

PT141. Theories of Justice

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

Course times: Tue & Thu 17:30-19:00

Course Description

Questions of justice have always occupied center stage in ethical, political, social, and legal theory. And they have always been 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.

We will use the online tool hypothes.is to collaboratively annotate the readings. You will need Google Chrome and the hypothes.is plugin for this. Details about this will be communicated in the first session.

Attendance and participation: Regular attendance and active participation is 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: The special circumstances of the current pandemic will most likely disrupt the usual way of conducting classes this semester and will make it necessary to adjust teaching formats and attendance policies. We will collaboratively decide how to deal with alternatives to in-person attendance, remote participation, or asynchronous teaching/learning in the first session.

Assignments: Students are required to complete the following assignments for this course: Two or three short presentations (max. 5 minutes) on how the theories of justice we'll discuss are applicable to real-life questions of justice in the 21st Century and/or on the texts we will collaboratively choose for the last two weeks, a midterm essay (about 2000 words, due Oct. 17), and a final essay (about 4000 words, due Dec. 18).

Grade Breakdown:

Class participation: 30%

Presentations: 10%

hypothes.is annotations: 10%

Midterm essay: 20%

Final essay: 30%

Essay Deadlines:

Midterm essay (2000 words): **Saturday, Oct. 17**

Final essay (4000 words): **Friday, Dec. 18**

(Submissions through Google Classroom)

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 will 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 within four weeks of the deadline and cannot receive a grade of higher than C. 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, Sept. 1 Introduction

Thursday, Sept. 3 David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1740)
Tuesday, Sept. 8 David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* (1751)
Thursday, Sept. 10 Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759)
Presentations

Tuesday, Sept. 15 Jeremy Bentham, *Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* (1780)
Thursday, Sept. 17 John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism* (1863)
Presentations

Tuesday, Sept. 22 Justice in the Bible

Thursday, Sept. 24 Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (1651)
Tuesday, Sept. 29 John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government* (1689)
Thursday, Oct. 1 Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discourse on Inequality* (1755)
Presentations

Tuesday, Oct. 6 Plato recap

Thursday, Oct. 8 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*
Tuesday, Oct. 13 **Presentations**
Thursday, Oct. 15

Midterm essay due **Saturday, Oct. 17**

FALL BREAK

Tuesday, Oct. 27 Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785)
Thursday, Oct. 29 **Presentations**
Tuesday, Nov. 3

Thursday, Nov. 5 Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality* (1887)
Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human* (1874)

Tuesday, Nov. 10 John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (1971)
Thursday, Nov. 12 John Rawls, "Justice as Fairness" (1985)
Tuesday, Nov. 17 **Presentations**

Thursday, Nov. 19 Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State, And Utopia* (1974)
Tuesday, Nov. 24 Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (1981)
Thursday, Nov. 26 **Presentations**

Tuesday, Dec. 1 TBD
Thursday, Dec. 3 (we will collaboratively choose texts for these sessions)
Tuesday, Dec. 8 **Presentations**

Thursday, Dec. 10 Final discussion

COMPLETION WEEK

Final essay due **Friday, Dec. 18**

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