

Name of Course: Foundations of Political Philosophy

Lecturer: Zoltan Miklosi

2 credits and 4 ECTS credits

Fall Semester, 2019/20

No pre-requisites

Course Level – advanced introductory

Office hours: Wednesday, 10 am to 13 am. Office hour consultations work by prior sign-up. Please, sign up at least one day in advance.

Introduction

The course focuses on a few of the most fundamental problems of normative political philosophy, regarding the ground and scope of the authority of the state to make and enforce rules that bind its citizens. Most people would agree that the state indeed has such authority, and that citizens are usually under a moral obligation to comply with the rules made by the government. However, there are deep disagreements concerning the source of this authority as well as about its proper limits: what are the goals that the government may or must rightfully pursue and by what means? Under what circumstances are its citizens exempt from the obligation to obey its laws? These are among the questions that will be examined in this course. First, we will discuss different theories of political obligation, i.e. theories about the moral basis of our obligation, if any, to comply with laws. The theories discussed will include consent theories, justice-based theories, and fair-play theories. Second, we will attend to the problem of distributive justice: are material inequalities between citizens unjust, and if so, under what circumstances? Is the state required to pursue some profile of distribution of goods in society, and if so, what characterizes that profile? We will discuss utilitarian, egalitarian, and libertarian accounts of justice. Third, it is widely held that democratic procedures of political decision-making have a special claim to legitimacy. In this context, we will discuss different accounts of the value of democracy as well as some prominent contemporary theoretical doubts about democracy.

Readings: The course readings include selected chapters of textbooks and primary contributions from the political philosophy literature. The textbooks are Jean Hampton's *Political Philosophy* (1998), Will Kymlicka's *Contemporary Political Philosophy* (2002), and Adam Swift's *Political Philosophy: A beginner's guide for students and politicians* (2014). The first two of these are advanced introductory works that provide in-depth explorations of a few central issues in the field, yet they are suitable for graduate students with little or no background in normative political philosophy as well. Nevertheless, students with limited background may find it useful to consult, in addition, textbooks aimed at a more beginners' level, such as David Miller's *Political Philosophy: A very short introduction* (Oxford University Press, 2003), and the rest of Swift's textbook.

Teaching format: Each session will include a lecture component and seminar-style discussions with the active engagement of students.

Assessment: Students are expected to read all the required readings come to the sessions well-prepared with questions and comments that are informed by the readings. The final grade is based upon a midterm exam (30%), a final paper (45%), and participation (25%). In addition, there will be two short in-class exercises that test students' ability to identify and distinguish between normative, empirical, and conceptual claims, and to identify and evaluate premises, inferences and conclusions of arguments. Performance on these exercises are not graded, but participation is mandatory, and missing them results in reduction of the participation component of the assessment.

Goals: The goals of the course are to introduce to students the most important problems and theoretical approaches that preoccupy contemporary political philosophy, to enable them to understand, present and criticize philosophical arguments regarding the problems discussed, and to help them relate such arguments to real-life problems and situations.

Learning outcomes: Improving analytical skills, enhancing the ability to reason logically about normative problems, to identify, characterize and evaluate different theoretical positions and arguments, to construct normative arguments of one's own.

Weekly schedule and readings

I. Political Obligation

Week 1: Introduction and a survey of premodern and early modern theories of political authority;

Readings:

- Jean Hampton, Chapter 1-2, *Political Philosophy* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1998) – mandatory.
- John Simmons, *Moral Principles and Political Obligations*, Chapter 2 – (recommended).
- Laura Valentini, “The Content-Independence of Political Obligation: what it is and how to test it?” *Legal Theory* 24 (2018), pp. 135-157 (recommended).

Week 2: Consent-based theories

Readings:

- John A. Simmons, *Moral Principles and Political Obligation*, Ch 3, 57-74 – mandatory.
- Amanda Greene, “Consent and Political Legitimacy,” in *Oxford Studies in Political Philosophy*, vol. 3 (OUP, 2016), pp. 71-97.

Week 3: Reciprocity-based theories

- Simmons, Chapter 5, 101-36 (mandatory).

Week 4: Justice-based theories

- Simmons, Chapter 6, 143-156 – mandatory.

- John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* §§19, 51, (Cambridge, Mass.: HUP, 1971) – (recommended).
- Anna Stilz, “Why Does the State Matter Morally? Political Obligation and Particularity,” in Sigal R. Ben-Porath & Roger M. Smith (eds.), *Varieties of Sovereignty and Citizenship* (Philadelphia, Pa.: U. Penn, 2013), pp. 244-264;
- Jeremy Waldron, “Special Ties and Natural Duties” *Philosophy and Public Affairs* (1993): 3-30. (recommended)

II. Distributive Justice

Week 5: Overview and Utilitarianism

Readings:

- Hampton, Ch 4, *Political Philosophy* – mandatory.
- Will Kymlicka, *Contemporary Political Philosophy* (Oxford: OUP, 2002), 10-48 – mandatory

Week 6: Utilitarianism, cont., Egalitarianism

- Kymlicka, *Contemporary Political Philosophy*, 57-60, 70-87 – mandatory.

Week 7: Midterm exam

Week 8: Egalitarianism, cont.

Readings:

- John Rawls, *TJ* (§§1-4, 11-12) – mandatory.
- Ronald Dworkin, *Sovereign Virtue*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002), Chapter 1 & 2 – (recommended).

Week 9: Libertarianism

Readings:

- Kymlicka, *Contemporary Political Philosophy*, 95-159– mandatory.
- Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, 149-182 – (recommended).

III. Democratic Theory

Week 10: What is democracy?

Readings:

- Adam Swift, *Political Philosophy: A beginner’s guide for students and politicians* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2014), pp. 187-210.

Week 11: What is the value of democracy?

Readings:

- Swift, *Political Philosophy*, pp. 211-230.

Week 12: Against Democracy?

Readings:

- Jason Brennan, “The Right to a Competent Electorate,” *Philosophical Quarterly* 61 (2011), pp. 700-724