The course deals with a few of the most fundamental problems of contemporary political philosophy. First among these is the ground and scope of the authority of states to rule, and of the obligation of their citizens to comply with their directives. Most people agree that governments indeed have such authority, and that citizens are usually under a moral obligation to comply with the rules made by the government. However, there are deep disagreements concerning the source of this authority as well as about its proper limits: what are the goals that the government may or must rightfully pursue and by what means? Under what circumstances are its citizens exempt from the obligation to obey its laws? These are among the questions that will be examined in this course. First, we will discuss different theories of political obligation, i.e. theories about the moral basis of our obligation, if any, to comply with laws. The theories discussed will include consent theories, justice-based theories, and reciprocity-based theories. Second, we turn to the form of collective political decision-making that confers authority to the decisions of the government. Most contemporary theorists agree that only democracy possesses such authority, but they disagree about the grounds of the authority of democracy: we will explore intrinsic and instrumental justifications of democracy. Third, we will attend to the problem of distributive justice: are material inequalities between citizens unjust, and if so, under what circumstances? Which inequalities are relevant from the point of view of justice? Is the state required to pursue some profile of distribution of goods in society, and if so, what characterizes that profile? We will discuss utilitarian, egalitarian, and libertarian accounts of justice, as well as their feminist and socialist critiques. Finally, is the state permitted to endorse, encourage or enforce any particular conception of the good life, i.e. of how its citizens should lead their lives, what ideals they should pursue, etc.? Is it permitted, in particular, to enforce the ethical or cultural preferences and beliefs of the majority or of the dominant historical tradition? What rights individuals have to pursue their own conception of a worthy, fulfilling life? In this context, we will discuss liberal individualism, perfectionism, communitarianism, and multiculturalism.

Requirements: students are required to read carefully all assigned readings and to actively participate in class discussions. At a few occasions students will be asked to work in small groups. Each student will present one assigned reading in class (max. 15 minutes). There will be a midterm examination and a final paper. In addition, there will be three short, 10-minute quizzes (one before the midterm exam and two afterwards, most likely on Weeks 3, 9 and 11). By the end of week 11, every student must submit their term paper topic and 2-page outline. On week 12, each student presents their outline and comments on the outline of another student.

Evaluation: Final paper (40%), midterm exam (25%), participation and presentation (15%), quizzes (20%).

Class meetings:

Office hours: Tuesday and Thursday 11 am to 12:30 pm.

Learning outcomes: acquiring analytical skills; understanding key debates contemporary political theory; analytical and critical writing; ability to orally communicate and discuss ideas, arguments;
General background reading:

- Joel Feinberg, Doing Philosophy: A Guide to the Writing of Philosophy Papers (2008), chapters 1, 4, 8, 10 and 11.

Week 1
1st session: What is Political Philosophy?
Required readings:

2nd session: Political Authority and Obligation: Basic Concepts and Pre- and Early Modern Theories
Required readings:

Recommended:

Week 2
1st Session: Consent-Theories of PO
Required readings:
- John A. Simmons, Moral Principles and Political Obligations, Ch 3, 57-74

2nd Session: Fairness-based Theories of PO
Required reading:
- Simmons, Chapter 5, 101-136.

Recommended:

Week 3
1st Session: Justice-based theories of PO
Required readings:
- Simmons, Moral Principles and Political Obligations, Chapter 6, 143-156.

Recommended:

2nd Session: Justified Exceptions to PO: Civil Disobedience
Required readings:

Recommended:

Week 4
1st Session: Democratic theory: Instrumentalism
Required readings:
- Richard Arneson: “Democratic Rights at the National Level,” Philosophy and Democracy (OUP, 2003), Ch. 4

Recommended:

2nd Session: Democratic theory: the Intrinsic Value of Democracy
Required reading:

Recommended:

Week 5
1st Session: Theory of Justice: Overview and Utilitarianism
Required readings:
- Will Kymlicka, Contemporary Political Philosophy (Oxford: OUP, 2002), 10-48

2nd Session: Theory of Justice: Utilitarianism and its critics
Recommended:
- Will Kymlicka, Contemporary Political Philosophy (Oxford: OUP, 2002), 10-48
- Hampton, Ch 4, PP

Week 6
1st Session: Theory of Justice: Liberal Egalitarianism
Required readings:
- Rawls, TJ (§§1-4, 11-12)
2nd Session: Theory of Justice: Egalitarianism
- Kymlicka, Contemporary Political Philosophy, pp. 57-87

Recommended:

Week 7:
1st session: Theory of Justice: Relational Egalitarianism
Required reading:

Recommended:

2nd session: Midterm exam

Week 8
1st session: Theory of Justice: Feminist Conceptions of Equality
Required readings:
- Ingrid Robeyns, “When Will Society be Gender Just?” in Jude Browne (ed.), The Future of Gender (Cambridge UP, 2007);

Recommended:

2nd session: Theory of Justice: Socialist Critiques of Liberal Equality
Required reading:
- Kymlicka, “Marxism” Contemporary Political Philosophy, 166-207

Recommended:

Week 9
1st session: Theory of Justice: Libertarian Critique of Liberal Equality
Required readings:
- Robert Nozick, Anarchy, State, and Utopia, 149-182.
Recommended:
- Kymlicka, *Contemporary Political Philosophy*, 95-159

2nd session: Conceptions of Liberty
Required reading:

Recommended:

Week 10
1st session: State Neutrality and Perfectionism
Required readings:

Recommended:

2nd session: Individualism and Communitarianism
Required reading:

Recommended:

Week 11
1st session: Multiculturalism
Required reading:

Recommended:
2nd session: Multiculturalism and its Critics
(Deadline for submitting 2-page term paper outlines)
Required reading:


Recommended:


Week 12
1st and 2nd session: discussion of term paper outlines. Each student presents his/her topic and comments on the outline of another student.