

Phil 330, Social Political Philosophy, 3 credits
Term 1 2024-25
Meets MWF 11-noon
Earth Sciences Building room 2012

Instructor: Matthew S. Bedke matt.bedke@ubc.ca Office: Buchanan Block E, room 361 Office Hrs: in person Wednesdays and Fridays, noon-1pm or by appointment	TA: TBD
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Required Learning Materials

A Theory of Justice [ToJ], by John Rawls

Various readings available online or through UBC Library Online Course Reserves

Course Description and Aims

This will be a survey course in social and political philosophy that focuses on contemporary debates about justice, fairness, freedom, and the good of community. Those debates all begin with John Rawls' A Theory of Justice. Rawls defends an account of what justice is in general and the two principles that a society must satisfy in order to be just. He also broaches the project of institutional design—that is, the design of legal, economic, social, and political institutions capable of satisfying the two principles of justice. The second half of the course surveys a number of critical responses and alternatives to Rawls selected from the following theories: libertarian, Marxist, communitarian, republican, feminist, and critical race.

Here are some of the questions we will tackle: Should we have an egalitarian political system? If so, in what respect(s) are we or should we be equal? Is the taxation of your money a violation of your rights of ownership? Do societies that emphasize individual freedom lose some aspects of community that make life good?

The aim in this course is not only to familiarize you with some profound questions about the basic rules to live by, and the most thoughtful attempts to answer those questions, but also to hone your thinking and writing skills. I want you to think clearly, avoid confusion, recognize and pick apart bad arguments, and build good arguments.

Learning Outcomes

After completing this course, students will

- have a broad appreciation of the questions and concerns surrounding justice as a first virtue of social institutions (as Rawls put it).
- be able to explain philosophical texts and positions accurately, to identify and apply philosophical research methods consistently, to articulate and defend precise philosophical positions, and to anticipate and rebut objections to those positions.

- Acquire the content, synthesize it, summarize it, analyze it, communicate it, and criticize it.

Learning Expectations

Students are expected to do the readings in advance, attend class, stay focused and undistracted during the lectures, and to actively participate in classroom discussions. Students are also required to submit all assignments on time.

Assessments of Learning

Your mark will be determined by a few at-home quizzes taken through Canvas (10%), one in-class, written midterm exam (40%) and one final exam (50%). The quizzes are designed to make sure you keep up with the readings and understand the material. The exams are designed to make sure you can explain and critically evaluate the material.

AI chatbots can facilitate the acquisition of information and summarize it in a concise manner. They can, however, fabricate information and fail to give citation or credit to the sources of the content they generate. Even when they function well, they do not provide the learner with much depth of understanding and they do not (yet) help the learner develop their own abilities to analyze and criticize material. Doing philosophy well requires one to think for themselves, and this is something I want us to practice.

Class participation and attendance are mandatory.

I will not accept late work except with a valid excuse from Arts Advising. Any request to re-grade work must be submitted in writing, detailing reasons for awarding a higher grade and indicating the new grade being requested.

Relationship between percentages and letter grades:

90-100% A+	85-89% A	80-84% A-
76-79% B+	72-75% B	68-71% B-
64-67% C+	60-63% C	55-59% C-
50-54% D	0-49% F	

A Range: Exceptional Performance. Mastery of the subject matter; strong evidence of original thinking; good organization in written work; impressive capacity to analyze; insightful critical evaluations.

B Range: Competent Performance. Evidence of grasp of subject matter; some evidence of critical capacity and analytic ability; reasonable understanding of relevant issues.

C Range: Adequate Performance. Understanding of the subject matter; ability to develop solutions to simple problems in the material; acceptable but uninspired work; not seriously faulty but lacking style and vigour.

D Range: Problematic Performance. Some incomplete understanding of the subject matter; limited evidence of critical and analytical skills; lack of original thinking.

F Range: Inadequate Performance. Little or no evidence of understanding of the subject matter; little or no evidence of critical and analytical skills; limited or irrelevant use of the literature.

University Policies

Academic Concession

[UBC's academic concession policy](#) “articulates the University’s commitment to support students in their academic pursuits through the application of academic concessions in the event that students experience unanticipated events or circumstances that interfere with their ability to accomplish academic work.” An academic concession may be granted for a student when an unexpected situation or circumstance prevents them from completing graded work or exams.

Students may request an academic concession for the following three reasons:

- Unanticipated changes in personal responsibilities that create a conflict
- Medical circumstances
- Compassionate grounds

If students have a disability or ongoing medical condition that affects their studies for more than one term, they may request an [academic accommodation](#).

Requests should be made as early as reasonably possible. Normally, the academic advising office will manage student’s request.

Academic Integrity

The academic enterprise is founded on honesty, civility, and integrity. As members of this enterprise, all students are expected to know, understand, and follow the codes of conduct regarding academic integrity. At the most basic level, this means submitting only original work done by you and acknowledging all sources of information or ideas and attributing them to others as required. This also means you should not cheat, copy, or mislead others about what is your work. Violations of academic integrity (i.e., misconduct) lead to the breakdown of the academic enterprise, and therefore serious consequences arise and harsh sanctions are imposed. For example, incidences of plagiarism or cheating may result in a mark of zero on the assignment or exam and more serious consequences may apply if the matter is referred to the President’s Advisory Committee on Student Discipline. Careful records are kept in order to monitor and prevent recurrences. A more detailed description of academic integrity, including the University’s policies and procedures, may be found under [Discipline for Academic Misconduct](#) in the Academic Calendar.

Resources to Support Student Success

UBC provides resources to support student learning and to maintain healthy lifestyles but recognizes that sometimes crises arise and so there are additional resources to access including those for survivors of sexual violence. UBC values respect for the person and ideas of all members of the academic community. Harassment and discrimination are not tolerated nor is suppression of academic freedom. UBC provides appropriate accommodation for students with disabilities and for religious observances. UBC values academic honesty and students are expected to

acknowledge the ideas generated by others and to uphold the highest academic standards in all of their actions.

Details of the policies and how to access support are available on the UBC Senate website: <https://senate.ubc.ca/policies-resources-support-student-success>

Learning Resources

Some learning resources are available on the Canvas website, such as links to helpful information about writing philosophy papers. I also want to bring your attention to the Philosophy Essay Clinic: <https://philosophy.ubc.ca/undergraduate/philosophy-essay-clinic/>

Copyright

All materials for this course (any handouts, lecture slides, assessments, course readings, etc.) are the intellectual property of the Course Instructor or licensed to be used in this course by the copyright owner. Redistribution of these materials by any means without permission of the copyright holder(s) constitutes a breach of copyright and may lead to academic discipline. Note: recording of the course is not permitted.

Reading Schedule

Please do the assigned readings before class and come prepared to discuss them. **The schedule is subject to change.**

Week	Day	Date	Topic	Readings	Assignments
1	W	4-Sep-24	Intro to Course		
	F	6-Sep-24	Rawls on the Nature and Foundation of Justice	ToJ Ch. 1	
2	M	9-Sep-24		cont	
	W	11-Sep-24		cont	
	F	13-Sep-24	Two Principles of Justice	ToJ Ch. 2	
3	M	16-Sep-24		cont	
	W	18-Sep-24		cont	Canvas Quiz
	F	20-Sep-24	The Original Position	ToJ Ch. 3	
4	M	23-Sep-24		cont	
	W	25-Sep-24		cont	

	F	27-Sep-24	Class Cancelled		
5	M	30-Sep-24	Statutory holiday in lieu of the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation. University closed.		
	W	2-Oct-24	Questions about Equal Liberty	ToJ Ch. 4 to p. 194	
	F	4-Oct-24		cont	Canvas Quiz
6	M	7-Oct-24	The Nature of Goodness as Rationality	Ch. 7 to p. 380	
	W	9-Oct-24	Stability: The Sense of Justice	ToJ Ch. 8 to p. 420	
	F	11-Oct-24	Stability: The Good of Justice	ToJ Ch. 9, secs. 78, 79, 85, 86 and 87	
	M	14-Oct-24	Thanksgiving, university closed		Practice exam questions posted
	W	16-Oct-24		cont	
7	F	18-Oct-24		Q and A session	
	M	21-Oct-24			In class essay exam
	W	23-Oct-24	The Libertarian Critique	Robert Nozick, (1974) Anarchy State and Utopia, Basic Books, ch. 7: 149-164 and 183-204.	

8	F	25-Oct-24		Samuel Freeman (2018) "Illiberal Libertarianism" in Liberalism and Distributive Justice, Oxford University Press, 62-89.	
	M	28-Oct-24		cont	Canvas Quiz
	W	30-Oct-24	Dworkin's Egalitarian Alternative	Dworkin, R. What is equality? Part 1: Equality of welfare. Philosophy and Public Affairs (1981). (You can skip sections III, VI, VII, and X.)	
9	F	1-Nov-24		cont	
	M	4-Nov-24		Dworkin, R. What is equality? Part 2: Equality of resources. Philosophy and Public Affairs (1981). (You can skip sections II, VI, and VII.)	
	W	6-Nov-24		cont	Canvas Quiz
10	F	8-Nov-24	The Communitarian Critique	Kymlicka, Will. (2002). Contemporary political philosophy: An introduction. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, chapter 6, pp. 208-83.	
	M	11-Nov-24	Remembrance day, university closed		
	W	13-Nov-24	fall break		
11	F	15-Nov-24		cont	
	M	18-Nov-24		cont	
	W	20-Nov-24		cont	
12	F	22-Nov-24		cont	Canvas Quiz
	M	25-Nov-24	Ideologies	Charles Mills (2005) "'Ideal Theory' as Ideology", Hypatia 20: 165-84.	

	W	27-Nov-24		Tommie Shelby (2003) "Ideology, Racism and Critical Theory", Philosophical Forum 34: 153-188	
13	F	29-Nov-24	Race and Justice	Tommie Shelby (2004), "Race and Social Justice: Rawlsian Considerations," Fordham Law Review 72: 1697-1714.	
	M	2-Dec-24		Charles W. Mills (2013), "Retrieving Rawls for Racial Justice? A Critique of Tommie Shelby," Critical Philosophy of Race 1: 1-27.	
	W	4-Dec-24		Tommie Shelby (2013) "Racial Realities and Corrective Justice: A Reply to Charles Mills," Critical Philosophy of Race, 1: 145-162.	
14	F	6-Dec-24		catch up day	Canvas Quiz

**Final Exam:
TBD**