

Politics 4413G/9729B: Intergenerational Justice
Thursdays 2:30-4 via Zoom

Instructor: E. Finneron-Burns (efinnero@uwo.ca)

Office Hours: By appointment

Course Outline

This course examines what our obligations to past and future people are. We have a huge influence over several matters including who will be born, how many people will be born, and what kinds of lives they will lead (including the environment and climate change). This leads to a number of normative questions including how good a life we ought to leave future people, whether future people have rights, how many future people there should be, and what we ought to do about historic injustices.

The emphasis throughout the course will be on critical review of the arguments provided in the readings and by your fellow students. Each week the two readings will provide differing views on the same question. Your job is to reflect on and evaluate the persuasiveness of the arguments in each. In each seminar we will discuss the merits and demerits of each article as well as comment on the topic at large. Your essays and exam will require you to be able to argue persuasively, taking due consideration of others' arguments.

Readings

Readings are posted on OWL.

Assessment

Reading Analysis (15%)– due **February 25, 2021**

Essay Proposal (5%) – due **March 25, 2021**

Research Essay (55%) – due **April 8, 2021**

Participation (25%) – ongoing

Reading Analysis

A short piece, of approximately 1000 words, analysing one of the readings assigned so far. In it, you should set out clearly what the author is arguing in their piece, but the focus should be on *assessing it*. You should reflect on what you find the strengths and weaknesses of the piece to be. In other words – do you find the piece convincing, and why/why not?

Research Essay:

3000 words (undergraduates) or 5000 words (graduates). You may choose your own essay topic related to one or more of the topics covered in the course. You might choose to answer a particular question or to respond to a particular reading. **You must submit a ½ page essay proposal (worth 5%) to me at least two weeks before the due date.** In your proposal you should state what the research question you plan to address is. You don't need to know what your answer or individual arguments will be at this stage, but you should have narrowed your topic down to a particular question or aim. The essays are **research** projects meaning that you are expected to read beyond the scope of the syllabus.

Response Papers:

You are required to email to me, by 9am on the day of class, a short (no longer than one page) response paper in which you should explain what you thought of each reading and any questions you have about them. The aim of the response papers is to a) ensure that each member of the seminar group has given due consideration to the readings each week in order to improve the quality of our discussions; b) to hone your skills in critical analysis in preparation for the research essay; c) let me know what everyone did not understand in the readings in order to guide our discussion in class.

Participation:

Participation is assessed primarily on the quality of your contributions to class discussions, but you will not do well if you attend only a few classes even if your contributions in those classes are very good. Similarly, if you simply attend every class without contributing, you will find your participation mark disappointing. Participation marks can be earned through critiquing the readings, raising questions or requesting clarification of things you did not understand (there are no stupid questions!), responding to classmates' points, participating in in-class debates or small group discussions, among others. If you are struggling with active participation in class, please see me to discuss strategies on how to improve.

How to Do Well

The emphasis throughout is on the critical evaluation of arguments. How are important political positions supported? In our weekly discussions we will examine the arguments put forward in the readings and consider whether or not they are persuasive. Often the two readings for the week put forward conflicting views, thus inviting us to make decisions about which has the better argument. (It is taken for granted that we may not all reach the same conclusion.)

Late Submission of Work

Late essays will incur a penalty of 5% per day. In extenuating circumstances, extensions may be granted, but only if arranged in advance of the due date. If such circumstances arise, please contact Academic Counselling as soon as is practically possible. Please note that computer problems do not constitute extenuating circumstances—you are strongly advised to back up your work.

Email Etiquette

I will do my best to respond to emails received Monday-Friday 9am-5pm within 24 hours. Occasionally there will be delays in replies but if you do not hear back from me within 48 hours (Monday-Friday), please do resend your email as it might have been missed (professors receive a lot of emails!). Note that I rarely work on evenings, weekends, or holidays, so emails sent at those times will take longer to receive a reply. Before you fire off an email at 2am, check and double check this syllabus to see if your question is answered here.

Schedule

January 14 – *Introduction to the course*

January 21 – *The Non-Identity Problem*

Derek Parfit, *Reasons & Persons*, ch. 16

Woodward, James, “The Non-Identity Problem”

January 28 – Do future people have rights?

Gosseries, Axel (2008), “On Future Generations’ Future Rights” *Journal of Political Philosophy* 16(4).

Beckerman, Wilfrid and Joanna Pasek (2001), *Justice, Posterity, and the Environment*, ch. 2

February 4 – How much should we save for future people?

John Rawls (1971), *A Theory of Justice*, pp. 284-93

Page, Ed (2007), “Justice Between Generations: Investigating a Sufficiency Approach” *Journal of Global Ethics* 3(1).

Caney, Simon (2018) “Justice and Future Generations” *Annual Review of Political Science*, sections 3 & 4.

February 11 – Would it be wrong to let humanity go extinct?

Finneron-Burns, Elizabeth, “What’s Wrong with Human Extinction?” *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*

Kaczmarek, Patrick and Simon Beard, “Human Extinction and Our Obligations to the Past” *Utilitas* 2

Supplementary:

Benatar, David, *Better Never to have Been*, ch. 6.

February 25 - Is it Wrong to Have Children?

Rivka Weinberg, *The Risk of a Lifetime*, ch. 3 & 4

March 4 – Human Enhancement

Julian Savulescu (2001), “Procreative Beneficence: why we should select the best children” *Bioethics* 15(5-6).

Inmaculada de Melo-Martin (2004) “On Our Obligation to Select the Best Children: A Reply to Savulescu” *Bioethics* 18(1).

March 11 – Conferring Advantage on One’s Own Children

Harry Brighouse and Adam Swift (2014), *Family Values*, ch. 5

Tom Douglas (2015) “Parental Partiality and the Intergenerational Transmission of Advantage” *Philosophical Studies* 172(10).

March 18– *Reparations I – Benefiting from past injustice*

Daniel Butt (2014), “A Doctrine Quite New and Altogether Untenable: Defending the Beneficiary Pays Principle,” *Journal of Applied Philosophy* 31.

Richard Vernon (2006), *Justice Back and Forth*, ch. 3.

March 25 – *Reparations II – Correcting past injustice*

Jeremy Waldron, “Superseding Historical Injustice,” *Ethics* 103 (1992), 4-28.

Ton van den Beld (2002), “Can Collective Responsibility for Perpetrated Evil Persist Over Generations?” *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 5.

April 1 – *Non-monetary corrections for injustice*

Chong-Ming Lim (2020), “Vandalizing Tainted Commemorations” *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 48(2)

Richard Vernon (2012), *Historical Redress*, pp. 80-87.

Dyzenhaus, David (2000), “Justifying the Truth and Reconciliation Commission”, *Journal of Political Philosophy* 8(4).