

Politics 9503A/Philosophy 9128A: Central Problems in Political Theory

September-December 2022

Tuesday 3:30-5:20, SSC 7200

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Office Hours: Tues 2:00-3:00, Wed 1:30-2:30, and by appointment

Each year this course examines a central problem in political theory. In 2022 we will investigate the fundamental problem of political authority. By the end of the course, students will be able to:

- (1) Describe the problem of political authority and explain -- and evaluate -- the main arguments on the subject,
- (2) Describe the history of the modern problems of political obligation, political legitimacy, and civil disobedience, along with the pros and cons of the most influential recent work on these problems,
- (3) Provide a critical evaluation of the arguments about political authority and defend their own views on the topic.

Texts

Delmas, Candice, *A Duty to Resist: When Disobedience Should be Uncivil*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2018.

Huemer, Michael, and Daniel Layman, *Is Political Authority an Illusion? A Debate*, New York: Routledge, 2022.

King, Martin Luther, 'Letter from a Birmingham Jail', 1963.

Plato, *Crito*.

Simmons, A. John, *Moral Principles and Political Obligations*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979.

How Your Final Mark is Determined

25% Participation

25% 2,000 word (5-6 page) Critical Notice of Simmons, *Moral Principles and Political Obligations*

25% 2,000 word (5-6 page) Critical Notice of Huemer and Layman, *Is Political Authority an Illusion? A Debate*

25% 2,000 word (5-6 page) Critical Notice of Delmas, *A Duty to Resist: When Disobedience Should be Uncivil*

Participation: 25%

To be eligible for this portion of the final grade, students must attend all classes except when there are medical or compassionate reasons. **Students will be provided with a list of questions to discuss and will be expected to attend with pre-written answers, ready to talk about their answers.**

Students will receive a mark that reflects their **contributions to seminar discussion** – average contributions will receive marks that translate into the B range, excellent contributions will receive marks that translate into the A or A+ range. I expect that all students will contribute to every class, or at least will not fail to contribute to two classes in a row.

Critical Notices: 2,000 words (5-6 pages), 25% each.

Critical Notices are to be submitted electronically by 12:00 noon on the relevant due date. Late submissions are subject to a penalty of 2% per day.

On Simmons: Due Friday October 21.

On Huemer and Layman: Due Friday November 11.

On Delmas: Due Friday December 9.

Weekly Meetings

At each meeting, I will begin by offering some background to a few of the issues covered in the day's assigned readings. This will *not* be a lecture on the readings themselves. Students will be expected to do this reading *before* the meeting. After my background comments, we will have an open discussion of the readings, focusing on their content, plausibility, and implications. In addition to the pre-written answers mentioned above, students are encouraged to contribute their own questions and comments.

September 13: Introduction: Overview of the course

September 20: Plato's *Crito*

Plato, *Crito*, <https://www.pitt.edu/~mthomps/ readings/crito.pdf>

September 27: Martin Luther King and John Rawls on civil disobedience

Martin Luther King, 'Letter from a Birmingham Jail'

John Rawls, 'The Justification of Civil Disobedience'

October 4: Simmons 1

A. John Simmons, *Moral Principles and Political Obligations*, Introduction, Chapters I & II, 3-56.

October 11: Simmons 2

A. John Simmons, *Moral Principles and Political Obligations*, Chapters III-V, 57-142.

John Rawls, 'Legal Obligation and the Duty of Fair Play', in John Rawls, *Collected Papers*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999, 117-129.

October 18: Simmons 3

A. John Simmons, *Moral Principles and Political Obligations*, Chapters VI-VIII, 143-201.

A. John Simmons, 'Associative Political Obligations', *Ethics* 106 (2), 1996, 247-273.

Friday October 21: First Critical Notice, on Simmons, due today at noon.

October 25: Huemer and Layman 1

Michael Huemer, and Daniel Layman, *Is Political Authority an Illusion? A Debate*, 1-113.

November 1: Reading Week: No Class Today

November 8: Huemer and Layman 2

Michael Huemer, and Daniel Layman, *Is Political Authority an Illusion? A Debate*, 117-196.

Friday November 11: Second Critical Notice, on Huemer and Layman, due today at noon.

November 15: Delmas 1

Candice Delmas, *A Duty to Resist: When Disobedience Should be Uncivil*, 1-71.

November 22: Delmas 2

Candice Delmas, *A Duty to Resist: When Disobedience Should be Uncivil*, 72-135.

November 29: Delmas 3

Candice Delmas, *A Duty to Resist: When Disobedience Should be Uncivil*, 136-197.

December 6: Delmas 4

Candice Delmas, *A Duty to Resist: When Disobedience Should be Uncivil*, 198-253.

Friday December 9: Third Critical Notice, on Delmas, due today at noon.