

Philosophy and the City (Phil 308c)

University of Maryland - Summer 2012

Instructor: Michael Zenz

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Course Description

This course will examine the philosophical problems that face residents, designers, and leaders of modern cities. The beginning of the 21st century has seen the resurgence of many American cities, most of which had been in dramatic decline in the latter half of the 20th century. This gives us reason to think that cities will play a large role in the development of society during the current century. Urban environments also make us more acutely aware of problems of collective action that are common to all political situations, and additionally they force us to think about ethical and sociological issues that are unique to urban environments. We will explore these ethical, political, and sociological issues that arise in the urban setting. For instance, we will consider the conflict between the democratic rule of cities and the need for experts to inform policy, as well as consider how cities should be designed, including how the aesthetic features of a city should be considered. We will also discuss whether the redistribution of wealth (especially in the form of subsidized housing) is morally required of city governments, whether such actions constitute injustices toward the rich, or whether their ethical status falls somewhere in between.

Aside from the above (and other) ethical questions, we will attempt to describe what sort of things cities are and how they function. As we answer these questions, we will make use of studies from sociology, economics, urban planning, and other empirical fields. We will also examine specific policy examples (especially from Baltimore, Washington, D.C, and New York) to show how philosophic issues are pertinent to many of us who live in or near cities. The course will take an integrative approach, intertwining concrete policy issues with more abstract philosophical ones.

Requirements

This is an online course, therefore it will require reliable Internet access. Readings will be posted online a week before they must be read, and lectures will be posted at the beginning of each week. Students will be expected to do all of the readings and watch the lectures for each week by about Thursday of that week, so that they are prepared for forum discussions. Students will be evaluated in the following categories (with % of grade in parentheses):

25% - Discussion Participation Each week (except for the first week) students are expected to post to the class forum about some aspect of the course material that interests them. These posts may be either about philosophical or empirical issues and may be well thought out questions or justified views. They should be approximately 100-300 words. Students are then required to comment on another student's post; the hope is that this develops into a longer forum discussion. As this discussion evolves, the instructor will also comment on important points. At the end of the 2nd week, the instructor will give students some feedback about the adequacy of the number and quality of their discussion contributions.

20% - Midterm Exam Take home essay exam. Exams will be given grades and then students will have an opportunity to revise answers for a possible improvement of their grade. (this applies to the midterm exam only). More details to follow.

30% - Paper An approximately 8 pg paper about a major topic from the course. Detailed assignment instructions will be provided around week 3. Students will be given comments and an initial grade, and will have an opportunity to revise and resubmit their papers.

25% - Final Exam Take home essay exam.

Students with Disabilities

Students with disabilities should inform the instructor of their needs as soon as possible so that appropriate accommodations can be made.

Academic Integrity

I take incidents of academic dishonesty very seriously. I will forward to The Office of Student Misconduct any possible cases of it that come to my attention. Please consult the Student Honor Council Website at www.shc.umd.edu. If you would like any further clarification, e.g., on what constitutes plagiarism, please speak with me.

Schedule

Week 1 (May 29th - June 1st): Introduction and a quick history of the American city (rise - decline - rise)

- A. The patterns and causes of urbanization in the US and the world
- B. Mid 20th Century decline of American cities
- C. Late 20th and early 21st Century rise of American cities
- D. A quick history of Washington, D.C. and Baltimore - a preview of why they should interest us.

Readings:

- Davis, "The Urbanization of the Human Population."
- Brower, "Urban Residential Environments."
- Beauregard, "Urbanization's Consequences."
- Mumford, "Paleotechnic Paradise: Coketown."
- Jaffe and Sherwood, excerpt from *Dream City: The Rise and fall of Washington D.C.*

Week 2 (June 4th - June 8th): What are the purposes of cities and how do they function?

- A. The improvement of citizens
- B. A redistributive machine
- C. A growth machine
- D. The pressures on cities

Readings:

- Jacobs, introduction to *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*.
- Wright, "Broadacre city: A new community plan."
- Wright, "When Democracy Builds."
- Molotch, "The City as a Growth Machine."

Week 3 (June 11th - June 15th): Distributive justice revisited

- A. Is it wrong to redistribute wealth (Rawls vs Nozick on justice)?
- B. Public housing as redistribution
- C. Transportation policy as redistribution

Readings:

- Rawls, excerpt from *A Theory of Justice*.
- Nozick, excerpt from *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*.

Midterm Exam Due June 17th (11:59pm)

Week 4 (June 18th - June 22nd): Who should govern?

- A. Problems and benefits of democratic rule
- B. Problems and benefits of rule by experts
- C. Are cities a special case?

Readings:

- Schrag, excerpts from *Great Society Subway*.
- NYC Arterial Facilities Plan, 1955
- Jacobs, Governing and Planning Districts in *Death and Life of Great American Cities*.

Week 5 (June 25th - June 29th): The identity of cities

- A. Do cities have a right to keep out cultural intruders?
- B. Gentrification
- C. Corporations vs the mom and pops

Readings:

- Smith, "Gentrification, the Frontier, and the Restructuring of Urban Space."
- Kennedy and Leonard, "Dealing with Neighborhood Change: A primer on gentrification and policy choices."

Paper Due June 30th (11:59 pm)

Week 6 (July 2nd - July 6th) The Aesthetic qualities of cities

- A. Architecture and city planning as forms of art
- B. ...as molders of behavior.
- C. Legibility vs. complexity in city design
- D. Can places be created?

Readings:

- Milgram, "The Experience of Living in Cities."
- Gieryn, "A Space for Place in Sociology."
- Lynch, excerpt from *The Image of the City*
- Oldenburg, excerpt from *Great Good Places*

Final Exam Due July 6th (11:59 pm)