

# PT141. Theories of Justice

**Seminar Leader: Hans Stauffacher (h.stauffacher@berlin.bard.edu)**

**Course times: Tue & Thu 09:00-10:30**

## Course Description

Questions of justice have always occupied center stage in ethical, political, social, and legal theory. And they are crucial for our everyday lives: More often than not the question of whether it is right or wrong to do something seems to boil down to a question of justice. This course, therefore, aims at being both, an introduction to political and social philosophy and a discussion of the questions of justice we face in our own political, social, and personal lives. Reading seminal theories of justice from Aristotle to the 20th Century we will encounter different approaches to justice like eudaimonism, utilitarianism, contractualism, and egalitarianism, and discuss core concepts and distinctions like distributive and corrective justice, conservative and ideal justice, substantive and procedural justice, comparative and non-comparative justice. We will discuss all the texts in two different ways: In a first step, we will attempt to understand them in their historical and systematical specificity. And in a second step, we will confront them with problems of justice from our own lives and ask whether, how, and to what extent these historical positions are applicable to the questions of justice we face today.

## Course Readings

All course readings will be provided through Google Classroom. You are expected to print the texts and come to class with paper copies.

Please note that the schedule and the readings are subject to change. All changes will be communicated in class and via email.

## Requirements

**Class preparation:** Preparing for class means reading thoughtfully and engaging with the texts, for instance, by thinking through the argument of a particular section and taking notes while reading. The readings for this course will be difficult and challenging. You should give yourself enough time to read them more than once. You will be expected to regularly submit short written comments or questions about the readings. Details about this will be communicated in the first session.

**Attendance and participation:** Regular attendance and active participation are essential to the success of this course. Therefore, attendance at all sessions and participation in all discussions is expected. Missing more than two 90-minute sessions will significantly affect the participation grade. Missing more than 30% (more than 8 sessions) would mean failing the course. Consult the Student Handbook for regulations governing periods of illness or leaves of absence.

**Covid-19:** Even though we hope it won't, the pandemic might again disrupt the usual way of conducting classes this semester and make it necessary to adjust teaching formats. Depending on the circumstances, class sessions will take place either in person or via Zoom. In case we will be able to meet in person, but you cannot attend class because of a Covid-19 related issue, there will always be the possibility to participate remotely.

**Assignments:** Students are required to complete the following assignments for this course: A response paper on how one of the theories of justice we'll discuss is applicable to real-life questions of justice in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (about 500 words; to be discussed in class), an elaboration of this response paper (about 1500 words), and a final essay (about 4000 words, due May 22).

**Grade Breakdown:**

Class participation: 40%

Written comments on readings: 10%

Response paper: 20%

Final essay: 30%

**Policy on Late Submission of Papers:** Please note the following policy from the Student Handbook on the submission of essays: *essays that are up to 24 hours late can be downgraded one full grade (from B+ to C+, for example). Instructors are not obliged to accept essays that are more than 24 hours late. Where an instructor agrees to accept a late essay, it must be submitted by the agreed deadline. Thereafter, the student will receive a failing grade for the assignment.*

**Academic Integrity:** Bard College Berlin maintains the staunchest regard for academic integrity and expects good academic practice from students in their studies. Failing to meet the expected standards of academic integrity (plagiarism, cheating) will be reported and dealt with under the Code of Student Conduct, Section 14.3 (Academic Misconduct) in the Student Handbook.

## Schedule\*

Tuesday, Feb. 1 Introduction

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### 1. MORAL SENTIMENTS

Thursday, Feb. 3 David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1740)  
Tuesday, Feb. 8 David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* (1751)  
Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759)  
**Response Papers**

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### 2. UTILITARIANISM

Thursday, Feb. 10 Jeremy Bentham, *Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* (1780)  
Tuesday, Feb. 15 John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism* (1863)  
**Response Papers**

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### 3. LAWS AND CONTRACTS

Thursday, Feb. 17 Justice in the Bible

Tuesday, Feb. 22 Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (1651)  
Thursday, Feb. 24 John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government* (1689)  
Tuesday, Mar. 1 Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discourse on Inequality* (1755)  
**Response Papers**

Thursday, Mar. 3 Plato recap

Tuesday, Mar. 8 – Holiday, no class

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### 4. DISTRIBUTION

Thursday, Mar. 10 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*  
Tuesday, Mar. 15 **Response Papers**  
Thursday, Mar. 17

Tuesday, Mar. 22 Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy* (1867)  
Thursday, Mar. 24 Karl Marx/Friedrich Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (1848)  
**Response Papers**

Tuesday, Mar. 29 Iris Marion Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (1990)

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### 5. MORAL PHILOSOPHY

Thursday, Mar. 31 Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785)  
Tuesday, Apr. 5 **Response Papers**  
Thursday, Apr 7

Spring Break

**Tuesday, Apr. 19** Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality* (1887)  
Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human* (1874)

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## 6. PROBLEMS OF EQUALITY

**Thursday, Apr. 21** John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (1971)  
**Tuesday, Apr. 26** John Rawls, "Justice as Fairness" (1985)  
**Thursday, Apr. 28** **Response Papers**

**Tuesday, May 3** Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State, And Utopia* (1974)  
**Thursday, May 5** Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (1981)  
**Response Papers**

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## 7. THE PRESENT

**Tuesday, May 10** Climate Justice. Texts tbd

**Thursday, May 12** Ta-Nehisi Coates, "The Case for Reparations" (2014)

**Completion Week**

**Final essay due Saturday, May 22**

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