

Politics 9503A: Distributive Justice

September-December 2015

Monday 10:30-12:30, SSC 4112

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Office Hours: Tues 3:00-4:00, Thursday 3:00-4:00 & by appointment

This course examines several key texts in the debate on distributive justice (the question of giving people what is due to them). We begin with John Rawls's 'justice as fairness', a restatement of the theory that, in its original incarnation, helped to revive the discussion about justice in the early nineteen-seventies. Next we consider Robert Nozick's libertarian theory, in particular his so-called 'entitlement conception' of justice in holdings. Finally, we study Jonathan Wolff and Avner de-Shalit's *Disadvantage*, a recent attempt to determine what it is to be disadvantaged and which policies might help to improve the position of the least advantaged.

During the term I will provide sets of questions on each week's readings and specific advice for the *Critical Notice* and the *Essay*.

Three Main Readings

John Rawls, *Justice as Fairness: A Restatement*, Cambridge: Belknap, 2001.

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

Jonathan Wolff and Avner de-Shalit, *Disadvantage*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.

How Your Final Mark is Determined

30%: Participation

20%: 2,000 word (5-6 page) *Critical Notice* of Rawls, *Justice as Fairness* (Due Monday October 19th at start of class)

50%: 4,000-4,500 word (12-15 page) *Essay* on justice in Nozick or Wolff & de-Shalit (Due Wednesday December 9, to be handed in to me in my office, SSC 4129, 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 hand in at each class a weekly response to the readings. [*Note: you may miss two weeks' written responses without penalty; each further missed response will result in a two-mark deduction from the participation grade.] This is to be one page, single-spaced, and should succinctly state what you take to be the main point and argument of each reading, and then state what issue or issues the readings pose for discussion. It 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.

Critical Notice on Rawls's Justice as Fairness: 20%

This *Critical Notice* should be 2,000 words (roughly 5-6 pages, double-spaced). See my document, 'How to write a *Critical Notice*'.

Essay: 50%

The *Essay* on justice in Nozick or Wolff & de-Shalit (due Wednesday December 9, to be handed in to me in my office, SSC 4129, between 10 am and noon) is worth 50% of your course grade. The essay should draw on our required reading plus additional readings as appropriate. Additional readings are suggested below. 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. See my document, 'How to write an Essay'.

Weekly Meetings

At each meeting, I will begin by offering some background to a few of the issues covered in the day's assigned reading. 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 reading, focusing on its content, plausibility, and implications. Students are encouraged to contribute their own questions and comments.

Note: There will not be a class on September 14: I will be attending a conference out of town, so we have no introductory meeting. Instead, read my 'Introduction and Overview'. You are not required to write a response to the reading for the September 21 meeting.

September 21: Rawls, Parts I & II

September 28: Rawls, Part III

October 5: Rawls, Parts IV & V

October 12: Thanksgiving: No Class Today

October 19: Nozick, Chapters 1-3 (Note: *Critical Notice* of Rawls is due today.)

October 26: Nozick, Chapters 4-6

November 2: Nozick, Chapter 7

November 9: Nozick, Chapter 8

November 16: Nozick, Chapters 9 & 10

November 23: Wolff and de-Shalit, Introduction and Chapters 1 & 2

November 30: Wolff and de-Shalit, Chapters 3-7

December 7: Wolff and de-Shalit, Chapters 8-10

Additional Readings

Rawls

Norman Daniels (ed.), *Reading Rawls*

Samuel Freeman, *Rawls*.

Samuel Freeman (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Rawls*, 2003.

Robert B. Talisse, *On Rawls*, 2001.

Nozick

Ralf Bader and John Meadowcroft (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Nozick's Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, 2014.

G.A. Cohen, 'Robert Nozick and Wilt Chamberlain: How Liberty Preserves Patterns', *Erkenntnis* 11 (1977), 5-23. (Reprinted in *Self-Ownership, Freedom, and Equality*.)

Mark D. Friedman, *Nozick's Libertarian Project: An Elaboration and Defense*, 2011.

Jeffrey Paul (ed.) *Reading Nozick: Essays on Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, 1982.

Jonathan Wolff, *Robert Nozick*, 1991.

Wolff and de-Shalit

Arneson, Richard J., 'Disadvantage, Capability, Commensurability, and Policy', *Politics, Philosophy & Economics* 9(3), 2010, 339-357.

Shrader-Frechette, Kristin, review of *Disadvantage*, *Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews*, 2008, <https://ndpr.nd.edu/news/23341-disadvantage/>

Preiss, Joshua Broady, 'Disadvantage and an American society of equals', *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy* 14 (1), January 2011, 41-58.

Wolff, Jonathan, and Avner de-Shalit, 'On Fertile Functionings: A Response to Martha Nussbaum', *Journal of Human Development and Capabilities* 14, 2013, 161-165.