

Harris School, University of Chicago
Public Policy 376
Spring 2016
Class time: TuTh 1:30-2:50
Twitter hashtag: #pp376
Class-related tweets:

[https://twitter.com/search?q=%23pp376
&src=typd](https://twitter.com/search?q=%23pp376&src=typd)

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Room 179
Office hours: by appointment, send me
an email.

Theories of justice and the common good: a philosophical approach to public policy

Description

Discourses about “values” impregnate the political discourse in the US, and also to a large extent in European countries. “Values” are thus often used – implicitly or explicitly – as a justification for public policy. The policy is said to be fair, to contribute to the common good, to promote our common values, etc. But what does this all mean? Can this appeal to values be in any way rational? By introducing the major families of contemporary theories of justice, this class will allow students to form an informed opinion with respect to what kind of justifications can be supported from the point of view of a theory of justice. We will establish the place of these theories of justice in the history of ideas and compare the different theories with respect to their main concepts. The course will also dwell on the theories’ implications for public policy. Finally, we will ask which of these theories, if any, coheres best with commonly held beliefs about justice in contemporary nations.

Texts

This class will use the following book as a textbook:

Will Kymlicka, “Contemporary Political Philosophy: An Introduction”, Second Edition, Oxford University Press 2002.

All other texts will be found either on the Internet (links below) or on chalk.uchicago.edu.

Assignments and grading

The course evaluation is based on essay writing. You will have three essays to write:

1. One short essay (10000 characters (no spaces) max.) applying some of the theories discussed in class to a policy topic assigned by me (same topic for the whole class). 20%. Essay is to be sent by email by the end of week 6, i.e. **Sunday May 8th, 11pm.**

2. One long essay (20000 characters (no spaces) max.) on a theme of your choice, after having consulted with me. 40%. Essay is to be sent by email by the end of week 8, i.e. **Sunday May 22nd, 11pm. Outline for the essay due by Sunday May 15th, 11pm, by email.**
3. One essay written in class, which will be the final exam, on **exam week**. 40% For more details about the assignments, see the guidelines on chalk under assignments. Essays have to be handed in on time. Each day a paper is late without a substantial excuse, a full letter grade is deducted from the paper. Starting from 30 minutes after the official deadline, your paper is considered to be a day late, and two days late 24 hours after the official deadline, etc.

Course outline and readings

Students are expected to read the assigned texts before class. Required readings are starred.

The class will be lecture and discussion based. Students' active participation is thus fundamental.

1. Introduction

* KYMLICKA, chapter 1. (Week 1, Class 2)

PLATO, The Republic, Book III (selections, see chalk).

ARISTOTLE, Nichomachean Ethics, Book V
(<http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/nicomachaen.5.v.html>).

HOBBS, Leviathan, chapters XIV and XV
(<http://oregonstate.edu/instruct/phl302/texts/hobbes/leviathan-contents.html>).

LOCKE, Second Treatise of Government, chapter V
(<http://www.constitution.org/jl/2ndtr05.htm>).

ROUSSEAU, The Social Contract, Book I, 6,8,9, Book II, 4
(<http://www.constitution.org/jjr/socon.htm>).

HUME, An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals, section III, part I,
<http://www.anselm.edu/homepage/dbanach/Hume-Enquiry%20Concerning%20Morals.htm#sec3a>

Part 1: General theories of justice

2. Utilitarianism

* KYMLICKA, chapter 2. (Week 2, Class 3)

BENTHAM, Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation, chapter 1
(<http://www.la.utexas.edu/research/poltheory/bentham/ipml/ipml.c01.html>).

MILL, Utilitarianism, chapter 2 (<http://www.utilitarianism.com/mill2.htm>).

MILL, On Liberty, chapter IV (<http://www.bartleby.com/130/4.html>).

3. Liberal equality

* KYMLICKA, chapter 3. (Week 3, Class 6)

* HARSANYI, “Review: Can the Maximin Principle Serve as a Basis for Morality? A Critique of John Rawls's Theory”, *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 69, No. 2. (Jun., 1975), pp. 594-606. (Week 3, Class 6)

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/1959090>

RAWLS, A Theory of Justice, (selections).

SEN, Commodities and Capabilities, (selections).

4. Libertarianism

* KYMLICKA, chapter 4. (Week 5, Class 10)

Part 2: The issue of marginalized groups

5. The working class and marxism

* KYMLICKA, chapter 5. (Week 7, Class 13)

6. Women and feminism

* PLATO, The Republic, Book V (selections, see chalk). (Week 7, Class 14)

* KYMLICKA, chapter 9. (Week 7, Class 14)

7. The challenge of including the disabled

* NUSSBAUM, Frontiers of Justice: Disability, Nationality, Species Membership, chapters 2 and 3 (see chalk). (Week 8, Class 15)

8. Nations and national minorities, race

* KYMLICKA, chapters 7-8. (Week 9, Class 17)

Part 3: Empirical justice: what people think

9. Empirical justice

MILLER (1992), “Distributive Justice: What the People Think”, *Ethics*.

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/2381840>

KONOW (2003), “What is the fairest one of all? A positive analysis of justice theories”, *Journal of Economic Literature*.

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/3217459>