

Politics 4413F/9729B

Special Topics: Intergenerational Justice

Thursdays 2:30-4

SSC - 7210

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

Office Hours: Thursdays 10-11am in SSC 7211

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 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 will require you to be able to argue persuasively, taking due consideration of others' arguments.

Assessment

Presentation & Critical Analysis Paper (30%)

Term Paper (60%) – due **April 6 at 2:30pm**. Optional: Submit by March 16 for feedback and the opportunity to resubmit.

Participation (10%) – ongoing

Research Essay:

2500 words (undergraduates) or 3500 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. The essays are **research** projects meaning that you are expected to read and cite sources beyond the scope of the syllabus. Sources should primarily be *academic*. This means they are books or journal articles written in a scholarly manner. They do not include blogs, websites, or newspaper articles. You may, of course, cite these latter kind of sources, but the bulk of your cited sources should be academic.

Presentation & Critical Analysis Paper:

Each week one or two students will present the week's readings. If you are on your own, you should present on one reading. If you are in a group of two, each person should present on a different paper. You should spend a short time setting out the authors' main points, but the bulk of the presentation should be on analysis. That is, what arguments did you find persuasive, and what did you find non-persuasive? Were there any holes in the authors' reasoning? Try to keep the focus on the authors' *reasoning/arguments* ("I found their argument that x unpersuasive because they overlooked this possibility"), not on their style (e.g., "they write clearly, they use lots of examples, they use outdated language"). You will then lead the seminar discussion (with my help). **The week you present, you should also prepare an approximately 1000 word page paper outlining your critique of the reading in question. This needs to be submitted no later than the next class.** [Here](#) is an example of how to do this type of writing (although the example piece is longer than our assignment). There are also other examples of critical responses on that site.

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

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 and Readings

January 12 – *Introduction to the Course*

January 19 – *The Non-Identity Problem*

Derek Parfit, [Reasons & Persons](#), ch. 16 (read this first)

Woodward, James, "The Non-Identity Problem"

Supplemental:

Jeffrey Reiman "Being Fair to Future People: The Non-Identity Problem in the Original Position"

January 26 – *How much should we save for future people?*

[John Rawls \(1971\), *A Theory of Justice*, section 44](#)

[Caney, Simon \(2018\) "Justice and Future Generations" *Annual Review of Political Science*, sections 3 & 4.](#)

Supplemental:

[Page, Ed \(2007\), "Justice Between Generations: Investigating a Sufficierian Approach" *Journal of Global Ethics* 3\(1\).](#)

February 2 – *Would it be wrong to let humanity go extinct?*

[Finneron-Burns, Elizabeth, "What's Wrong with Human Extinction?" *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*](#)

[Johann Frick "On the Survival of Humanity" *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*](#)

February 9 - *Is it (Ever? Sometimes?) Wrong to Have Children?*

[Rivka Weinberg, *The Risk of a Lifetime*, ch. 3 & 4](#)

[Benatar, David, *Better Never to have Been*, ch. 6.](#)

February 16 – *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\(1\).](#)

February 23 – READING WEEK

March 2 – *Justice between age groups*

[Juliana Bidadanure \(2021\) "Justice Between Coexisting Generations" *Oxford Handbook of Intergenerational Ethics*](#)

[Paul Bou-Habib \(2011\) "Distributive Justice, Dignity, and the Lifetime View" *Social Theory and Practice*.](#)

March 9 – *Can historic injustice be superseded?*

[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.](#)

March 16 – *What to do about tainted commemorations*

[Chong-Ming Lim \(2020\), "Vandalizing Tainted Commemorations" *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 48\(2\)](#)

[Joanna Burch-Brown \(2020\) "Should Slavery's Statues be Preserved? On Transitional Justice and Contested Heritage" *Journal of Applied Philosophy*](#)

March 23 – *Duties to the Dead?*

[Kaczmarek, Patrick and Simon Beard, "Human Extinction and Our Obligations to the Past" *Utilitas* 2](#)

[Geoffrey Scarre \(2021\) "Do we have moral duties to past people?" *Oxford Handbook of Intergenerational Ethics*](#)

Supplemental:

[Elizabeth Finneron-Burns \(2022\) "Human Extinction and Moral Worthwhileness" *Utilitas* \(a response to Kaczmarek and Beard\)](#)

March 30 – Essay Conference

You will divide into two groups. Each student will present their essay topic, thesis, and argument structure for constructive peer comments.

April 6 – No Class