

Politics 9503A/Philosophy 9128A: Central Problems in Political Theory

September-December 2020

Tuesday Zoom meetings 3:30-5:20

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Zoom Office Hours: Wednesdays 1:30-3:00 & by appointment

This course examines some central problems in political theory: political authority, property and the market, distributive justice and equality, liberty, and democracy. We will study both classic works and recent scholarship on these issues. By the end of the course, students will be able to:

- (1) Describe the problem of political authority and explain (and evaluate) the main arguments in its favour,
- (2) Assess the case for and against private property rights,
- (3) Explain the pros and cons of markets in goods and services as a means of organizing an economy,
- (4) Describe the problem of distributive justice ('who should get what?') and explain the relative merits of competing approaches to this problem,
- (5) Evaluate the value of equality and sufficiency as competing goals of just distribution,
- (6) Explain the arguments on both sides of the debate between distributive egalitarians and relational egalitarians in their answers to the question, 'What is the point of equality?',
- (7) Identify the competing conceptions of liberty in the history of political theory and adjudicate between them,
- (8) Evaluate the case for and against 'libertarian paternalism' as an approach to public policy,
and
- (9) Outline the most important arguments against and for democracy as a form of public and private decision-making.

Texts

Links to some readings appear below; some other readings will be posted on the OWL site. Journal articles and Elizabeth Anderson, *Private Government: How Employers Rule Our Lives (and Why We Don't Talk about it)*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017, may be accessed via the Weldon library website.

How Your Final Mark is Determined

30%: Participation

20%: 2,000 word (5-6 page) *Short Essay* (Due Wednesday October 14 between 10 am and noon)

50%: 4,000-4,500 word (12-15 page) *Long Essay* (Due Monday December 14 between 10 am and noon)

Participation: 30%

To be eligible for this portion of the final grade, students must attend all classes except when there are medical or compassionate reasons, and, **by 4 pm on the Monday before each class, submit a response to the readings (maximum one page in length)**. [*Note: you may miss one weeks' written response without penalty; each further missed response will result in a two-mark deduction from the participation grade.] This maximum one page, single-spaced response should perform two tasks: (1) succinctly state what you take to be the main point and argument of each reading, and then (2) state what issue or issues the readings pose for discussion. The responses will be assessed on a pass/fail basis.

Students who meet this requirement will receive a mark that reflects their **contributions to seminar discussion** – average contributions will receive marks that translate into the B range, excellent contributions will receive marks that translate into the A or A+ range. I expect that all students will contribute to every class, or at least will not fail to contribute to two classes in a row.

Short Essay: 2,000 words (5-6 pages) 20% (Due Wednesday October 14)

Critically discuss the best arguments for and against the duty to obey the law.

The *Short Essay* (due Wednesday October 14, to be submitted electronically between 10 am and noon) is based on our course readings on the topic of political authority. It should be 2,000 words (roughly 5-6 pages, double-spaced). Late essays are subject to a penalty of 2% per day.

Long Essay: 4,000-4,500 words (12-15 pages) 50% (Due Monday December 14)

Write an essay on one of the following topics:

1. Defend a considered position on the question of property rights.
2. Critically discuss the arguments for and against markets.
3. Outline and evaluate Rawls's case for his favoured principles of distributive justice.
4. Explain what kinds of equality matter and why.
5. Critically discuss the following claim: 'Liberty is the most important political value'.
6. What is democracy and what can be said for and against it?

The *Long Essay*, due Monday December 14, to be submitted electronically between 10 am and noon, is worth 50% of your course grade. The essay should draw on our required readings plus additional readings as appropriate. The essay should be 4,000-4,500 words (roughly 12-15 pages, double-spaced). Late essays are subject to a penalty of 2% per day.

Weekly Zoom Meetings

At each meeting, I will begin by offering some background to a few of the issues covered in the day's assigned readings. This will *not* be a lecture on the readings themselves. Students will be expected to do this reading *before* the meeting. After my background comments, we will have an open discussion of the readings, focusing on their content, plausibility, and implications. Students are encouraged to contribute their own questions and comments.

September 15: Introduction: Overview of the course

September 22: Political Authority I

Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 1651, Chapter 13, 'Of the natural condition of mankind as concerning their felicity and misery',

<http://www2.econ.iastate.edu/classes/econ362/hallam/Readings/LeviathanXiiiXv.pdf>

Plato, *Crito*, <https://www.pitt.edu/~mthomps/ readings/crito.pdf>

Stanley Milgram, 'The Perils of Obedience', *Harper's Magazine*, December 1973, 62-77,

<https://archive.harpers.org/1973/12/pdf/HarpersMagazine-1973-12-0021874.pdf?AWSAccessKeyId=AKIAJUM7PFZHQ4PMJ4LA&Expires=1596052503&Signature=Ok3kIDNNVhKAxg7eB%2F3OJkerilw%3D>

Rutger Bregman, *Humankind*, New York: Little, Brown, 2020, Chapter 8: 'Stanley Milgram and the Shock Machine', 159-178.

A. John Simmons, 'Political Obligation and Authority', in Robert L. Simon (ed.), *The Blackwell Guide to Social and Political Philosophy*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2002, 17-37.

Charles Mills, *The Racial Contract*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014, Introduction, Overview, and Notes, 1-40.

September 29: Political Authority II

John Rawls, 'Legal Obligation and the Duty of Fair Play', in John Rawls, *Collected Papers*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999, 117-129.

Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1974, 90-95.

Martin Luther King, 'Letter from a Birmingham Jail', April 1963.

John Rawls, 'The Justification of Civil Disobedience', in John Rawls, *Collected Papers*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999, 176-189.

October 6: Property

John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, 1689, Chapter 5,
https://www.gutenberg.org/files/7370/7370-h/7370-h.htm#CHAPTER_V

Karl Marx, *Capital*, Volume 1, excerpt on ‘primitive accumulation’, 1867.

David Schmidtz, ‘The Institution of Property’, 1994.

October 13: The Market

Adam Smith, ‘Of the Division of Labour’, from *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, 1776, Book I, Chapter I-III, excerpt.

Adam Smith, ‘Of the Expences of the Sovereign or Commonwealth’, from *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, 1776, Book V, Chapter I, Parts I, II, and III (Articles 1 and 2), and Conclusion, excerpt.

Friedrich Hayek, ‘The Use of Knowledge in Society’, *American Economic Review* 35 (4), 1945, 519-530.

Karl Marx, *Capital*, Volume 1, 1867, excerpt on appearance and reality.

Wolff, Jonathan, *Ethics and Public Policy*, second edition, 2020, Chapter 9: ‘The free market’, 176-193.

October 20: Distributive Justice I

Friedrich Hayek, ‘The Atavism of Social Justice’, 1976.

David Hume, ‘Justice as Convention’, excerpt from *Treatise of Human Nature*, 1739.

John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, 1971, sections 3, 4, 5, 6, 11, 24, 26.

October 27: Distributive Justice II

G. A. Cohen, *If You’re an Egalitarian, How Come You’re So Rich?*, Chapters 8-10 (on Rawls).

Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, 1974, chapter 7.

G. A. Cohen, ‘Robert Nozick and Wilt Chamberlain: How Patterns Preserve Liberty’, 1977.

November 3: Reading Week: No Class Today

November 10: Equality

Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), Introduction and Chapter 2: The prevailing opinion of a sexual character discussed, <https://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/wollstonecraft-a-vindication-of-the-rights-of-woman>

Harry Frankfurt, 'Equality as a Moral Ideal', *Ethics* 98 (1), 1987, 21-43.

Elizabeth Anderson, 'What is the Point of Equality?', *Ethics* 109, 1999, 287-337.

Jonathan Wolff, 'Equality', in George Klosko (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Political Philosophy*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011, 611-623.

November 17: Liberty I

John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*, 1859, excerpt.

Isaiah Berlin, 'Two Concepts of Liberty', 1958.

Gerald C. MacCallum, Jr., 'Negative and Positive Freedom', *The Philosophical Review* Volume 76, Number 3, July 1967, pp. 312-334.

November 24: Liberty II

Philip Pettit, 'Republican Political Theory', 1997.

Richard Thaler and Cass Sunstein, 'Libertarian Paternalism Is Not an Oxymoron', 2003.

Sarah Conly, *Against Autonomy: Justifying Coercive Paternalism*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012, Introduction and Chapter 1, 1-46.

December 1: Democracy I

Plato, *Republic*, excerpt.

Thomas Christiano, 'Democracy', in Catriona McKinnon et al. (eds.), *Issues in Political Theory*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, fourth edition, 2019, 70-90.

Amy Gutmann and Dennis Thompson, 'Moral Disagreement in a Democracy', 1995.

December 8: Democracy II

Elizabeth Anderson, *Private Government: How Employers Rule Our Lives (and Why We Don't Talk about it)*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017, available at Weldon library website.

Monday December 14: Long Essay to be submitted electronically between 10 am and noon.

Further Reading by Topic

Political Authority

Dagger, Richard, and David Lefkowitz, 'Political Obligation', *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2014.

Hardin, Russell, 'Rationally Justifying Political Coercion', *Journal of Philosophical Research* 15, 1989, 79-92.

Horton, John, *Political Obligation*, second edition, 2010.

Huemer, Michael, *The Problem of Political Authority*.

Klosko, George, *Political Obligations*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.

Simmons, A. John, *Moral Principles and Political Obligations*, Princeton, 1979.

Simmons, A. John, *Political Philosophy*, OUP, 2008, Chapter 3: Obligations.

Thoreau, Henry David, 'An Essay on Civil Disobedience'.

Property

Becker, Lawrence C., *Property Rights*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977.

Gaus, Gerald, 'Property', in David Estlund (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Political Philosophy*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012.

Waldron, Jeremy, *The Right to Private Property*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988.

Waldron, Jeremy, 'Property and Ownership', *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2004.

The Market

Anomaly, Jonathan, in Jonathan Anomaly et al. (eds.), *Philosophy, Politics, and Economics*.

Buchanan, A. E., 1985, *Ethics, Efficiency, and the Market*, Towota, NJ: Rowman & Allanheld.

Heath, Joseph, *Filthy Lucre*.

Herzog, Lisa, 'Markets', *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2017.

Seabright, Paul, *The Company of Strangers: A Natural History of Economic Life*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, second edition, 2010.

Distributive Justice

Arneson, Richard, 'Justice After Rawls', in John Dryzek et al. (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Political Theory*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006, 45-64.

Cohen, G.A., 'Why Not Socialism?', in Zwolinski (ed.)

Fleurbaey, Marc, 'Economics and Economic Justice', *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2016.

Freeman, Samuel, 'G.A. Cohen's Critique of Rawls's Difference Principle', *The Harvard Review of Philosophy* 19, 2013, 23-45.

Lamont, Julian, and Christi Favor, 'Distributive Justice', *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2017.

Miller, Christian B., 'Distributive Justice and Empirical Moral Psychology', *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2015.

Miller, David, 'Justice', *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2017.

Olsaretti, Serena (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Distributive Justice*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018.

Simmons, A. John, *Political Philosophy*, OUP, 2008, Chapter 4: Justice.

Van Parijs, Philippe, on universal basic income, in Zwolinski (ed.)

Equality

Anderson, Elizabeth, 'Equality', in David Estlund (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Political Philosophy*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012.

Miller, David, *Principles of Social Justice*, chapter 4: Distributive Justice: What the People Think, and chapter 11: Equality and Justice.

Scheffler, Samuel, 'What is Egalitarianism', *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 31 (2003).

Sen, Amartya, 'Gender Inequality and Theories of Justice', in Martha Nussbaum and Jonathan Glover (eds.), *The Quality of Life*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995.

White, Stuart, *Equality*, Cambridge: Polity, 2007.

Liberty

Conly, Sarah, *Against Autonomy: Justifying Coercive Paternalism*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012.

Constant, Benjamin, 'The Liberty of the Ancients and the Liberty of the Moderns',

Dworkin, Gerald, 'Paternalism', in Jonathan Anomaly et al. (eds.), *Philosophy, Politics, and Economics*, 526-536.

Dworkin, Gerald, 'Paternalism', in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2017.

Green, T. H.,

Mill, John Stuart, *On Liberty*.

Skinner, Quentin, 'The Republican Ideal of Political Liberty', in Rosen and Wolff (eds.), 161-171.

Thaler, Richard, and Cass Sunstein, *Nudge*.

Democracy

Cunningham, Frank, *Theories of Democracy: A Critical Introduction*, London: Routledge, 2002.

Dahl, Robert, *On Democracy*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998.

Fishkin, James, 'Deliberative Democracy', in Robert L. Simon (ed.), *The Blackwell Guide to Social and Political Philosophy*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2002.

Shapiro, Ian, *The State of Democratic Theory*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003.

Simmons, A. John, *Political Philosophy*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008, Chapter 5: Democracy.