

9-2013

PHL 114E.02: Introduction to Political Ethics

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Recommended Citation

Huff, Thomas P., "PHL 114E.02: Introduction to Political Ethics" (2013). *Syllabi*. 1770.
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Political Ethics
Philosophy 114E
Fall 2013

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Syllabus

This is a General Education Requirement course. Its purpose is to help you understand and appreciate the sources, the premises, and the forms of reasoning that have shaped Western thinking about the nature and justifications for our political institutions. To that end, we will study three works, representative of the three great Western traditions of thought about politics. Our focus will be on the justifications which can be offered for, and the reasoning which is characteristically used in, modern, liberal, constitutional democracies of the sort familiar in modern industrial states (represented by John Rawls), and the ways in which those justifications draw upon, and contrast with, early modern political thought (represented by John Locke), and classical thought (represented by Plato).

In order to check your understanding of these matters, as we develop them in class lecture and discussion, I will ask you to begin doing this sort of reasoning yourself, in a series of quizzes, roughly every two weeks during the term. These quizzes will allow you to discover whether you have grasped the basic concepts of political thought and their distinctive role in political reasoning of different kinds. Two five page papers, one at midterm and one in lieu of the final exam, will check your understanding by requiring that you both synthesize the main themes of Western political thought and apply those themes to "real world" political problems.

Quizzes: Seven quizzes, ten points each, drop two lowest, 50% of your grade, no make-up quizzes. All quizzes will be taken on Thursday and returned the following Tuesday. The quiz dates are:

September 5, 19
October 3, 17, 31
November 14
December 5

Midterm Paper: 5 pages, 25 points, 25% of you grade. Due date announced later.

Final Paper: 5 pages, 25 points, 25% of your grade. Due at the time assigned for the final exam: Tuesday, December 10, 10:10 a.m.

Reading Assignments: Announced as needed.

Books: Plato, Euthyphro, Apology, and Crito
Locke, A Letter Concerning Toleration;
Rawls, A Theory of Justice.