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PHIL 201E.01: Political Ethics

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Syllabus

This is a General Education Requirement course. Its purpose is to help you understand and appreciate the sources, the premisses, 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, listed below, 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 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 and in our independent discussion sessions, 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 know 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 place of the final exam, will check your understanding by requiring that you both synthesize the main themes of western political thought and that you be able to apply them to "real world" political problems.

Quizzes: Ten points each, drop two lowest, 50% of your grade, no make-up quizzes. All quizzes will be taken on Friday, and returned the following Monday.

September 10, 24
October 8, 22
November 5, 19
December 10

Midterm Paper: Five pages, 25 points, 25% of your grade. Due date announced later.

Final Paper: Five pages, 25 points, 25% of your grade.

Due in our classroom at the time scheduled for the final exam. I will also be available at that time to discuss the paper topic, for those who are interested.

Reading Assignments:

Available each week on "quiz" Fridays for the following two weeks.

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