PHIL 537 Political Philosophy

Seminars: Mondays 2pm – 4:30pm
Room: MHP 102

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Office Hours: Wednesdays 1pm – 3pm or by email appointment
Office: 229 Stonier Hall

Overview

This seminar will focus on the topic of justice, in particular distributive justice. Here are some of the questions we will tackle:

- What is the main site of distributive justice, that is, who or what are the relevant objects to which principles of justice apply?
- What are the grounds of distributive justice? Is justice primarily concerned with one value, such as equality, or is it comprised of a plurality of conflicting considerations?
- What is the scope of principles of distributive justice? Are they global in scope, or limited to those with whom we stand in particular relationships?
- What is the correct principle of distributive justice? Equality, priority to the worst off, sufficiency, or something else?
- What is the currency of distributive justice, that is, what gets distributed by the principles of distributive justice? Welfare, resources, capabilities?
- What role, if any, should judgments about individual responsibility play in a theory of justice?

To help us address these questions we will read works by philosophers such as: Elizabeth Anderson, G.A. Cohen, Ronald Dworkin, Thomas Nagel, Robert Nozick, Derek Parfit, Michael Otsuka, Samuel Scheffler, Hillel Steiner, and John Rawls. No background in political philosophy is presupposed.

Expectations and Requirements

Each week there will be two or three papers that are listed as required reading. Everyone will be expected to have read this material prior to class, and be prepared to
discuss this material. I also provide a brief list of further readings for each week, but there is no expectation that anyone will have read this material.

Those taking the course for credit will be evaluated as follows:

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<tr>
<th>Assessment</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tr>
<td>Essay (5,000 words)</td>
<td>70%</td>
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<td>Seminar presentation</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<td>Seminar participation</td>
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**Topics and Readings** (note the schedule below is provisional and subject to revision)

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Topic</th>
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<tr>
<td>1 (8/26)</td>
<td>Introduction (no reading)</td>
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<td>2 (9/2)</td>
<td>Labor Day (no class)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Part I</strong></td>
<td><strong>The Role and Site of Distributive Justice</strong></td>
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<td>Nozick, <em>Anarchy, State, and Utopia</em>, pp. 183-204</td>
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<td>Barry, <em>Theories of Justice</em>, pp. 241-254</td>
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<td>Buchanan, “Justice as Reciprocity versus Subject-Centered Justice,” <em>Philosophy &amp; Public Affairs</em> (1990)</td>
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<td>4 (9/16)</td>
<td>The Basic Structure as Subject</td>
<td>Rawls, <em>Political Liberalism</em>, lecture VII</td>
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<td>Nagel, <em>Equality and Partiality</em>, chapters 6 and 9</td>
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<td>Nozick, <em>Anarchy, State, and Utopia</em>, pp. 205-213</td>
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<td>Porter, “The Division of Moral Labor and the Basic</td>
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Week 5 (9/23)  Facts, Principles, and Rules of Regulation

Required:  Cohen, *Rescuing Justice and Equality*, chapters 6-7

Further:  Miller, “Political Philosophy for Earthlings,” *Political Theory: Methods and Approaches*

Freeman, “Constructivism, Facts, and Moral Justification,” in *Contemporary Debates in Political Philosophy*


**Part II  Principles of Distributive Justice**

Week 6 (9/30)  Priority

Required:  Parfit, “Equality or Priority?” in *The Ideal of Equality*


Williams, “The Priority View Bites the Dust?” *Utilitas* (2012)


Temkin, “Equality, Priority, and the Levelling Down Objection,” *The Ideal of Equality*


Week 7 (10/07)  Sufficiency


Raz, *The Morality of Freedom*, chapter 9

Week 8 (10/14) Equality

Required: Nagel, “Equality,” in *Mortal Questions*

Scanlon, “The Diversity of Objections to Inequality,” in *The Difficulty of Tolerance*
Williams, “The Idea of Equality,” in *Problems of the Self*

**Part III**

**The Currency of Distributive Justice**

Week 9 (10/21) Equality of Welfare


Cohen, “Expensive Taste Rides Again,” in *Dworkin and his Critics*
Dworkin, *Sovereign Virtue*, chapter 7
Week 10 (10/28)  Equality of Resources

Required:  
*Philosophy & Public Affairs* (1981)


Further:  
Olson, “Equality and Responsibility” (unpublished)


Week 11 (11/04)  Democratic Equality

Required:  


Further:  
Stemplowska, “Responsibility and Respect: Reconciling Two Egalitarian Visions” in *Responsibility and Distributive Justice*


Part IV  Freedom, Equality, and Efficiency

Week 12 (11/11)  Self-Ownership and Equality

Required:  
Cohen, *Self-Ownership, Freedom, and Equality*, chapters 3-4

Vallentyne, Steiner, and Otsuka, “Why Left-Libertarianism is Not Incoherent, Indeterminate, or Irrelevant,”  
*Philosophy & Public Affairs* (2005)

Further:  


Week 13 (11/18)  A Trilemma

Required:  Cohen, Rescuing Justice and Equality, chapter 5


Quong, “Justice Beyond Equality,” Social Theory and Practice (2010)

Part V  The Scope of Distributive Justice

Week 14 (11/25)  Cosmopolitanism

Required:  C. Beitz, Political Theory and International Relations, part III

S. Caney, Justice Beyond Borders: A Global Political Theory, chapter 4


T. Pogge, Realizing Rawls, part III

A. Sangiovanni, “Global justice and the moral arbitrariness of birth” The Monist (2011)
Week 15 (12/02)  Coercion and Authorship

Required:


Further:


