

Poli 28: Ethics and Society II

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Lectures:	Mon. & Wed. 12:00-12:50 CTL 0125	Office Hours:	Wed. 4:00 - 5:00 SSB 385
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Course Description

All students will eventually confront moral problems with social, political, or legal dimensions in their roles as citizens, scholars, professionals, parents, members of their communities, and as human beings with responsibilities to other nations and peoples. Warren College designed Ethics and Society, PHIL or POLI 27 and PHIL or POLI 28, to help students learn how to make moral decisions, engage in moral reasoning, and understand the positions of others in the great moral conflicts of our time.

Generals, politicians, executives, and judges often make decisions for many other people that can have widespread ramifications. The Ethics and Society courses demand that students examine essential moral and ethical questions.

- Should we go to war in order to protect our national security or the security of an ally? If so, how should the war be conducted?
- Should we build factories in third world countries that employ people who thereby acquire the means to sustain themselves, if we do so by exploiting them, or by polluting their air, water, and land?
- Do individual persons have the right to decide whether to end their lives without interference from the state?

These questions, and others like them, are not merely academic—they are very real. Democracy works only when citizens have sufficient knowledge and understanding of moral theory and practice to make decisions that have a significant impact on the lives of others. Warren College is dedicated to the ideal of informed, engaged, morally sensitive citizenship, and considers Ethics and Society to be a principal means of achieving this ideal.

PHIL 27 or POLI 27 provides an overarching view of these issues and PHIL 28 or POLI 28 focuses on one (or more) topics in detail. In these courses, students will learn how to write, think, and speak about these issues.

Learning Outcomes

Students who complete this course are expected to be able to do the following:

- To comprehend and articulate theories of dissent—in various forms it takes.
- To argue for and against these theories of dissent.
- To display skill in writing coherent arguments about political disobedience.

Overview

This course is concerned with political dissent: with what dissent looks like, when it is morally justified, and what states ought to do in light of a dissenting population. We begin by discussing an often-overlooked form of dissent: voting. We investigate the phenomenon of voting as an act of dissent, as well as the conditions in which it is rational to vote.

We will then address civil disobedience and its alternatives. We begin by discussing classic examples of political dissent—in particular, the philosophical views of Martin Luther King Jr. and Mahatma Gandhi. We then turn to the legal counterpart of civil disobedience: uncivil obedience. Uncivil obedience involves the use of laws to undermine political systems—for example, the practice of intentionally refusing to settle legal cases on a large scale in order to overburden an unjust legal system. At that point, we discuss the limitations of civil disobedience. If that type of dissent is ineffective, under what conditions are more violent forms of dissent justified?

We then turn to discussions of political violence. While states sometimes use violence in order to achieve political ends, we will focus primarily on individual acts of violence to achieve political goals. Along these lines, we will discuss whether acts of oppressed groups constitute violence or self defense. We will address terrorism—and investigate whether there is a distinction between terrorism and violence by individuals to achieve political goals. The course will conclude by discussing two of the most extreme forms of dissent—secession and rebellion.

Expectations and Evaluations

Students are expected to attend lectures, to actively participate in discussions, and to complete reading assignments before class. Students will be graded on the basis of two papers, a final exam, and participation. The breakdown of grades is as follows:

First Paper	20%
Second Paper	20%
Final Exam	35%
Participation	25%

Both papers will be 6–8 pages in length (double spaced) and based on topics distributed to the class. The prompt for the first paper will be handed out on January 21st, and is due January 31th. The prompt for the second paper will be handed out on February 15th and is due on February 25th. The final examination will contain factual information about the readings and lectures, and ask you to reflect on its impact on different moral dilemmas.

Participation is based on your performance in discussion sections. Remember that although active contribution involves making your own voice heard, it also involves listening to your peers.

Students will *not* be evaluated based on their political opinions. The course will present and examine a wide variety of political views—some of which you may agree with, and many of which you will not. Students from all backgrounds—democrat, republican, independent, undecided (or anything else) are welcome, and all will be respected. This course asks only that you examine the arguments for political views rigorously, not that you hold any particular political position.

Academic Integrity

You are expected to conduct yourself with honor and integrity throughout this course. UCSD’s policy on academic honesty is the following:

“Integrity of scholarship, otherwise referred to as academic integrity, is essential for an academic community, including UC San Diego. Academic integrity is built on a foundation of honest, responsible, fair and trustworthy scholarly activity. Without it, the degrees we confer, the research we conduct, and our reputation all diminish in value.

Thus, the University expects that both faculty and students will adhere to its standards of academic integrity. The UC San Diego Policy on Integrity of Scholarship (herein the “Policy”) states the general rules associated with student integrity of scholarship. The Procedures for Resolving Alleged Violations of the Policy (herein the “Procedures”) are found at <https://senate.ucsd.edu/media/389895/procedures-for-resolving-alleged-ai-violations.pdf> and authorized by the San Diego Division of the Academic Senate’s Educational Policy Committee.”

Academic honesty involves adequately citing the sources you rely upon, not stealing other students' exams or papers, not cheating on exams, and not plagiarizing any work. Anyone who is found to be dishonest will automatically fail the class and be reported to the UCSD Academic Integrity Office. If you are unsure whether something constitutes academic dishonesty, contact me or your teaching assistant BEFORE submitting your work.

Reading Schedule

Introduction

Question: What is dissent? What does it mean to be disobedient to the state?

01/03/22 None
01/05/22 The Crito Plato

Voting

Question: Is voting an act of dissent? If so, is it one of the least or most extreme forms of dissent?

01/10/22 Democracy: Instrumental Vs. Noninstrumental Value Elizabeth Anderson
01/12/22 Polluting the Polls: When Citizens Should Not Vote Jason Brennan

Civil Disobedience

Question: What is civil (as opposed to uncivil) disobedience? Is it an effective method for change?

01/17/22 Martin Luther King Day—No Class
01/19/22 Civil Disobedience Henry David Thoreau
A Theory of Justice: pg. 319-43 John Rawls
01/21/22 First Paper Distributed
01/24/22 Non-Violence in Peace and War: Sections III & IV Mahatma Gandhi
01/26/22 A Letter from a Birmingham Jail Martin Luther King Jr.

Uncivil Obedience

Question: Are there ways to use unjust laws to undermine those very laws? What might this process look like?

01/31/22 First Paper Due
01/31/22 Uncivil Obedience Jessica Bulman-Pozen & David Pozen
02/02/22 In Praise of Idleness Bertrand Russell

