The study of politics includes not only how the political world operates, but also how it ought to operate. The course focuses on John Rawls’ *A Theory of Justice* and some of the most important objections it has been presented with in the last thirty years. The course addresses some of these questions: what is a fair redistribution? How can taxation be justified? Is justice about giving people what they deserve? Is equality an important political value? Should people who are reluctant to take up employment be subsidised? How can political institutions be justified? Should politics promote community values? The goal of the course is to provide students with theoretical musculature to think further about politics.

Aims:
- To trigger an understanding of central arguments of contemporary political philosophy.
- To foster the ability to analyse and discuss arguments in political philosophy.
- To develop the ability to link and apply arguments of political philosophy to social and political issues.
- To foster the ability to communicate both orally and in writing arguments in political philosophy.
- To develop the capacity to learn new ideas and approaches, and to apply them in research.

Learning outcomes:
At the end of the course the student shall be able to:
- Understand the main arguments for and against the basic principles of liberal egalitarian thought.
- Understand the key positions within contemporary political philosophy.
- Produce critical and well-structured arguments in political philosophy.
- Balance and contrast the weakness and strengths of different positions in contemporary debates in liberal egalitarian thought.
• Summarise arguments clearly and succinctly.

Requirements:
• All students must read the core reading before the lectures and seminars.
• Attendance is compulsory. You need at least 90% of attendance to get a grade.
• There will be a mid-term exam, and a final 3,500 words paper. The paper’s title must be pre-approved, so consult me once you have an idea what you want to write about. You can use some of the seminar questions to formulate the title or any other related topic you are interested in.

Grades will be awarded as follows:
• Exam: 25%, participation 15%, presentation 20%, final paper 40%. Essays are due on the date they are due! Extensions will be granted only in special circumstances. Late submissions will get a -20% initial penalty, and a -10% daily penalty afterwards. Organise your time!
• Academic dishonesty will be severely penalised. Don’t plagiarise!!

The essays must represent a significant piece of independent research; it can be a positive argument of your own, or a critical argument. They should provide succinct, clear statements of your positions and of arguments pro and con. Don’t make claims without arguing strongly for them! Also, when you criticise and argument, use the best counter-argument you find, don’t waste your time with straw men!
Finally, literary or emotive or heavily jargon-laden style is often unhelpful. Do not write a one-sided essay: be sure to evaluate the strongest arguments on both sides!
For more on how to write a philosophy paper check Doug’s Portmore’s ‘Tip on writing a philosophy paper’ at http://www.public.asu.edu/~dportmor/tips.pdf (also available at the e-learning site). See also James Pryor’s guide at http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/writing.html.

Grades mean the following:

F= Fail. Poor
C+ Minimum Pass. Significant confusions; unawareness of some crucial arguments; poor written style
B- Satisfactory. Struggles to organize main ideas of the paper. Some confusions, but a general sense of the main arguments.
B Good. Cover material covered in class, good reconstruction of main arguments, written expression is clear and succinct
B+ Very good. Cover material covered in class, good reconstruction of main arguments, written expression is clear and succinct, plus understanding of subsidiary arguments, familiarity with secondary literature. Some display of analytical skills.
A- Excellent. Cover material covered in class, good reconstruction of main arguments, written expression is clear and succinct, plus understanding of subsidiary arguments, familiarity with secondary literature; independent reconstruction of arguments; display of good analytical skills; some critical engagement with the material.
A outstanding. Cover material covered in class, good reconstruction of main arguments, written expression is clear and succinct, plus understanding of subsidiary arguments,
familiarity with secondary literature; independent reconstruction of arguments; display of good analytical skills, signals of independent thought, critical engagement with the arguments.

**Weekly Program:**
Week 1: ‘What is Political Philosophy?’
Week 2: ‘John Rawls: Justice as Fairness’
Week 3: ‘Libertarian Justice’
Week 4: ‘Equality of What? Dworkin on Resources and Responsibility’
Week 5: ‘Equality or What?’
Week 6: ‘Meritocracy and Schooling’
Week 7: ‘Cohen on Incentives and the Site of Justice’
Week 8: ‘Gender and Justice’
Week 9: ‘Unconditional Grants’
Week 10: ‘Neutrality and Perfectionism’
Week 11: ‘Religious and Cultural Justice’
Week 12 ‘Revision and Conclusions’

**General books and introductions** (strongly recommended in **bold**):
- Hampton, J. *Political Philosophy* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 2001)
- Kymlicka, W. *Introduction to Political Philosophy*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002). The best survey. If you only read one, read this one.

**Edited collections** (strongly recommended in **bold**):
Week 1.
‘Introduction: What is Political Philosophy’

This week introduces some broad notion of what political philosophy is. It is distinguished, on the one hand, from moral philosophy and on the other from political science. The difference between conceptual analysis and substantive theory is also drawn. Some practical applications of political philosophy are discussed. Key concepts such as legitimacy, coercion, power, justice and liberty will be introduced. The idea of utilitarianism is also introduced.

Seminar questions:
- What is political philosophy? What is the difference between political philosophy and moral philosophy and political science?
- Is there any point in knowing what ought to be done even if one lacks political power?
- Is hopeless realism worthless? Is utopianism best avoided?

Core reading:
(Read Brighouse and Estlund for the first session, and Hampton and Anderson for the second)

Supplementary reading:
Week 2.

‘John Rawls: Justice as Fairness’

In this session we will introduce ‘justice as fairness’. We will discuss the intuitive appeal of Rawls’s theory, and some of its practical applications. We will assess whether the selection model of the principles of justice as a rational decision model is successful. Most of the discussion, though, will address the question of how egalitarian is Rawls’s theory, the structure of the two principles of justice and plausibility of the ‘difference principle’.

Seminar questions:
• What are Rawls’ two principles of justice? Are they appealing?
• What is the Original Position? What role does it play in Rawls’ argument? Is it plausible?
• Would the parties choose the two principles?

Core reading:

Supplementary reading:
There are thousands of papers on Rawls. Look at the vast bibliographies of Freeman’s, Audard’s and Pogge’s books. Here is a short selection:
• Barry, B. *Justice as Impartiality* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1995), Ch. 1, 3.
Week 3.
‘Libertarian Justice’

Nozick is one of the best critics of Rawls, so in this week his criticisms are discussed. The main claims of libertarianism will be introduced and analysed. Particular attention will be paid to Nozick’s claim that patterns upset liberty, that taxation is a form of slavery, and what values motivate libertarian justice.

Seminar questions:
- Do patterns upset liberty?
- What is the point of Will Chamberlain’s example? Is it convincing?
- Does Nozick succeed in devising a pure entitlement theory?
- Is liberty or self-ownership at the centre of Nozick’s theory?
- Is Nozick unfair to the poor?

Core reading:

Supplementary reading:
- Also check [http://bleedingheartlibertarians.com/](http://bleedingheartlibertarians.com/)

Week 4.
‘Equality of What? Resources and Responsibility’

Discussions so far have made comparisons between the relative positions of different people. However, hardly anything has been said about the ‘currency’ of justice. The debate is introduced through a critical analysis of Dworkin’s equality of resources.

Seminar questions:
• Assess the debate between ‘primary goods’, ‘resources’ and ‘welfare’.
• What is the relation between equality and luck?
• How convincing is Dworkin’s ‘envy test’ and the ‘hypothetical insurance market’ as a theory of distributive justice?
• Can we do without welfare?

Core reading:

Supplementary reading:
• Dworkin, R. et. al. ‘Symposium on Ronald Dworkin’s *Sovereign Virtue*, Ethics, 113 (2002) 5-143.
**Week 5**

**‘Equality or what?’**

Although at first sight ‘equality’ seems to be an attractive ideal, on a second thought it is more problematic. In this week we will discuss the appeal of equality and some objections to it. The difference between prioritarianism and egalitarianism will be discussed at length and the ‘levelling-down objection’ will be subject to close scrutiny. Finally, the main claim posed by sufficientarians will be dealt with.

**Seminar questions:**
- Should we be egalitarians, sufficientarians or prioritarians? Or none of them?
- Is the levelling-down objection fatal to egalitarians?

**Core reading:**

**Supplementary reading:**
• ———— ‘Egalitarianism Defended’, *Ethics*, 114 (2003), 764-82.
• See the special issue on the priority view published in *Utilitas* (24, 2012)

Week 6

**Meritocracy and Schooling**

Does justice require that the most talented occupy advantaged positions? Is it unfair that social position plays a role in determining prospects in life? What is the ideal of equal opportunity? Is it attractive?

Core reading


Supplementary readings:

• ——— *The Liberal Theory of Justice*, ch. 8


Monbiot, ‘Yes, Mr Gove, I went to private school – but I want to challenge the system’, The Guardian, 10th May 2012 at http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2012/may/10/michael-gove-private-school-social-justice


Nozick, R., Anarchy, State and Utopia, 232-238.


Pogge, T. John Rawls: His Life and Theory of Justice, 120-133.


Week 7

‘Cohen on Incentives and the Site of Justice’

This week discusses an important criticism to Rawls’s ‘difference principle’. The main question today is captured in Cohen’s title: ‘If You’re and Egalitarian How Come You’re So Rich?’ We will discuss the incentive argument for inequality, and Cohen’s ‘egalitarian ethos’ argument.

Seminar questions:

- Is Cohen’s appeal for an ‘egalitarian ethos’ convincing? How can the Rawlsians reply?
• Is the difference principle egalitarian enough?
• Can incentive inequality be justified?
• Is there a meaningful difference between the first and third person perspectives regarding distributive justice?

Core reading:


Supplementary reading:

• Murphy, L. ‘Institutions and the Demands of Justice’ *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 27 (1998), 251-91
• See also the 2008 *Ratio* issue on Cohen

Week 8

‘Gender and Justice’

An important deal of criticism has come from the feminist front. It seems that some liberal theories neglect the importance that gender has in our society. The seminar will discuss the extent to which the feminist critique succeeds as well whether liberalism has the resources in order to address it.

Seminar questions:
• How convincing is Okin’s conception of justice and gender?
• Is liberalism male-biased?
• Is Okin too radical, or not radical enough?
• Is Rawls’ response attractive?

Core reading:

Supplementary reading:
• Gilligan, C. In a Different Voice (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993).
• ——— Mother Nature (London: Chatto & Windus, 1999)
• Sen, A. 1992. Development as Freedom. Ch. 8

Week 9.

‘Unconditional Grants’

Most entitlements are conditional upon people willing to cooperate. There is a proposal which suggests that the state should distribute some basic unconditional grants that are independent of people willing to work. An argument for this scheme holds that it maximises people’s real freedom. We look at some advantages and problems of this suggestion.

Seminar questions:
• Is Unconditional Basic Income appealing?
• What is the difference between principled and pragmatic arguments for UBI? Which supports it better?
• Is UBI exploitative?

Core reading:

Supplementary reading:
• Arneson, R. ‘Is Socialism Dead?’ *Ethics* 102, (1992), 485-511
• Also see the Basic Income Earth Network (BIEN) website: [http://www.etes.ucl.ac.be/BIEN/Index.html](http://www.etes.ucl.ac.be/BIEN/Index.html)

Week 10.

‘**Neutrality and Perfectionism**’

This week’s discussion follows from last week. Some liberals argue that a liberal state must be neutral towards different conceptions of the good. The seminar will address that concept of neutrality and different ways to understand it. The plausibility of ‘public reason’ will also be discussed.

Seminar questions:

- What sort of neutrality do liberals seek?
- Should the State be neutral?
- Is the idea of public reason feasible? Is it attractive?
- Is political liberalism just another comprehensive doctrine?

Core reading:


Supplementary reading:

• Larmore, C. 'Political Liberalism', Political Theory, 18, (1990) 339-60.
• Lecce, S. Against Perfectionism (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008).
• Quong, J., Liberalism without Perfection (Oxford: OUP: 2010)
Week 11

‘Religious and Cultural Justice’

In this seminar we will discuss whether religious practices should be treated differently from other practices. Through the case of religion, we will raise questions of diversity and multiculturalism in contemporary societies.

Seminar questions:
- Under which circumstances, if any, should religious accommodation be granted? Is it legitimate doing so?
- Is religion in any sense special?
- What is the most attractive conception of multiculturalism?

Core reading:

Supplementary reading:
(See also bibliography from last week!)
• Sandel, M. *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), Postscript ‘A Response to Rawls’ *Political Liberalism*’.

Week 12.

‘Revision and Conclusions’