

**Introduction to Contemporary Political Philosophy**  
**Instructor: Zoltán Miklósi**  
**2019/20**

The course deals with a few of the most fundamental problems of contemporary political philosophy. First among these is the ground and scope of the authority of states to rule, and of the obligation of their citizens to comply with their directives. Most people agree that governments indeed have 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 reciprocity-based theories. Second, we turn to the form of collective political decision-making that confers authority to the decisions of the government. Most contemporary theorists agree that only democracy possesses such authority, but they disagree about the grounds of the authority of democracy: we will explore intrinsic and instrumental justifications of democracy. Third, we will attend to the problem of distributive justice: are material inequalities between citizens unjust, and if so, under what circumstances? Which inequalities are relevant from the point of view of justice? 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, as well as their feminist and socialist critiques. Finally, is the state permitted to endorse, encourage or enforce any particular conception of the good life, i.e. of how its citizens should lead their lives, what ideals they should pursue, etc.? Is it permitted, in particular, to enforce the ethical or cultural preferences and beliefs of the majority or of the dominant historical tradition? What rights individuals have to pursue their own conception of a worthy, fulfilling life? In this context, we will discuss liberal individualism, perfectionism, communitarianism, and multiculturalism.

**Requirements:** students are required to read carefully all assigned readings and to actively participate in class discussions. At a few occasions students will be asked to work in small groups. Each student will present one assigned reading in class (max. 15 minutes). There will be a midterm examination and a final paper. In addition, there will be three short, 10-minute quizzes (one before the midterm exam and two afterwards, most likely on Weeks 3, 9 and 11). By the end of week 11, every student must submit their term paper topic and 2-page outline. On week 12, each student presents their outline and comments on the outline of another student.

**Evaluation:** Final paper (40%), midterm exam (25%), participation and presentation (15%), quizzes (20%).

**Class meetings:**

**Office hours:** Tuesday and Thursday 11 am to 12:30 pm.

**Learning outcomes:** acquiring analytical skills; understanding key debates contemporary political theory; analytical and critical writing; ability to orally communicate and discuss ideas, arguments;

## General background reading:

- Joel Feinberg, *Doing Philosophy: A Guide to the Writing of Philosophy Papers* (2008), chapters 1, 4, 8, 10 and 11.

## Week 1

### 1<sup>st</sup> session: What is Political Philosophy?

Required readings:

- Daniel McDermott, “Analytical Political Philosophy” in In David Leopold & Marc Stears (eds.), *Political Theory: Methods and Approaches* (Oxford University Press, 2008).
- Christian List and Laura Valentini, „The Methodology of Political Theory” (Oxford, OUP: Oxford Handbook of Philosophical Methodology, 2016)

### 2<sup>nd</sup> session: Political Authority and Obligation: Basic Concepts and Pre- and Early Modern Theories

Required readings:

- Jean Hampton, Chapter 1-2, *Political Philosophy* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1998).
- John Simmons, *Moral Principles and Political Obligations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 29-56;

Recommended:

- Joseph Raz, *The Morality of Freedom* (OUP, 1986), pp. 22-69.
- Stephen Perry, “Political Authority and Political Obligation,” in Leslie Green and Brian Leiter (eds.), *Oxford Studies in the Philosophy of Law*, vol. II. (OUP, 2013)

## Week 2

### 1<sup>st</sup> Session: Consent-Theories of PO

Required readings:

- John A. Simmons, *Moral Principles and Political Obligations*, Ch 3, 57-74

### 2<sup>nd</sup> Session: Fairness-based Theories of PO

Required reading:

- Simmons, Chapter 5, 101-136.

Recommended:

- George Klosko, “Presumptive Benefit, Fairness, and Political Obligation,” *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 16:3 (1987), pp. 241-259.

## Week 3

### 1<sup>st</sup> Session: Justice-based theories of PO

Required readings:

- John Rawls, *Theory of Justice* §§19, 51, (Cambridge, Mass.: HUP, 1971)
- Simmons, *Moral Principles and Political Obligations*, Chapter 6, 143-156.

Recommended:

- Jeremy Waldron, „Special Ties and Natural Duties,” *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 22:1 (1993), pp. 3-30.

- 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),

## **2nd Session: Justified Exceptions to PO: Civil Disobedience**

Required readings:

- Kimberley Brownlee, “Features of a Paradigm case of Civil Disobedience,” *Res Publica* 10 (2004): 337–351;
- David Lefkowitz, “On a Moral Right to Civil Disobedience,” *Ethics* (2007), pp. 202-233.

Recommended:

- John Rawls, “The Justification of Civil Disobedience,” in *Arguing about the Law* (2013), pp. 244-256.

## **Week 4**

### **1st Session: Democratic theory: Instrumentalism**

Required readings:

- Richard Arneson: “Democratic Rights at the National Level,” *Philosophy and Democracy* (OUP, 2003), Ch. 4

Recommended:

- Steven Wall, “Democracy and Equality,” *Philosophical Quarterly* (2007), pp. 416-438

### **2nd Session: Democratic theory: the Intrinsic Value of Democracy**

Required reading:

- Thomas Christiano, “The Authority of Democracy,” *Journal of Political Philosophy* (2003)

Recommended:

- Jeremy Waldron, *Law and Disagreement* (OUP, 1999), pp. 232-254.

## **Week 5**

### **1st Session: Theory of Justice: Overview and Utilitarianism**

Required readings:

- Will Kymlicka, *Contemporary Political Philosophy* (Oxford: OUP, 2002), 10-48

### **2nd Session: Theory of Justice: Utilitarianism and its critics**

Recommended:

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

## **Week 6**

### **1st Session: Theory of Justice: Liberal Egalitarianism**

Required readings:

- Rawls, *TJ* (§§1-4, 11-12)

## **2<sup>nd</sup> Session: Theory of Justice: Egalitarianism**

- Kymlicka, *Contemporary Political Philosophy*, pp. 57-87

Recommended:

- Ronald Dworkin, *Sovereign Virtue* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000), Ch. 1-2
- G. A. Cohen, "On the Currency of Egalitarian Justice," *Ethics* 99:4 (1989), pp. 906-944.

## **Week 7:**

### **1<sup>st</sup> session: Theory of Justice: Relational Egalitarianism**

Required reading:

- Elisabeth Anderson, "What is the Point of Equality?" *Ethics* 109 (1999), 287-337

Recommended:

- Samuel Scheffler, "The Practice of Equality," in Carina Fourie et al. (eds.), *Social Equality: On What it Means to Be Equals* (OUP), pp. 21-44.

## **2<sup>nd</sup> session: Midterm exam**

## **Week 8**

### **1<sup>st</sup> session: Theory of Justice: Feminist Conceptions of Equality**

Required readings:

- Anca Gheaus, "Gender Justice," *Journal of Ethics and Social Justice* 6:1 (2011), pp. 2-29
- Ingrid Robeyns, "When Will Society be Gender Just?" in Jude Browne (ed.), *The Future of Gender* (Cambridge UP, 2007);

Recommended:

- Gina Schouten, "Is the Gendered Division of Labor a problem of Distribution?" *Oxford Studies in Political Philosophy* (OUP, 2016)
- Kymlicka, "Feminism" *Contemporary Political Philosophy*, pp. 377-420.

### **2<sup>nd</sup> session: Theory of Justice: Socialist Critiques of Liberal Equality**

Required reading:

- Kymlicka, "Marxism" *Contemporary Political Philosophy*, 166-207

Recommended:

- Richard Arneson, "Meaningful Work and Market Socialism" in *Ethics* (1987), pp. 517-545 (recommended)
- John Roemer, "The Morality and Efficiency of Market Socialism," *Ethics* Vol. 102, No. 3 (1992), pp. 448-464.

## **Week 9**

### **1<sup>st</sup> session: Theory of Justice: Libertarian Critique of Liberal Equality**

Required readings:

- Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, 149-182.

Recommended:

- Serena Olsaretti, *Liberty, desert, and the market: a philosophical study* (Cambridge University Press, 2004)
- Kymlicka, *Contemporary Political Philosophy*, 95-159

## **2<sup>nd</sup> session: Conceptions of Liberty**

Required reading:

- Adam Swift, “Liberty,” in *Political Philosophy: A Beginner’s Guide for Students and Politicians* (Polity, 2014), pp. 57-94;

Recommended:

- Isaiah Berlin, “Two Concepts of Liberty,” (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), recommended
- Philip Pettit, “Liberty as Non-Domination,” in Pettit, *Republicanism: A Theory of Freedom and Government* (Oxford: OUP, 1997), pp. 51-79 (recommended)
- Ralf M. Bader, “Moralizing Liberty,” in David Sobel et al. (eds.), *Oxford Studies in Political Philosophy* vol. IV. (OUP, 2018), pp. 141-166 (recommended)

## **Week 10**

### **1<sup>st</sup> session: State Neutrality and Perfectionism**

Required readings:

- Kymlicka, “Liberal Individualism and Liberal Neutrality” *Ethics* 99 (1989), 883-905

Recommended:

- Alan Patten, “Liberal Neutrality: A Re-interpretation and Defense,” *Journal of Political Philosophy* 20:3 (2012), pp. 249-272
- Chiara Cordelli, “Neutrality of What?” *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy* 20:1 (2017), pp. 36-48
- Steven Wall, “Neutrality for Perfectionists,” *Ethics* (2010), pp. 232-256.

### **2<sup>nd</sup> session: Individualism and Communitarianism**

Required reading:

- Charles Taylor, “Atomism” in *Philosophy and the Human Sciences*, Ch 8, pp. 187-210;

Recommended:

- Ronald Dworkin, *Sovereign Virtue* (2000), Chapter 5.

## **Week 11**

### **1<sup>st</sup> session: Multiculturalism**

Required reading:

- Kymlicka, “Multiculturalism,” in *Contemporary Political Philosophy*, pp. 327-370.
- Sarah Song, “Multiculturalism,” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2010)

Recommended:

- Jonathan Quong, “Cultural Exemptions, Expensive Tastes, and Equal Opportunities,” *Journal of Political Philosophy* 23:1 (2006)

## **2<sup>nd</sup> session: Multiculturalism and its Critics**

(Deadline for submitting 2-page term paper outlines)

Required reading:

- Brian Barry, "Equality and Culture," pp. 19-62.

Recommended:

- Simon Caney, "Equal treatment, exceptions and cultural diversity," in Paul Kelly (ed.), *Multiculturalism Reconsidered* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002), pp. 81-101.

## **Week 12**

**1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> session: discussion of term paper outlines.** Each student presents his/her topic and comments on the outline of another student.