNLESS the global health situation changes. If necessary, they will be moved to Zoom.

I sincerely hope that you schedule an office hours appointment with me! Just a few minutes of one-on-one discussion can often help clarify a lot of issues. Please don't feel as if you have to have something brilliant to say to schedule an appointment. You are not intruding by coming by.

***Can we meet outside office hours?*** If you can't make my office hours because of a class or work conflict, or if all the spots are full, then email early in the week with a list of times when you are free to meet and I will try my best to find an alternative.

## 7. Reading

This is a course about making, analyzing, and evaluating arguments. All the readings are dense and written in outdated language. Leave yourself ample time to complete the readings.

Take the reading process seriously: read actively, doing your best to think about, and respond to, the works you are reading. Active annotation (e.g., underlining, tabbing, note-taking) will help you track down important passages when you come back to them later, such as in class or when writing a paper.

Some reading advice: **1. I will send out reading questions for almost every session. Use these to help focus your attention on what is most important.** 2. If you encounter a passage that you don't understand, re-read it a few times. If you still don't understand it, pass over it! Try to get a sense of the whole instead of getting lost in the part. 3. Jot down any questions or confusions you have about any particular passage or argument and raise them in class. (Note: if you're nervous about speaking in class, having a prewritten question on hand can help.) 4. Look over the reading again after class discussion. It should be much easier to understand at this point. 5. If you're still unclear about something, get help: ask other classmates, schedule office hours, etc.

## 8. Essays & Exams

***When will my work be graded?*** I aim to return essays and exams within two weeks of the date they were submitted. I realize it's hard to wait, but it's also hard to grade. I want to give your work the care and attention it deserves.

***Can I send you a draft of my essay to read?*** I'm happy to help you with your essay, but I don't read complete drafts. Feel free to schedule office hours with questions, an outline, a paragraph you've written, an argument you're considering, etc. We can talk through your ideas and questions. Don't forget that you can also visit the Writing Center with drafts. This is a great resource. To schedule an appointment, visit

<https://www.amherst.edu/academiclife/support/writingcenter/makeappointment>

***What sources should I use for writing my paper?*** You **do not** need to read any additional material beyond the assigned reading—and I don't encourage it. However, if you do consult outside sources, you must remember to *always* cite your sources.

Exams: There will be two exams in this course, designed to assess your comprehension of the readings. **The exam questions will be loosely based on the reading questions provided for almost every session.**

As for my expectations on writing, David Foster Wallace put it well in his own syllabus:

“If you want to improve your academic writing and are willing to put extra time and effort into it, I am a good teacher to have. But if you’re used to whipping off papers the night before they’re due, running them quickly through the computer’s Spellchecker, handing them in full of high-school errors and sentences that make no sense, and having the professor accept them “because the ideas are good” or something, please be informed that **I draw no distinction between the quality of one’s ideas and the quality of those ideas’ verbal expression**, and that I will not accept sloppy, rough-draftish, or semiliterate college writing. Again, I am absolutely not kidding. If you won’t or can’t devote significant time and attention to your written work, I urge you to drop... and save us both a lot of grief.”<sup>3</sup>

## 9. Grading

You will be given both a number grade and a letter grade for each assignment. Only the numerical grade is taken into account in determining your final grade. Numerical grades correspond to letter grades as follows:

A 10-9.5; A- 9.4-9.0; B+ 8.9-8.7; B 8.6-8.3; B- 8.2-8.0; C 7.9 or below.

## 10. Electronic Devices in the Class

All devices with an ON/OFF switch—laptops, phones, etc.—must be switched off during class, unless they are serving a medical purpose. The empirical evidence is pretty clear that people don’t learn as well with laptops, phones, and other gadgets in the classroom. Plus, you won’t need it. You’ll be expected to join in the discussion, not keep a written record of everything that is said. I’ll often provide handouts that summarize the main points, and you will have brought your books or print outs of the relevant readings. If for some reason you really do need to bring some technology to class, come see me.

## 11. Accommodations

This course is open to all students who meet the academic requirements for participation. Any student who has a need for accommodation based on the impact of a disability should make an appointment to speak with an Accessibility Services Staff Member. In order to receive reasonable accommodations for a disability, you must register with the *Office of Accessibility Services* at Amherst College (even if you are a 5-College student). (<https://www.amherst.edu/offices/student-affairs/accessibility-services>). This office will provide a letter describing the appropriate accommodations. Once you have this letter, set up an appointment with me and we will discuss how to accommodate you.

## 12. Summary of Requirements

1. Don’t plagiarize (plagiarism includes using AI to write your papers).
2. Do all required readings. Bring readings to class in hard copy.
3. Don’t miss more than one class without a legitimate excuse.
4. Participate in class discussion.
5. Do occasional homework.
6. Do two essays and two in-person exams.

## Reading Schedule

*Note: This schedule is not a contract. It is entirely provisional. We may speed up, slow down, skip readings, or add readings, depending on where our discussion leads and the interests of members of the class.*

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<sup>3</sup> <http://alasophia.blogspot.com/2008/09/david-foster-wallaces-syllabus.html>

## I. Political Obligation

### Week 1:

Tu 9/3: Introduction to the course: two political/philosophical problems

Th 9/5: READ THE ENTIRE SYLLABUS

Hobbes, *Leviathan* (1651), "The Introduction," chs. 10-11, 13 (pp. 3-5; 50-63; 74-78)

### Week 2:

Tu 9/10: Hobbes, *Leviathan*, chs. 14-15 (pp. 79-100)

Th 9/12: Hobbes, *Leviathan*, chs. 16-18 (pp. 101-118)

### Week 3:

Tu 9/16: Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Chs. 16-18 (continued) & ch 21 (pp. 141-145)

Th 9/19: Locke, *Second Treatise of Government* (1689), chs. 1-4 (pp. 7-18)

### **First Essay Assigned**

### Week 4:

Tu 9/24: Locke, *Second Treatise*, ch. 5 (pp. 18-30)

Th 9/26: No class: instructor is away at a conference.

### Week 5:

Tu 10/1: Locke, *Second Treatise*, chs. 7-9 (pp. 42-68); Quiggin, "John Locke Against Freedom"; Brewer, "Slavery-Entangled Philosophy"

Th 10/3: Rousseau, *Discourse on Inequality* (1755), Preface & Part II (pp. 51-63, 91-117)

F 10/4: **ESSAY 1 DUE @ 9pm EST**

### Week 6:

Tu 10/8: Rousseau, *The Social Contract* (1762), Bk. 1 (pp. 163-178)

Th 10/10: Rousseau, *Social Contract*, Bk. 2; Bk. 4, chs. 1-2 (pp. 179-203; 243-247)

### Week 7:

Tu 10/15: No Class (midsemester break)

Th 10/17: Carol Pateman, *The Sexual Contract* (1988) (pp. ix-xi; 1-18; 40-61; 219-234)

### **MIDTERM EXAM STUDY QUESTIONS DISTRIBUTED**

### Week 8:

Tu 10/22: Charles Mills, *The Racial Contract* (1997) (pp. 1-40; 67-78)

Th 10/24: **MIDTERM EXAM (IN-CLASS)**

## **II. Distributive Justice**

### **Week 9:**

Tu 10/29: Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (1971), ch. 1, secs. 1-5 (pp. 3-37)

Th 10/31: Rawls, *Theory*, ch. 2, secs. 11-14 (pp. 60-90)

### **Week 10:**

Tu 11/5: Rawls, *Theory*, ch. 2, secs. 15-17 (pp. 90-108)

Th 11/7: Robert Nozick, "Distributive Justice" (1973) (pp. 45-61)

### **Week 11:**

Tu 11/12: Nozick, "Distributive Justice" (pp. 63-78)

### **ESSAY 2 ASSIGNED**

Th 11/14: Nozick, "Distributive Justice," (pp. 78-126)

### **Week 12:**

Tu 11/19: G.A. Cohen, "Robert Nozick and Wilt Chamberlin: How Patterns Produce Liberty" (1977)

## **III. Freedom**

Th 11/21: Jeremy Waldron, "Homelessness and the Issue of Freedom" (1991)

F 11/22: **ESSAY 2 DUE @ 9pm EST**

11/25-11/29 **No class Thanksgiving break**

### **Week 13:**

Tu 12/3: Elizabeth Anderson, *Private Government* (2017), ch. 2 (pp. 37-71)

## **IV. Racial Justice**

Th 12/5: Tommie Shelby, "Justice, Deviance, and the Dark Ghetto" (2007)

### **Week 14:**

Tu 12/10: Shelby, "Justice, Deviance, and the Dark Ghetto" (continued)

Th 12/12: **FINAL EXAM STUDY QUESTIONS DISTRIBUTED**

### **Finals Week (12/16-12/20):**

**TBD: Final Exam (2 hours)**