Spring 2014
Phil 130-01: Introduction to Political Philosophy (through film) (13858)
Dr. Jack Weinstein
Tuesday, 6:00-8:30
Room: Merrifield 300

Office Hours: Tuesday, Thursday: 1:45-2:45 and Tuesday: 8:30-9:15 (p.m.), or by appointment.
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Web page: http://www.und.nodak.edu/instruct/weinstein/


Course Objectives: (1) to investigate major ideas in the history of political philosophy; (2) to examine ‘legitimate governance’ and its context; (3) to identify political theories that help society reconcile individuals’ needs with their communities’ needs; (4) To foster written, oral, and comprehension skills required for argumentation and analysis.

Course Description: What is justice? Do people have rights? Is government good or bad? What is human nature? Introduction to Political Philosophy helps us understand why our societies are organized the way they are and what alternatives we may have to make them better. Although this is a theoretical class, it is directly tied into the debates we have every day. Through films, readings, papers, and journals, students will develop their own positions on debates in political philosophy and offer defenses against criticism of their ideas. Please note, this is a reading- and writing intensive class.

This course relies upon films to provide a common set of examples which we, as a class, can use to discuss our theories. Students are required, first and foremost, to see the films as philosophical texts in themselves and not solely as entertainment.

This course is geared towards skills-development. It is designed to foster argumentation, writing, comprehension, and oral skills through in-depth reading, writing, and oral assignments. It emphasizes the critical examinations of selected readings. Students are expected to be able to understand difficult texts and write summaries, comparisons, and criticisms that represent both the philosopher's ideas and the students' own observations about those ideas.

This course emphasizes reading, understanding, expressing oneself and listening to others. All students are required to participate in in-class discussions and to respect others’ opinions even if they do not agree with those opinions expressed. This course encourages both independence and inter-dependence. It encourages questioning and the ability of individuals to make up their own mind yet also recognizes the importance of discussion and sharing in learning and thinking. Above all else, this course emphasizes communication within a larger group and hopes to create a community of people who can contribute to and learn from each other's insights and knowledge.

Essential Studies: Philosophy 130 fulfills goal # 1, Thinking and Reasoning from the Essential Studies Program. Essential Studies courses are designed to help students become stronger in areas that have been identified as particularly important for professional, private, and civic life in the 21st century: being able to think and reason well, to communicate effectively, to judge the credibility of information, and to engage in complex and respectful ways with diversity. The essential studies goals of Philosophy 130 are to help you improve your argumentation and reasoning skills, and to cultivate your ability to apply theoretical principles to everyday situations.

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Nearly every class session will focus explicitly on argumentation analysis and construction, as well as the application of political principles to contemporary controversies.

Requirements: Class participation is of the highest priority. This course will not be a success unless everyone in it feels as if they are a part of a larger whole. It is expected that all members of the class keep up to date with the assignments, take an interest in the opinions and arguments of others, and, as a result, students will be graded on participation.

Students are required to complete journals summarizing and commenting on each reading assigned in class, and to write journals connecting the films with the readings. Students are also required to complete all papers listed on the syllabus, to post on the Facebook discussion board, and take in-class quizzes. Late papers will only be accepted in special circumstances. Please speak with me about lateness or attendance problems in advance.

Grading: The grading formula is as follows:

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<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tr>
<td>Midterm paper</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final paper</td>
<td>25%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Journals</td>
<td>30%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Facebook Discussion Posts</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Class Participation</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
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Letter grades will be converted to a 100 point scale, in which 95 = A, 87 = B+, 85 = B, 83 = B-, etc.

Perhaps a more useful way of thinking about the grades is: A = excellent or outstanding work, B = good or above average work, C = acceptable or average work, D = unsatisfactory work but it is “just squeaking by,” and F = unsatisfactory or failing work. By definition, most work is “average.” Papers will be graded on: clarity of focus, adequacy of text, breadth and depth of documentation, cogency of argument.

All written work must be typed. No handwritten work will be accepted.

How to get an ‘A’ in this course: This course is difficult; it requires both a lot of work and a significant personal commitment (all classes should require this). You should anticipate at least three hours of out-of-class work for every hour you spend in class. Written work should be detailed and well-edited, with a strong sense of academic discipline evident in the assignment.

‘A’ students notate their textbooks both when they read and during class discussion. They also take notes during the lecture and refer to these notes when completing assignments. To get an ‘A’, a student must participate actively in the majority of classes, and write detailed journals that integrate their personal point of view with textual analysis. If someone has questions about his or her overall grade, I will ask to see his or her notes and study material. Without textbook notations, lecture notes, lengthy journals, active participation, and, of course, the completion of all assignments, it is unlikely that someone can earn a high grade. Please note, I do not enter grades on Blackboard, nor can I give you an indication of “your grade so far.” All the information required for these computations will be in your hands. Please keep adequate records so you are aware of your standing. Also note, the 100-level designation of this class does not indicate the amount of work required, but the amount of background knowledge necessary to engage the material. In other words, this class is introductory, but it does not require less work than other intensive courses.
Note: Absences are not extensions; all deadlines still apply. If you are going to be absent, please give me all the required work in advance. Assignments are only accepted in class unless other arrangements have been made (or, obviously, in special incidents such as a car accident, etc.). No late assignments will be accepted unless we have spoken and I have agreed to an extension. Simply informing me that your paper is going to be late does not constitute my consent. Being absent does not excuse you from taking a quiz.

The Web Page: I have developed an interactive World Wide Web page that I hope will make things easier for you throughout the semester. It contains links to sites that will help you write your papers, take better notes, and understand the text better. This, combined with the Facebook group, provides a 24-hour support group that adds depth to our in-class time and makes you feel less isolated when you are doing work outside of class. I hope that this will be the first place you go to when you are having difficulties, or when you are simply “inspired” and want to talk philosophy. The web page address is as follows: http://www.und.nodak.edu/instruct/weinstein/

Journals: Write a journal on the reading assigned or on the movie viewed in class. You should have a separate journal for the readings and the movie, so some days you will submit one journal, and some days two, but multiple readings on the same day should be included in the same journal. Journals on the reading are due the day the reading is scheduled for discussion, but journals on the movie are due the class immediately following the viewing. Each journal entry should be at least 450 words long, but this is a minimum length and, in conjunction with other factors, does not guarantee anything above the minimum satisfactory grade. The first half should include a summary of the main idea of the reading. The second half of the journal should be your reaction. Is the argument a good one? Are there mistakes in reasoning? How does this connect with other readings? Did the reading upset you? Are there problems to be solved? Is there something you don’t understand, or would like to spend more time on? Include any questions or other comments you have about the reading. The journals will be graded on a three point scale: 3= Excellent, 2=Good, 1=Acceptable. Your journal grades will be averaged at the end of the semester. There are sample journals on my web page and attached to this syllabus.

***JOURNALS WILL ONLY BE COLLECTED IN CLASS. NO JOURNALS CAN BE SUBMITTED VIA EMAIL OR PLACED IN MY MAILBOX***

Grading Rubrics: Each paper and journal you submit must include a grading rubric as a cover sheet (with your name on it). There are separate ones for the journals and the papers. You are responsible for printing them out and attaching them to the front of your paper. Assignments without rubrics will not be graded.

Facebook Discussion Posts: This class uses Facebook to create a 24-hour forum for discussion. Every student is expected to participate and to post at least one substantive comment on the group page every week. The message must be at least a short paragraph, relating to something discussed in class that week. You may respond to other posts or you may start a new thread, but you must make a genuine attempt to engage in the community of inquiry present on the board. Please print out and submit a copy of your post each week. Posts that are not submitted will not be counted for credit.

Using Facebook: Virtually every student in the class will already have a Facebook account; those who do not, usually avoid Facebook on principle. To the latter group, I apologize, but you will have to open an account. You will not have to do anything with it other than post, but given that the vast majority of students have integrated social
networks into their lives, this is the best vehicle for online discussion. It also allows people to post photos and questions, host chats, and do other things that will be of use during the semester. One benefit of Facebook is that it clearly identifies posters with name and pictures; it is helpful for everyone to know who he or she is talking with. If you are adamant about keeping your social network life separate from your school life, then feel free to start a new account for the sole purpose of class assignments. But please do include at least one photo so we can see who you are. It is a big class and we want to learn each other’s names as quickly as possible. You can join the social network at www.facebook.com.

The Facebook group for your class is closed. It is only accessible to class members. No one but class members will be able to see your comment or posts. To join, please follow the link to the group on my webpage and request membership. I will approve it as soon as possible. Then, check the group regularly for updates and discussions.

Because this group is on Facebook, I ask everyone to please act responsibly. Do not “friend” anyone who does not welcome it, and respect those who choose not to accept friend requests. Post respectfully, no trolling, insults, obscenity, or questionable links. The same code of conduct that governs class behavior is in effect online. But please, enjoy yourself. I am putting it on Facebook so after-hours interaction can be more fun and versatile.

**Electronics policy:** Because the class is both large and discussion oriented, and because it is in a “lecture bowl” classroom, no laptops can be used during class. They are distracting and too many people use them to do other things. (Hand writing notes is a much better way to remember things anyway.) Also, please turn off your cell phones and no texting is permitted during class. If there is an emergency that you need to keep abreast of, let me know before class starts and we can work something out.

**General comments:** All of the journal entries are considered to be foundational work contributing to the larger papers. All of the early papers are considered to be foundational work for the later papers. Consequently, you are encouraged to use these entries as much as possible in order to organize your thoughts and arguments. This means that if you feel something that you have written in a journal or earlier paper can be used within a different assignment, you are encouraged to use it again. Remember, you cannot plagiarize off your own work—only other people’s work.

- Do not plagiarize. The university defines plagiarism as “the appropriation, buying, receiving as a gift, or obtaining by any means another person’s work and the unacknowledged submission or incorporation of it in one’s own work.” If you are unsure of what that means, speak with me. When in doubt, use citations. **All acts of plagiarism will result in immediate failure for the course.** Plagiarism includes but is not limited to copying work from other students. You are encouraged to talk in groups about your assignments; I hope that students form study groups to attack the reading and the papers. However, when it is time to write the papers, do your work on your own. Do not write collectively. Should two or more students hand in the same or unacceptably similar papers, both the writer and those who copied the work will be subject to the consequences. In short, all written work must be your own. **I have failed many people for plagiarism. Don’t do it. It’s not worth the risk.**

- Students who are absent are responsible for all work and all announcements made while they were absent. The syllabus is not a contract. I may add, take-away, or change assignments when I think it necessary. Additionally, I may change deadlines, so make sure you know what you missed while you were absent. All the new rules will apply, even if you are unaware that things have changed.
- Avoid sloppy or careless mistakes. Spell the names of the philosophers correctly. I become very frustrated when I read people who do not care enough about their papers to edit properly. You don't want a frustrated professor grading your paper – that would be a very bad thing.

- Please be sure to keep copies of everything you hand me, either on disk or as a photocopy. I am a human being. Sometimes I lose things. If, for whatever reason, I misplace your paper, or I think you never gave it to me, these copies will resolve the issue.

- If you are having difficulties, or if you are falling behind, come see me. I have office hours for a reason, and I am almost always willing to arrange a one-on-one meeting. E-mail is also a useful way of contacting me. I cannot help you if you don’t let me know you need it; no one has ever been penalized for asking for help. In fact, students who come see me often find it to be an advantage. There is no reason to be scared of me. I really am quite harmless, even though I am loud and flail while I talk.

- As an extension of the previous comment, do not come to me three weeks before the end of the semester to ask what you can do to pass this course. The grade for this course is a semester-long evaluation. At that point, there is little I can do. Don’t let it get that far. See me early with any difficulties. Remember, I don’t give you a grade; you earn it.

- Electronic Communication - My webpage contains all the course handouts; please go there to download them and print them out to bring to class. Also, make sure that Campus Connection has your current e-mail address. Announcements and links will be sent electronically via that service, and you are responsible for receiving them even if you have not updated your account. Finally, for class related matters, it is best to communicate with me via my UND email address rather than my Facebook account. I have no objections to being friended, having you write on my wall, or receiving messages there, but I don’t check it as often. My UND address is my official account. It is best to conduct class business there. Don’t post questions about your work, grade, or situation, in the Facebook group or on my wall. Remember: my Facebook account contains my personal opinions and the usual social-network snark. If you find this offensive or it makes you uncomfortable, do not friend me. Becoming my Facebook friend authorizes me to inform you of my opinions (even though, of course, these opinions will never affect your grade or class experience).

- Students with disabilities: Individuals with physical, psychological, or learning disabilities, should contact Disability Support Services in McConnel Hall (777 – 3425 – voice or TTY). It is the student’s responsibility to request accommodations. I cannot provide accommodations that are not requested in writing from Disability Support Services.

- Students for whom English is a second language: I will make every attempt to work with you so that you meet the requirements of this class. However, you will be held responsible for writing understandable and grammatically correct papers. Contact the academic services below for academic assistance.

- Students requiring writing assistance or tutoring: Help is available free of charge through the University Learning Center at the Memorial Union room 201A (777 – 4406), or the Writing Center in Merrifield Hall, room 12 (777 – 3600).

- Discussions in this class will not shy away from controversy. Students are encouraged to discuss any topic that is relevant to the course. It is therefore not uncommon for issues relating to current
events, human sexuality, religion, drugs, politics, race, and gender to be our focus. It is also quite common that students will disagree with each other or with me. Although each person is expected to show the proper respect for his or her colleagues, students will not be discouraged from discussing relevant topics that may be offensive to others. Consequently, if such topics make you uncomfortable, or if you are concerned about being offended, you may want to reconsider taking this course.
**Reading and Assignment Schedule:**
(all readings are from the textbook unless otherwise specified)

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**Don’t forget to use the correct grading rubric!**

Tuesday, August 21: What is political philosophy?

*Human Nature and the State*


Movie: *Heathers*.


Movie: *Mosquito Coast*.

*Liberty & Rights*


Paper draft: due for workshopping.

NOTE: CLASS MAY RUN LATE.

Tuesday, March 18: Spring Break.


Movie: *Harold and Kumar Go to White Castle*.

Due: Midterm paper. “Is the social contract a viable foundation for a political theory? (5-7 pages).

Law & Equality

Tuesday, April 8: Read: Plato, Crito, handout and Martin Luther King Jr., Letter from Birmingham Jail, pp. 214-224.


Civic Education


Tuesday, April 29: Read: Paulo Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, handout and Stuart Hampshire, “The Soul and the City,” handout. Movie: Bulworth


Final Paper: “Is education necessary for political freedom?” (10-12 pages) Due at final exam time: Tuesday, May 14, 7:45 p.m.

Instructions for submitting final paper:
1. Papers must be submitted as a PDF file. No other file types will be accepted.
2. Files must be named you last name and first initial. So, my paper would be: “weinsteinj.pdf”
3. Length: 10-12 pages.
4. Layout: Times New Roman font, 12 point, double spaced, margins no more than 1” on all sides. Indented quotes should be single spaced, left justified.
5. Title of the paper should be the question of the paper. Do not change the title.