Philosophical Foundations of Public Policy

Spring, 2020

Instructor Scott Ashworth

Class meetings Mon. and Wed., 2:00–3:20 in TK

Reading

All readings will be available on the course website. You should bring a copy of the relevant reading to class each day—we will be referring to the texts during class discussions.

Schedule

March 30:
Introductory meeting—no reading

Normative Foundations

April 2: Consequences and Rights
Peter Singer, excerpt from Practical Ethics

April 6: Structure

April 8: Theories of Welfare
Tim Mulgan, “Well-Being and Value”, chapter 8 of Ethics for a Broken World
Costs and Benefits in Policy Analysis

April 13: From Welfarism to Cost-Benefit Analysis
Joe Bakija, “Social Welfare, Distributive Justice, the Tradeoff between Equity and Efficiency, and the Marginal Efficiency Cost of Funds”

April 15: Redistribution
Peter Diamond and Emmanuel Saez, “The Case for Progressive Tax: From Basic Research to Policy Recommendations”
N. Gregory Mankiw, “Defending the One Percent”

April 20: Climate Change
Paul Kelleher, selection from *The Social Cost of Carbon: Economic Theory, Moral Philosophy, and U.S. Public Policy*

April 22: Climate Change, II
Paul Kelleher, selection from *The Social Cost of Carbon: Economic Theory, Moral Philosophy, and U.S. Public Policy*

April 27: Climate Change, III
Paul Kelleher, selection from *The Social Cost of Carbon: Economic Theory, Moral Philosophy, and U.S. Public Policy*

Gender and Discrimination

April 29: Labor Market Discrimination
Claudia Goldin, “A Grand Gender Convergence: Its Last Chapter”

May 4: Structure, II
Iris Marion Young, “Political Responsibility and Structural Injustice”

Fact and Value

May 6: The Entanglement of Facts and Values
Heather Douglas, “Facts, Values, and Objectivity”

May 11: Resisting the Entanglement
Liam Kofi Bright, “Du Bois’ Democratic Defense of the Value Free Ideal”

May 13: Genetics
Charles Manski, “Genes, Eyeglasses, and Social Policy”

May 18: Should Everything be up for Discussion?
Philip Kitcher “An Argument About Free Inquiry”

Testimony and Advice

May 20: Learning from Experts

May 25: Incentives for Experts

May 27: Testimonial Injustice

June 1: Climate Change, IV
Stephen John, “From Social Values to p-Values: The Social Epistemology of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change”

June 3:
Concluding discussion—no reading
Course Work and Evaluation

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Student Responsibilities

**Attendance.** Each course meeting will involve a mix of lecture, small-group exercises, and discussion. As such, regular attendance is crucial, as is active participation in exercises and discussions. More than three unexcused absences will affect your grade.

We’ll be discussing many controversial issues in this course, and challenging our beliefs throughout. Be polite, respectful, and charitable in discussion with your classmates and teachers.

**Reading responses.** At least 10 times, you will submit a 150–250 word reading response. These should not be summaries; instead, ask a question, raise an objection, make up your own example to illustrate one of the points, etc.

Weekly reading responses are designed to help all of us start thinking about the material for discussion before class starts. As such, late responses will not be accepted. Reading responses are due at 8:00 AM on the day the reading is to be discussed in class.

You can choose which readings to write about, subject to two constraints: you must do at least 10, and you may not do more than 1 in a single week. You can do more than 10 responses—your grade for this component will be based on your 10 best attempts.

**Problem Sets** There will be 5 problem sets. Each will include a mix of analytical problems and short essays. The grade will be based on the 4 highest grades across the 5 attempts.

I encourage you to talk to each other about the problems, and work together to solve them. But each student must write up their solutions independently.

Sometimes unexpected events make it difficult to submit a problem on time. For this reason, you will have a pool of 2 late days to be used for any of the problem sets. That is 2 days total for the quarter, not 4 days per problem set. Weekend days are counted in the same way as weekdays (e.g., if the deadline is Friday and you turn it in Sunday, that’s two days late). Note that you are responsible for tracking your own late days.

Other than the late days, there are no exceptions to the deadlines for any assignment, except in case of a serious emergency. If such an emergency does arise, you should contact the office of the Dean of Students.
Helpful resources. Jim Pryor has prepared several useful guides for students taking philosophy courses. I particularly urge you to read “Guidelines on Reading Philosophy” and “Guidelines on Writing a Philosophy Paper”.

Course Policies

Technology in the Classroom Turn off your cell phone and store it during lecture. If you might need to receive a call during class for some reason, put your phone on vibrate and step out quietly as needed.

The laptop policy will be discussed in the first meeting.

Academic Honesty

Mandatory Reporting As instructors, one of our responsibilities is to help create a safe learning environment. The professor and teaching assistants are also Individuals with Title IX Reporting Responsibilities. That means we are required to report all incidents of sexual misconduct, sexual harassment, dating violence, domestic violence, and stalking to the Title IX Coordinator for the University.