Foundations of Political Philosophy

Course Catalog Description

This course surveys the main thinkers and themes of political philosophy. Students will concentrate on a particular theme to organize their readings in a given year. Possible themes include power, history, liberty, equality, identity, and justice. Students will critically assess their own opinions in the light of the theories examined in the course, and address issues of contemporary importance in theoretical context where appropriate.

Course Overview: Global Justice

This course surveys the main thinkers and themes of political philosophy from the perspective of global justice. Our main concern is to think about the connection (and tension) between equality and liberty. Students will survey important topics in global justice, including property rights, animal rights, free speech rights and insults, social movements and racial equality, income distribution and wealth disparities, religious liberty, equality in the household, workplace democracy, global paternalism and intervention in local conflicts, the "right to the city," decolonizing development, and the multicultural politics of recognition. Students will critically assess their own opinions in the light of the theories examined in the course. Throughout the course, students will also be invited to address issues of contemporary regional and global importance through presentations, class discussion, and writing responses.

Course Outcomes

By the end of the course, students will be able to:

- Identify and evaluate political philosophy's continuing contribution to the discipline of political science.
- Analyze and apply concepts and theories from global justice in the context of the student's own subfield.
- Compose a final seminar paper that analyzes, synthesizes, and evaluates theories relevant to the student's chosen topic.
- Identify the need for generative AI in student work, and evaluate its uses.

Review Sandel, *Justice: What's the Right Thing to Do*, pp. 22-33 (posted to Canvas) to assess three possible approaches to justice.

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Theory:

Utilitarianism (Greatest Happiness Principle, Felicific Calculus) in theory (Sandel, Chapter 2, 9-47) for Bentham and Mill; Philippa Foot's Trolley Problem and JJ Thomson's variant.

Literature question: What limits, if any, are there on the decision to serve the "greatest happiness of the greatest number," especially when it comes to quantifying social utility in terms of individual pleasures and pains, and are inviolable individual rights one of those limits? (Your answer can focus on Bentham and take into account any interesting modifications offered by Mill.)

Presentation:

1. Effective altruism: Peter Singer, "What is Effective Altruism?" in *The Most Good You Can Do;* Iason Gabriel, "Effective Altruism and its Critics"; and presenter's choice of materials on philanthropic giving and duties to under-resourced communities (please cite and provide any links to further readings, if necessary)
2. Animals: Tom Regan, "Utilitarianism, Vegetarianism, and Animal Rights," *Philosophy & Public Affairs*, and presenter's choice of materials on the ethics of killing and eating animals (please link to additional readings, if any)
3. Utilitarianism and surveillance: Is the "panopticon" a just, efficient, and humane way of punishing law-breakers, and is it consistent with the premises of utilitarianism? Read Bentham, *Panoptical Letters*, and choose practical examples/applications to illustrate your interpretation.
5. Policing. Read an article (e.g., Quinn, "Bentham on Preventive Policing") and try to understand whether and how Bentham's support for preventive policing explains aggressive ICE policing in Minneapolis.
6. Bentham on colonialism: Does Bentham make a coherent argument against colonialism in "Emancipate Your Colonies!" and is anything missing from the utilitarian criticism of colonialism? (If needed, you can consult the edited volume, *Utilitarianism and Empire*, for helpful articles by Jennifer Pitts and other scholars.)
7. Climate justice: What climate policy should a utilitarian choose? Read this article and explain its approach (and alternatives) to the class.
8. Covid ventilator-rationing, and/or insurance companies' cost-benefit analysis in the provision of medical services. Read Savulescu, Persson, and Wilkinson, "Utilitarianism and the Pandemic, Download Utilitarianism and the Pandemic," *Bioethics*, and tell us about the utilitarian approach to the pandemic.

Lockean Liberalism and Modern Libertarianism Theory:

Locke and property rights in theory (Locke, *Second Treatise*, Chapter 1-5);

Libertarianism in theory (Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, excerpt)

Literature question: How would a libertarian answer the question of whether governments should interfere in social issues by offering reparations for past historical justice, or taking property from private property owners for the sake of development, and other examples of "interference" with individual liberty? (Your answer should refer

to Locke and Nozick, and briefly indicate how you see the agreement/disagreement between both authors on the literature question.)

Presentation:

1. Would a libertarian favor affirmative action policies? Evaluate the argument in Valls, "The Libertarian Case for Affirmative Action."
2. Historical injustices and libertarian reparations: Should libertarians favor reparations to remedy historical injustices? (e.g., read Jason Lee Byas, "Rectification and Historic Injustice" or Reiff, "The Libertarian argument for Reparations").
3. Paternalism and the politics and policy of "nudges" (e.g., Rebonato, "A Critical Assessment of Libertarian Paternalism," *Journal of Consumer Policy*). Should liberals and libertarians accept that governments can nudge consumers and other citizens towards useful choices and policy outcomes?
4. Locke and post-war rebuilding. How does a Lockean approach to rebuilding after war compare to other approaches? E.g., Pablo Kalmanovitz, "Sharing Burdens After War: A Lockean Approach")

Kantian Autonomy and Neo-Kantianism Theory:

Kant, Freedom as autonomy (Sandel, Chapter 6, 157-198)

Literature Question: Should our politics be informed by the view that there are absolute moral commands that are binding on humans (one can never murder, and all murderers should be executed by the state; we should never lie), or should we consider context, history, prudence – or abstract utility - in making law and policy?

Presentation:

1. Absolute moral commands in politics: Immanuel Kant, "On the Supposed Right to Lie"; and presenter's choice of materials on duties of honesty, sincerity, etc. (e.g., Benjamin Constant versus Kant on the "right to lie" for prudential reasons, and a case study of the student's choice, such as lying about receiving military decorations or out of political necessity).
2. Personhood and Kant: Read "Are You a Legal Person or a Legal Thing?" The Nonhuman Rights Project and Wesley Smith, "Habeas Chimpanzee," and evaluate the debate over the moral and legal personality of animals (and whether they can be confined in zoos or kept as pets).
3. Absolute commands in punishment: Is Kant correct and consistent to write that all murderers must be executed by the state for their crime? Read the short excerpt from Kant, *Metaphysics of Morals*, on punishment and Potter, "The Principle of Punishment is a Categorical Imperative," and evaluate Potter's interpretation of Kant on the death penalty. Is it Kantian enough, in your view?
4. Personhood and AI: Are generative AIs "human" or "rational" and thus a bearer of rights that deserve respect in global justice? Is AGI (artificial general intelligence)

deserving of rights? Here, students can choose a scholarly resource that captures the state of the debate, focusing on generative AI.

Communitarianism
Theory:
Justice, Community, and Membership in theory (Sandel, Chapter 12, 315-342); recommended, Michael Sandel, "The Procedural Republic"
Literature Question: Is a human being primarily determined as a political actor by joint identities (race, gender, group, shared history), and, if so, does that compromise the universality of claims about individual rights and global justice?

Presentation:
1. Should "all" lives matter? Would the communitarian say that all lives matter, or that

Black lives matter? Presenter's choice of materials (e.g., Yancy and Butler, "What's Wrong with 'All Lives Matter'?" for a short overview) plus the presenter's choice of a scholarly article to provide further depth to the debate.
2. Do countries of the Gulf/Arab world owe Gazans a duty of support, whether in support of peace or in the form of funds to rebuild Gaza? Or does the burden lie on other countries? (E.g., read https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/gaza-post-warhousing-reconstruction-cost-least-15-bln-fund-2024-01-17/ and add a scholarly article providing arguments for or against the communitarian duties of the Arab world or MENA countries in rebuilding Gaza and other post-conflict areas.
3. Is there such a thing as communitarian anarchism? Read the introduction of *The Impossible Community: Realizing Communitarian Anarchism* by John P. Clark and identify and evaluate its communitarian anarchism (e.g., by focusing on rebuilding postdisaster communities through communitarian voluntary contribution).
4. Is there such a thing as "communitarian capitalism"? Read an article on Japan or other examples of this hybrid conceptualization and evaluate the attempt to combine communitarian political theory and the logic of the market.

Liberalism and Speech (Domestic theory) Theory:
Mill, *On Liberty*, Chapter 1 and 2; Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*
Literature Question: The question for the Mill reading: How absolute should rights to speech and expression be? How much should intention, context, and the opinions of others matter when deciding on a speaker's right to offend? The question for the Rawls reading: Is there a basic, just structure of any society that any reasonable person should want to live under? (You may choose either question.)

Presentation:
1. The Danish Cartoons and Islam (using Mill, *On Liberty*, Chapter 2): Jytte Klausen, "Introduction," *The Cartoons that Shook the World*; Ziad Majed, Farouk

Mardam Bey, and Yassin al-Haj Saleh, "On the crisis of Islam: In defense of discussion," AbdulWahab Kayyali, "On the crisis of Islam: Muslims and the question of equality" (both in *Al-Jumhuriya*); *or* essays on the cartoons from *Is Critique Secular? Blasphemy, Injury, and Free Speech.*

2. Universities and free speech (using Mill, *On Liberty*, Chapter 2): Identify the limits on freedom of speech in universities and evaluate these limitations on liberal grounds.

Liberal Internationalism

Theory:

Rawls, *The Law of Peoples*, 3-34, 59-88

Literature Question: Does a government or community or group have the right to intervene in another nation's affairs for the benefit of the nation that is interfered with?

Presentation:

1. How egalitarian and cosmopolitan should liberal internationalism be? Evaluate Charles Beitz's argument versus Rawls's response in *The Law of Peoples*, 115-120.
2. Decent societies and outlaw states: Evaluate Brown's support of the usefulness of Rawls's categories for IR theory and choose a contemporary example of a well-ordered state and an "outlaw" state, indicating whether your account of global justice categorizes states as Rawls does. (For example, scholars have debated whether Israel is an "outlaw" state, and you could evaluate their argument.)
3. R2P: Is there a responsibility to protect at-risk civilian populations? Evaluate the argument of Michael Doyle, a key theorist of R2P (and someone who has written a book on JS Mill's anticipation of R2P) on Rawls.

Liberty, Community, Utility, and Just War Theory:

Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars*, 138-159, 251-268, 323-326

Literature Question: Is it ever appropriate to kill civilians in times of war, and what exceptions to the rule, if any, are givn by instances of "supreme emergency"?

Presentation:

1. Read GEM Anscombe (Catholic) and evaluate her argument (versus Walzer's) in light of responsibility for the area bombings of German cities and the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki
2. Communitarian IR theory? Read Toni Erskine (e.g, "Distinguishing State from Community: Michael Walzer's Communitarian 'View from the Cave'" or "Embedded Cosmopolitanism and the Case of War: Restraint, Discrimination and Overlapping Communities") and consider whether we should read Walzer's approach to IR as a communitarian one.
3. Read Walzer (who identifies as a liberal Zionist) on Israel and on just war – is it just for communitarians to accept the killing of civilians, based on these writings and

his canonical work *Just and Unjust Wars*, or is there an internal tension in Walzer's position? What is a communitarian reading of the Israel-Palestine conflict?

Feminism Theory:
Nancy Hirschmann, *The Subject of Liberty*, Preface and Chapter 1; Saba Mahmood, *The Politics of Piety*, Chapter 1
Literature Question: Does gender equality require a different justification than liberalism, or is feminism best understood by thinkers of global justice as a form of liberalism?

Presentation:
1. Critical political thought and the family: Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, short excerpt on the family; Axel Honneth, *The Pathologies of Individual Freedom*, chapter on Hegel and the family (pp. 57-80). Is the "modern," post-Kantian family the answer to communitarian problems of the "Oriental-patriarchal" family, or Eurocentric? 2. Veiling: Veiling is a controversial, hot-button issue in some societies. In others, the hijab controversy has less to do with freeing women from veiling and more to do with lifting restrictions and unfreedoms on hijabi women, e.g., access to North Coast resorts, restaurants, and hotel/resort pools. Presenter's choice of a scholarly article on veiling, or a chapter from Mahmood's *Politics of Piety*, or another reading on the global justice of veiling (or restricting veiled women).
3. Presenter's choice of topics on global justice and global feminism.

Discursive Injustice
Theory: Miranda Fricker on Testimonial, and Hermeneutical Injustice (*Epistemic Injustice*)
Literature Question: Are the most important epistemic injustices associated with identity power, and systemic rather than incidental violations of justice, and are these categories the best way to think about gendered and racialized abuses of social power?

Presentation:
1. Permissions to narrate: Is a denial of a permission to narrate an epistemic injustice, and is this of concern for theorists of global justice? (E.g., Edward Said, in books and essays, argues that this denial of an equal permission to narrate the Palestinian experience is at the heart of the conflict.)
2. Silencing women and minorities: Fricker's essay on hermeneutical injustice gives examples of gendered social power, such as harassment or denial of medical issues such as post-partum depression. Applying this and any other relevant scholarly article to Egypt, does Fricker's approach help to clarify social power in Egypt. Is the remedy to these injustices a sudden conversion to a different way of thinking?
3. Presenter's preference of a global injustice and its connection to Fricker's work.

Liberalism, Communitarianism, and Indigeneity: Nationalism and the Politics of Recognition Theory:
Charles Taylor, *The Politics of Recognition*; Glen Sean Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks*, Introduction and Chapter 1.
Practical text: Excerpt, *The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples* (RCAP) (1996) and list of "shared objectives" (Algonquin Golden Lake First Nation)
Literature Question: For Coulthard, the multicultural politics of recognition has proven to be assimilative rather than inclusive. What should the aim of multicultural politics be: to recognize the valuable identity of distinct peoples for their own sake, or to create a stronger and more unified national community by recognizing local communities? (Your answer should use Taylor as a point of departure, as Coulthard does, but clearly state and evaluate Coulthard's answer to this question.)

Presentation:
1. In the MENA region, and in Egypt in particular, are Nubians, Bedouins and other groups recognized for their distinct identities, or are they assimilated? Read this article on the marginalization of Nubians relocated after the dam and consider the relations between development, communitarianism, and recognition.
2. Can you recognize generative AI as a subject? Should you? Presenter can add a reading updating the following 2018 working paper written by global justice theorist Matthias Risse.
3. Presenter's choice of topics applying questions of redistribution versus recognition (see this text by Nancy Fraser for your theoretical approach) to a preferred context of student interest.

Developmentalism and Urbanism
Theory: Culp, "Global Justice and Development"; "Critical Urbanism"
Literature Question: Is (sustainable) development and urban development typically opposed to the human rights and/or the interests of communities in the Global South? In cases of conflict, which should be prioritized, overall benefit or rights/communities? (The linked reading by Culp engages with development in the roughly neoKantian/liberal egalitarian framework but there is room to suggest additional readings.)

Presentation:
1. Urban development and exclusion: On the subject of large-scale, capital-intensive development (sometimes called Dubai-ization or Dubai-ification), global justice theorists should wonder about who benefits, and how benefit is assessed. The presenter can choose Egypt's new capital (e.g., Rowaq Arabi, "The New Administrative Capital: Authority and the Erosion of Rights in the Egyptian City"), the GERD, Dubai (e.g., Shestawy, "The New Arab City" combined with Julian Bolletter,

who makes an opposed argument, or Saudi Arabia's projects (The Line, The Cube), and interpret them through the lens of the required reading.

2. Urban development and planning and justice: Consider articles on "insurgent planning" and communicative approaches to development, and "human rights cities," when thinking about the global and social justice of urban development.

3. How should theorists of global justice think about development? The presenter should choose an article that brings to life the contrast between roughly liberal approaches and critical approaches to development and assess their relative merits from the standpoint of global justice.

Utility, Dignity, Harm, and Tolerating Same-sex Conduct Theory:

Bentham, *Offenses Against One's Self*; Introductory essay (recommended) by Philip Scofield

Literature Question: In this essay, Bentham makes what is considered to be the first English-language argument for the decriminalization of homosexual conduct. Should same-sex conduct be granted the same rights as opposite-sex conduct? Decriminalized? Criminalized? Which approach is supported by utilitarian arguments, versus other theories of justice (e.g., liberalism, communitarianism)?

Presentation:

1. Neo-Kantian dignity and same-sex marriage: Evaluate the argument made for legalizing same-sex marriage by revisitionist readers of Kant (e.g., Matthew C. Altman, "Kant on Sex and Marriage: The Implications for the Same-Sex Marriage Debate") 2. Communitarian rejections of same-sex marriage: Consider arguments made from the perspective of African communitarianism against the push to legalize same-sex conduct and same-sex marriage (e.g., Husein Inusah & Abdussalam Alhaji Adam, "The Cultural Argument and the Same-Sex Marriage Debate: The Perspective of Moderate African Communitarianism").
3. Aesthetic injustice: Is a lack of representation an aesthetic injustice, and how should this sort of injustice be theorized? Read this short, popular article and this article and assess the approach taken to invisibilizing some groups.
4. International politics and sexual orientation: Presenters interested in law or policy can use one of the theoretical frameworks for global justice to "frame" a legal debate over same-sex marriage, or similar topics.

Required books (for purchase by students):

All required texts for this course will be posted to Blackboard under the appropriate week. It is recommended that students purchase the handy reader from which several readings are sourced: *Justice: A Reader*, ed. Michael Sandel (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007). Sandel, *Justice: What's The Right Thing To Do?* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2010) provides Sandel's own commentary.