Political Ethics: Morality and Politics from Machiavelli to Rawls

First and Second Term Seminar 2015-2016

Organized by Richard Bellamy

Please register here

This seminar explores the ethical dimensions of politics. It investigates the moral responsibilities of politicians, public servants and citizens; it examines various philosophical methods through which one might morally evaluate the behaviour these actors exhibit and the policies they enact; and it evaluates the advantages and disadvantages of these methods. Combining theory and practice, the seminar combines abstract philosophical debates with concrete case studies. The course addresses such issues as the use of violence and official secrecy, the morality of lying, the dangers of hypocrisy, the necessity of compromise, and the possibility of public standards. Term 1 explores certain classic theories; Term 2 moves to a discussion of specific issues and case studies.

Requirements
Students who choose to take this seminar for credit are required to meet Departmental attendance.

Up to three students have the option of writing a term paper for this seminar as part of their general term paper requirements. However, they must first clear the topic with Professor Bellamy. The term paper must then be submitted via email to Professor Bellamy with the organizing assistant in copy (Jennifer.Dari@eui.eu).

This seminar is worth 20 credits.

Schedule
The seminar takes place on Thursdays at 9.00-11.00 in Seminar Room 4 in the Badia Fiesolana, with the exception of the session on the 10\textsuperscript{th} of December which will be held in Seminar Room 3.

The full list of seminar sessions is the following:

Term 1
Thursday 8\textsuperscript{th} October: No Session
Thursday 15\textsuperscript{th} October: Seminar Room 4
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<tr>
<td>Thursday 22\textsuperscript{nd} October</td>
<td>No Session</td>
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<td>Thursday 29\textsuperscript{th} October</td>
<td>Seminar Room 4</td>
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<td>Thursday 5\textsuperscript{th} November</td>
<td>No Session</td>
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<td>Thursday 12\textsuperscript{th} November</td>
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<td>Thursday 19\textsuperscript{th} November</td>
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<td>Thursday 26\textsuperscript{th} November</td>
<td>No Session</td>
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<td>Thursday 3\textsuperscript{rd} December</td>
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<td>Thursday 10\textsuperscript{th} December</td>
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<td>Thursday 7\textsuperscript{th} January</td>
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<td>Thursday 14\textsuperscript{th} January</td>
<td>No Session</td>
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<td>Thursday 21 January</td>
<td>Seminar Room 4</td>
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<td>Thursday 28\textsuperscript{th} January</td>
<td>No Session</td>
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<td>Thursday 4\textsuperscript{th} February</td>
<td>No Session</td>
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<td>Thursday 11\textsuperscript{th} February</td>
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<td>Thursday 18\textsuperscript{th} February</td>
<td>Seminar Room 4 (includes a guest session with Max Weber Lecturer Sarah Birch)</td>
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<td>Thursday 25\textsuperscript{th} February</td>
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<td>Thursday 3\textsuperscript{rd} March</td>
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<td>Thursday 10\textsuperscript{th} March</td>
<td>Seminar Room 4</td>
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**General Reading**

S Mendus, *Politics and Morality*

R. E., Goodin, *Utilitarianism as a Public Philosophy*

M. Baron, M. Slote and P. Pettit, *Three Methods of Ethics*

M Sandel, *Justice: What’s the Right Thing to Do?*

R Geuss, *Philosophy and Real Politics*

R. Bellamy (ed.), *Public Ethics*

A. Gutmann and D. Thompson (eds.), *Ethics and Politics: Cases and Comments*

**Term 1: Classic Approaches**

**15 Oct Week 1: Introduction: Approaches and Issues**

In this session we shall discuss the basic aims of the course, investigate the distinction between ideal theory and non-ideal theory and between both of these with political realism, and explore the three main schools of ethical and political thought.
1) Ideal and Non-Ideal Theory, and Political Realism


Matt Sleat, ‘Realism, Liberalism and Non-ideal Theory Or, Are there Two Ways to do Realistic Political Theory?’, *Political Studies*, (2014) doi: 10.1111/1467-9248.12152

2) Between Utility and Rights: Trolley Problem, Jim and the Indians


29 Oct Week 2 Machiavelli

N Machiavelli, *The Prince*, especially Chs. 15-19

[http://www.constitution.org/mac/prince00.htm](http://www.constitution.org/mac/prince00.htm)

R Grant, *Hypocrisy and Integrity: Machiavelli, Rousseau, and the Ethics of Politics*, Ch. 2


12 Nov Week 3 Kant

Kant, ‘Perpetual Peace’ Appendix 1 (‘On the Disagreement Between Morals and Politics in Relation to Perpetual Peace’) and 2 (On the Agreement Between Politics and Morality According to the Transcendental Concept of Public Right)

[http://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/kant/append1.htm](http://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/kant/append1.htm)


19 Nov Week 4 Weber

M Weber, ‘Politics as a Vocation’
http://www2.selu.edu/Academics/Faculty/ibell/weber.pdf


Richard Bellamy, Liberalism and Modern Society, Polity Press, 1992, Ch. 4

10 Dec Week 5 Rawls


R Geuss, Philosophy and Real Politics, Introduction, Ch 3

Term 2: Issues and Case Studies

7 Jan Week 6 Dirty Hands: The Example of Torture and ‘The Ticking Bomb’

Key Questions:

1) Must politicians sometimes adopt dirty - in particular violent - means for justifiable ends, as Machiavelli suggested?

2) Is the willingness to do so the mark of what Weber would regard as a ‘responsible’ politician?

3) Or are certain means always to be condemned, as Kant affirmed?


D. Thompson, Political Ethics and Public Office (Harvard University Press, 1987), ch. 1

**Case Studies:** The Ticking Time Bomb; Interrogating Detainees at Guantanamo (A Gutmann and D Thompson (eds), Ethics and Politics: Cases and Comments, Ch 1)

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21 Jan Week 7 Integrity and Compromise: Personal and Political (George and Coalitions)

Key Questions:

1) Is integrity always to be admired - be it in personal life or public life?

2) Should politicians be willing to compromise? And if so, when and for what reasons?

3) Are compromises principled or pragmatic? Or are they always unprincipled?

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1) **Personal Integrity**


S. Mendus, Politics and Morality, Chs 1 and 4

2) **Political Integrity and Compromise**


**Case Studies:** George’s Dilemma; Coalition Politics – Compromising Positions?, Should Tsipras have been ready for ‘an honest compromise’?
11 Feb Week 8 Secrets and Lies

Key Questions:

1) Might deception and secrecy sometimes be necessary in democracies, as Machiavelli suggested, or are they never permissible, as Kant has been taken as arguing?

2) What might qualify as legitimate ‘official’ secrets? Do they include the private actions of politicians?

3) What about being ‘economical’ with the truth? Are ‘spin’, manipulation – perhaps even what Harry Frankfurt has called ‘bullshit’ – an inevitable part of governing?


[NB. Both Carson articles are reprinted and revised in: Carson, Lying and Deception: Theory and Practice (OUP, 2010), chs. 1, 2, 12]


Case Studies: John Major and IRA, Wikileaks

John Major’s Secret Negotiations with IRA

http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/1993/nov/28/northernireland

Wikileaks: http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-10757263
18 Feb Week 9 Private Vice and Public Virtue (NB Sarah Birch shall join us for the second part of the seminar)

Key Questions:

1) What sort of people do we want in public life? Must they be saints, or might it be more useful to have a sinner?

2) Is political morality *sui generis*?

3) How far is consistency important? Is the private life of politicians of any relevance to politics? Or is hypocrisy the mark of the shrewd politician?

4) Should we be worried if elite views differ from those of the general public?


D Thompson, *Political Ethics and Public Office*, Ch. 5.


N Allen and S Birch

**Case Studies:** Clinton, Berlusconi and Abbott

A Gutmann and D Thompson (eds), *Ethics and Politics: Cases and Comments*, Ch 3 The Investigation and Impeachment of Clinton

Berlusconi’s womanising and blocking of photos of a party at his villa in Sardinia, his media empire, its reporting by *The Times* and the impact on the 2009 Italian EU elections:

http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/europe/article6401845.ece
http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/comment/leading_article/article6401859.ece
http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/80bb1e6c-4e44-11de-a0a1-00144feabdc0.html
http://www.guardian.co.uk/media/2009/jun/04/silvio-berlusconi-the-times-rupert-murdoch

Diane Abbott’s decision to send her son to a private school:

http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/education/3240245.stm
http://www.newstatesman.com/200311030009
10 March Week 10 Public Standards

Key Questions:

1) Are there any ethical standards that should govern legislators?

2) How far are general ethical considerations consistent with the ethical demands of representing their constituents and parties? Should legislators abjure all private interests and concerns and simply adopt ‘public reasons’? Or are they honour bound to reflect the personal convictions and interests of those they represent?

3) Are standards more applicable to the conduct of the political process than to that of individual politicians?


M Philp, Political Conduct, Chs 6 and 7


E Burke, ‘Speech to the Electors of Bristol’ 1774 http://press-pubs.uchicago.edu/founders/documents/v1ch13s7.html


Website of the Committee on Standards in Public Life is here: http://www.public-standards.gov.uk/

The Liam Fox Affair: Allegations against Rt Hon Dr Liam Fox MP: Report by the Cabinet Secretary http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/resource-library/allegations-against-rt-hon-dr-liam-fox-mp-report-cabinet-secretary

Ministerial Code: http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/resource-library/ministerial-code
Fowl Dealings - Second Homes, for Ducks and MPs: the UK MPs Expenses Scandal:

http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/newstopics/mps-expenses/

http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2009/mar/30/mps-expenses-who-claimed-most

http://www.guardian.co.uk/news/datablog/2009/may/13/mps-expenses-houseofcommons


http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/8039273.stm