Philosophy 116A/Topics in Political Philosophy:

Normative Justifications of the State
And a Few Questions about Civil Disobedience

Philosophy 116A explores a variety of normative justifications of the State that have been put forward by key figures in the history of Western political philosophy, including Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, David Hume, J. S. Mill, and John Dewey, and then goes on to analyze the views of several contemporary political philosophers who argue against the legitimacy of the state in general or who put forward theories of civil disobedience and/or resistance against the state under particular conditions. While the course is organized loosely around various efforts to justify State power, it does not focus primarily on the State for its subject matter. Instead, it focuses primarily on the ways in which various Western political philosophers have used values such as individual freedom, rights, private property, peace and prosperity, religious toleration, and equality, as well as intellectual constructs such as the social contract, to argue for – or against -- the necessity of particular kinds of state authority.

Course Requirements: Two 6-9 page papers and a final exam. (The final exam is May 8th from 1:30-4:30.) Class attendance is mandatory. Participation is encouraged.

Required Books: The following required books can be purchased at the Brandeis University Bookstore.

Thomas Hobbes, Leviathan.
John Locke, Second Treatise.
David Hume, Treatise on Human Nature.

A course pack (CP) of articles will be for sale in the Philosophy Dept. Office and all of the articles contained in it will be on WebCT.

NOTE: If you are a student with a disability on record at Brandeis and would like to be accommodated, please speak with me after class or in my office.
READINGS

NOTE: Class discussion will focus exclusively on the following books and articles listed below. So please read the particular selections by the dates cited.

Jan. 20: Introduction.


March 17: First Papers Due. No Class. (Extra Office Hours)


Dewey, selections, Individualism: Old and New (CP).

April 14: J. S. Mill, selections, On Liberty (CP).

Milton Friedman, selections, Capitalism and Freedom (CP).


April 21: Wolff, In Defense of Anarchy, Chapter 3 (CP).

Martin Luther King, “Letter From Birmingham Jail” (CP).

Louis Waldam, “Civil Rights -- Yes; Civil Disobedience – No (A Reply To Martin Luther King)” (CP).

May 3: Second Papers Due (Friday)

May 5: Richard Wasserstrom, “The Obligation to Obey the Law” (CP).

Bruce Pech, “Radical Disobedience and its Justification” (CP).

Second Papers Due May 7th