

# Ethics of Political Violence

POLSCI 314S - 01

Gray 319

WF: 1:25-2:40

Instructor: William Wittels

Office Hours on Wednesday after class or by appointment

## Course Description

Violent actions have profound effects. Those effects, in turn, are profoundly varied. For example, violence can both defend and destroy life. It has a similarly changeable relationship to liberty, autonomy, and security. Given the centrality of these goods to the goals of any reasonable political association, how do states (the dominant contemporary political association) manage to use violence while holding onto a justifiable ethical position? Any person interested in public service (whether at the local, national, or international level) must be prepared to answer this question.

While no single course could produce a definitive statement on the relationship between politics and violence, every student in this course should come away with a deeper, more-nuanced framework for evaluating the use of violence in politics. This course will ask students to explore formal political theory, empirical political studies, and normative political theory so that they can better engage the questions of “what *is* done?” and “what *ought* to be done?” Each question is less meaningful when asked in isolation. So we will ask them together. This course will also engage normative material from multiple eras to deepen students’ historical sensibilities. Questions of what is or what ought to be done are themselves most effectively asked against the backdrop of perennially strong arguments and provocative questions.

Critical engagement with the problem of political violence is important because disparate schools of thought dominate the contemporary discourse and any student who would navigate that discourse must be armed with a rich understanding of the subject. We must go beyond the usual clichés about violence in order to navigate those debates. For example, thinkers on the left criticize the state as being too violent and dissident movements as not violent enough. Others condemn the use of violence altogether. Neoliberals point to the absence of market institutions and the rule of law in making their diagnosis. These institutions, they argue, attract investment, increase prosperity, and make both crime and war less profitable than enterprise and free trade. Some realists argue that trying to eliminate the problem of violence amounts to tilting at windmills and counsel a politics of management and limited use of violence. Who is right? This course will critically evaluate these competing claims about violence, tracing the course of each argument from its assumptions, through its step-by-step logic, to its conclusion.

We will explore these debates primarily through two political lenses: one that shares the perspective of the state and one that shares the perspective of those subject to state power. When looking through the first lens, we will be forced to ask questions like: What is the state's logic for acquiring control over the use of coercive force? How is the state different from other powerful organizations? To what norms should the state conform when using coercive force? What is the nature of political sovereignty? Legitimacy? When looking through the second lens, we will be forced to ask questions like: what are the limits of legal authority? When do peaceful movements turn violent? When are they justified in doing so? Is non-violent political action more effective than violent political action? Is it more justifiable from a normative standpoint? These and other questions will animate the course's readings, lectures, and discussions.

## Course Goals, Expectations/Policies, and Assignments

### Goals

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This course aims to enhance your analytical and intellectual skills while simultaneously allowing you to situate yourself and others in the political-intellectual landscape. The course's goals for each author that we encounter are threefold:

- 1) **Analyze:** Each author makes a set of controversial claims. They mean for their positions to win out in a field of competing arguments and theories. I invite and encourage you to sharpen your analytic skills by separating each argument into its constituent parts, identifying the assumptions that animate each argument, and tracing the logic of each argument from those assumptions to its conclusions.
- 2) **Synthesize:** Each author will share continuities and discontinuities with each other as well as with those not included on this syllabus. This course aims to aid you in identifying those continuities and discontinuities, both as a tool to navigate contemporary political discourses and to identify your own agreements and disagreements with influential arguments.
- 3) **Criticize:** These works are insightful, but they are all flawed in some way. What are the strengths and weaknesses of these arguments about political violence? The course aims to help you identify the elements most worth keeping in the ideas you encounter, as well as those most worthy of being tossed in the dustbin of history.

### Expectations and Policies

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To achieve the course goals, you will need to approach this course in a certain way. If you do, you will find the texts we read and the authors we engage will come to life much more so than if you approach the course passively. Duke is an expensive institution. Get your money's worth!

- 1) **Reading:** The texts we will read are dense and complex. Their difficulty and richness are part of what has made them classics. Effective interpretation only comes with attentive engagement. My job will be to help you in that task by clarifying passages and pointing you to key issues. Your job is to read slowly and carefully. Do not plan on grasping the main points of the argument by skimming key passages. Many of the devils are in the details. Leave at least 1 hour for every 20 pages you plan on reading. If you take your time with these texts, you will learn far more from them than you will from me. You will also more sharply discern the flaws in their arguments and the unasked questions in their explorations. Take notes. Write down questions. Your goal in reading is to identify the *strengths* and *weaknesses* in the arguments at hand, not just the wikipedia-level summary.
- 2) **Criticism:** The goal here is criticism from all sides. When approaching an issue or an argument, be both critical and charitable. Think about how the writer would respond to your criticisms if he or she were in front of you. What defense would be mounted? How strong is it? Your goal should be to criticize the *strongest possible variant* of an author's argument. Moreover, allow the author to challenge you and your assumptions. Criticism is a two-way street. Our answers to the problems posed by the authors we read in this course are not necessarily any better than those that have come before. If you disagree with an author on a certain issue, ask why that is the case. Explore *your own* assumptions and chain of reasoning in addition to the author's. This task is a challenging one. Our political positions are often bound up with the most deeply-rooted parts of our self-conception. But, if you engage in this process honestly and charitably, you will find your political positions challenged for the better. If your political positions (or the justifications behind them) are the same at the outset of this course and at the end, then you did not really participate in it. (Don't worry. It won't affect your grade 😊.) The same goes for me.
- 3) **Class-Participation:** The goal of each class session is two-fold. We will aim to both *understand* the arguments at hand and *critically assess* the claims they make. I plan to lecture for 1/3-1/2 of each session. However, no lecture I can give will be as fruitful as a lively discussion. Come to class with questions and concerns ready. Bring your reading notes. If you've been taking them dutifully, then you'll have no shortage of contributions and we will arrive quickly at a better understanding of what claims were made in the reading. Moreover, just as you ought to interrogate the arguments in front of you as you read, come prepared to do so in class. Each of us will come with a different set of concerns with respect to the reading. Together, we can better assess the strengths and weaknesses of the arguments before us. In addition, we can better test our own positions by challenging and being challenged by the positions of others. Be prepared to *respectfully* question the claims being made by me and by your peers while simultaneously being receptive to the questions we pose to you.
- 4) **Electronics Policy:** The devices developed as part of the information revolution have dramatically empowered us in unforeseen ways and vastly improved the educational

- experience. However, a small percentage of students abuse these devices in class and have prompted a strict policy regarding electronics in the classroom.
- a. **Laptops/iPads:** There has been a sea-change in the way students take notes. I, like many of you, prefer to take notes on a laptop or tablet, rather than with pen and paper. However, the notational and organizational strengths of such devices come with the hazard of e-mail, Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, instant-messaging services, and any number of other possible distractions. As a result, they significantly hinder some students' participation in class discussion. To that end, I ask that all laptops and tablets be put away during the discussion portion of class. Please be prepared to take notes during the discussion section of class with pen and paper.
  - b. **Cell-Phones:** All cell-phone use during class is strictly prohibited. As an instructor, I find students' texting and e-mailing in class extremely distracting. Any students using their cell-phone to text or e-mail in class will be asked to leave for the day and will have an unexcused absence recorded. *Exception:* Naturally, we all forget to turn off our ringers from time to time. If you forgot to turn it off before class, please don't be embarrassed. And please don't ignore the phone as if it belongs to one of your classmates. If your cell-phone does happen to go off in class, discreetly silence the phone at that time.
  - c. **Recording Devices:** Many students like to record lectures and discussions for later reference. I am happy to allow recordings provided I am notified beforehand and the student making the recording is present.
- 5) **Honor Code:** By participating in this course, you have agreed to abide by the Duke University Community Standard, both in letter and spirit:  
<http://www.integrity.duke.edu/standard.html>
- 6) **Attendance:** Attendance is mandatory. You will each be given three unexcused absences. Each unexcused absence beyond that will result in the loss of 2/3 letter to your participation grade. Excused absences require submission of a STINF (<http://www.aas.duke.edu/cgi-bin/trinity/t-reqs/illness/form.pl>), Notification of Absence Due to Observance of a Religious Holiday form (<http://www.aas.duke.edu/cgi-bin/trinity/t-reqs/rholiday/form.pl>), Notification of Varsity Athletic Participation (<http://www.aas.duke.edu/cgi-bin/trinity/t-reqs/novap/form.pl>), or a notification from your Dean. I will also make excused absences for family emergencies.

## Assignments

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**N.B.** The 3 primary assessments in this course are designed to give you an opportunity to hone the skills you will likely need as you enter the job world. Most jobs will require pithy, cogent memo writing in addition to focused and persuasive presentational skills. The assignments below may not be the research papers you are used to. That's by design.

- 1) **Midterm and Final (35% of your final grade each)**

This class will have two take home exams. For each of the exams, you will receive a selection of hypothetical political scenarios. For the mid-term, all of these scenarios will concern a decision confronting the chief executive of a state. This executive will be deciding to use or not use the state's mechanisms of violence in response to recent political developments. You will craft a memo advising her to take one course of action or another, and offer practical and ethical justifications for that course of action. For the final, you will repeat this exercise, but will be advising the leader of a social movement that is considering taking up arms to further its cause. Both are open book and open note. The midterm will be a thoughtful, deliberative exercise, during which you will have 10 days to craft your memo. The final will be a 24-hour take-home designed to test how well you have synthesized and absorbed the course material. Additional parameters (length, etc.) will be specified on the exam.

2) **Presentations (20% of your final grade)**

Each of you will give a short (12-15 minute) presentation on a chosen case-study (with my consultation, followed by a question and answer period with your classmates. You will present your findings and justify them in front of the class. We will be collegial, but challenging. You will be assessed on the coherence and completeness of the presentation as well as persuasiveness of your claims. Presentational aids such as Powerpoint or Prezi are not required.

3) **Attendance/Participation (10%)**

4) **Extra Credit (2%)**

In addition to these graded assignments, you may participate in the political science experimental subject pool. Students will need to participate in 2 hours of Political Science Research Pool (PSRP) studies over the course of the semester to receive a 2% extra credit toward their final grade. More information about this option is available at: <http://www.duke.edu/web/psrp>. If you wish to participate, you can register at: <http://duke-psrp.sona-systems.com> by February 21.

## Required Texts

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Arendt, Hannah: *On Violence* (Harvest Books)

Aristotle: *The Politics* (Penguin Classics)

Hobbes, Thomas: *Leviathan* (Library of Liberal Arts)

Homer: *The Iliad* (University of Chicago Press - Lattimore Translation)

Locke, John: *Two Treatise of Government* (Cambridge University Press)

Machiavelli, Niccolò: *The Prince* (University of Chicago Press)

Sophocles: *Antigone* (Fitts/Fitzgerald Translation)

## Course Schedule

### Part 1: Violence, the long view

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- Jan 10<sup>th</sup> – Introductory session

- Jan 15<sup>th</sup> – Readings: *The Iliad*: Books I, XVIII, XXII, XXIV
- Jan 17<sup>th</sup> – Reading: Pinker, Steven. 2011. *The better angels of our nature: why violence has declined*. New York: Viking. Chapters 1 and 10 (On Sakai)

## Part 2: The State vs. The Citizen

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### Part 2.1: The State and the Institutionalization of Violence

- Jan 22<sup>nd</sup> – Aristotle’s *Politics*. I.1-2, III.1, III.4, III.6-9, IV.1-3, 11-12; V.1 (recommended), V.5-8 (recommended), VII.1-4 (recommended), VII.13-14.
  - Case-Study Presentation Selections due
- Jan 24<sup>th</sup> – Reading: Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*. Chapters 14, 16-21 17-18.
- Jan 29<sup>th</sup> – Readings: Margaret Levi, “Why We Need a New Theory of Government,” Perspective on Politics, 2006, Presidential address, APSA. (On Sakai); Weber, North, Douglass C., John Joseph Wallis, and Barry R. Weingast, *Violence and Social Orders: A Conceptual Framework for Interpreting Recorded Human History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009. Chapter 1 and 7 (On Sakai)
- Jan 31<sup>st</sup> – Readings: Olson, Mancur, “Dictatorship, Democracy, and Development,” The American Political Science Review, Vol. 87, No. 3 (Sep., 1993), pp. 567-576. (On Sakai). Tilly, Charles, “War Making and State Making as Organized Crime,” in Evans, Peter B., Dietrich Rueschemeyer, and Theda Skocpol. 1985. *Bringing the State Back in*. Cambridge [Cambridgeshire]: Cambridge University Press. (On Sakai)

### Part 2.2: State Repression

- Feb 5<sup>th</sup> – Readings: Davenport, Christian. 2007. "State Repression and Political Order". Annual Review of Political Science. 10: 1-24. (On Sakai), Pierskalla, Jan. 2010. "Protest, Deterrence, and Escalation: The Strategic Calculus of Government Repression". Journal of Conflict Resolution. 54 (1): 117-145. (On Sakai)
- Feb 7<sup>th</sup> – Readings: Davenport, Christian and David A. Armstrong II, “Democracy and the Violation of Human Rights: A Statistical Analysis from 1976 to 1996,” *American Journal of Political Science*, vol. 48, no. 3, 2004. (On Sakai), Bruce Bueno de Mesquita, George W. Downs and Alastair Smith, “Thinking Inside the Box: A Closer Look at Democracy and Human Rights,” *International Studies Quarterly*, 49, 2005. (On Sakai), Patrick M. Regan and Errol A. Henderson, “Democracy, Threats and Political

Repression in Developing Countries: Are Democracies Internally Less Violent?" *Third World Quarterly*, 23, 2002. (On Sakai)

- Feb 12<sup>th</sup> – Reading: Machiavelli, Niccolò, and Harvey Claflin Mansfield. 1985. *The Prince*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Dedicatory Letter, Chapters 1-3, 6-9, 12-14 (Recommended) 15-19, 21, 25, and 26
- Feb 14<sup>th</sup> Reading: Arendt, Hannah. *On Violence*. Parts 2 and 3, Skim Part 1

### Part 2.3: State Failure

- Feb 19<sup>th</sup> – Readings: Bates, Robert H. 2008. When things fell apart: state failure in late-century Africa. New York: Cambridge University Press. Chapter 1 (On Sakai), Robert H. Bates. 2008. "State Failure." *Annual Review of Political Science*. 11: 1-12 (On Sakai)
- Feb 21<sup>st</sup> – Readings: James Fearon and David Laitin, "Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War," *American Political Science Review*, vol. 97, no. 1, 2003. (On Sakai) Barbara Harff. "No Lessons Learned from the Holocaust? Assessing Risks of Genocide and Political Mass Murder since 1995," *American Political Science Review*, vol. 97, no. 1, 2003. (On Sakai)
- Feb 26<sup>th</sup> – Reading: Hobbes: *Leviathan*. "Author's Introduction," Chapters 5, 6, 10-13, 29, and "Review and Conclusion"
- Feb 28<sup>th</sup> – Reading: Locke, John: *Two Treatise of Government*. Paragraphs: 1-4, 6-8, 10-13, 16-24, 25-36 (Recommended), 40, 42, 54-55, 77-107, 118-131, 143-148, 159-168 Recommended, 199-202, 211-213, 219-232, 238-243.
- March 5<sup>th</sup> Section Review

## Part 3: The Citizen vs. The State.

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### Part 3.1: Police, Prisons, and Power

- March 7<sup>th</sup> Readings: Jack Goldstone and Bert Useem, "Prison riots as microrevolutions: an extension of state-centered theories of revolution." *American Journal of Sociology* 104 (1999): 985-1029. (Sakai) Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* (New York, NY: Vintage, 1979), Book 3, Chap. 3 (Sakai)
- Midterm Distributed

- March 17<sup>th</sup> Steven I. Wilkinson, *Voices and Violence. Electoral Competition and Ethnic Riots in India*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004, pp.1-26, 40-47, 57-62 and 137-60. (Sakai)
- Midterm Due
- March 19<sup>st</sup> Reading: Sophocles, *Antigone*
- March 24<sup>th</sup> Reading: Plato, *Crito*

### Part 3.2: Armed and Unarmed Social Movements.

- March 26<sup>th</sup> – Readings: Macartan Humphreys and Jeremy Weinstein, “Who Fights? The Determinants of Participation in Civil War,” *American Journal of Political Science*, vol. 52, no. 2, 2008. (Sakai) Stathis Kalyvas and Matthew Adam Kocher. 2007. “How ‘Free’ is Free Riding in Civil Wars? Violence, Insurgency, and the Collective Action Problem.” *World Politics* 59: 177-216. (Sakai)
- March 28<sup>th</sup> – Reading: Kurt Schock, *Unarmed Insurrections. People Power Movements in Nondemocracies*, Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2005. Introduction, Chapters 1 and 2 (Sakai)
- April 2<sup>nd</sup> Karl Marx, *The Communist Manifesto* (Sakai)
- April 4<sup>th</sup> King, Martin Luther, and James Melvin Washington. 1986. *A testament of hope: the essential writings of Martin Luther King, Jr.* San Francisco: Harper & Row. Selections TBD (Sakai)

### Part 3.3: Civil War and Organized Crime

- April 9<sup>th</sup> – Reading: Elisabeth Jean Wood, *Insurgent Collective Action and Civil War in El Salvador*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004, selections pending. Mohammed M. Hafez, *Why Muslims Rebel. Repression and Resistance in the Islamic World*, Boulder, CO: L. Rienner Publishers, 2004. Chapter 1, Conclusion. (Sakai)
- April 11<sup>th</sup> – Reading: Diego Gambetta, *The Sicilian Mafia. The Business of Private Protection*, Boston, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1993 Part 1. (Sakai) Stergios Skaperdas, “The Political Economy of Organized Crime: Providing Protection When the State Does Not,” *Economic of Governance*, 2, 2001. (Sakai)
- April 16<sup>th</sup> – Reading: Reading: Fanon, Franz, Constance Farrington, and Jean-Paul Sartre. 2001. *The wretched of the earth*. London: Penguin. Read ‘On Violence’
- April 18<sup>th</sup> – Reading: Simone Weil ‘The Iliad, or the Poem of Force.’ (On Sakai) Final

- April 23<sup>rd</sup> - Section Review
- April 28<sup>th</sup> – Final Exam (Distributed and Due)