

# Contemporary Political Philosophy

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Department of Political Science  
Central European University

Philosophy, Politics, and Economics Programme (Mandatory Elective)

Fall semester 2023-24 (2 US credits, 4 ECTS)

Class meetings: Monday and Wednesday 15:20h – 16:20h

Office hours: Monday and Wednesday 16:30h – 18:30h; office: QS. A413 (by appointment to [astierc@ceu.edu](mailto:astierc@ceu.edu))

## Introduction

Political philosophy has been a fruitful and prolific discipline specially since the publication of John Rawls's *A Theory of Justice*, in 1971. This course will analyse the main concepts, debates, and ideas in contemporary political philosophy from classical debates about political authority to still open disagreements about how to achieve a society of equals.

To do so, the course is divided in three main parts: part one will introduce and discuss political authority, legitimacy, and political obligation; part two focus on discussing the concept of justice and egalitarian responses such as equality of opportunity, equality of outcomes, and social or democratic equality; finally, the third part introduces and discusses gender equality and discusses the value of democracy, is democracy justified for its consequences, is it justified for other values? What is the relation, if any, between equality and democracy?

Introductory readings include Adam Swift, *Political Philosophy: a beginner's guide for students and politicians* (Cambridge: Polity Press 2013); and Will Kymlicka, *Contemporary Political Philosophy: An Introduction* (OUP, 2001). Both books are available at CEU Library and as ebooks through access to CEU Library.

## Learning outcomes

In this course, the following learning outcomes might be acquired:

- Reason logically: ability to recognize and use logical models such as induction, deduction, etc. Students should be able to identify them in the required readings and to reproduce them in the various exercises for assessment.
- Informed and reasoned judgement: Make well-reasoned judgment, recognize subjectivity, etc. After the identification and reproduction of arguments in the required and recommended readings, students should be able to make their own judgments through learning how to develop their positions.
- Analytical writing: ability to generate logical, plausible, and persuasive arguments, connect, compare, and contrast, etc. Students should develop analytical writing both at the mid term exam and the final paper. To write analytically is difficult and requires time and practice. *Clarity* and *precision* are two of the main characteristics of analytical writing.

- Oral communication: ability to communicate clearly and using appropriate media, and participate in tasks involving communicative competence. The student should develop this ability when participating in class discussions, and in-class presentations.
- Ability to demonstrate critical thinking skills: ability to formulate critical arguments and present them in scholarly debates and written products.

## Course requirements and assessment

### ➤ **Active class-room participation and presentation (25 %)**

- Students should have an active participation and engagement in class: prepare the material for each class, mainly the required reading(s), and when appropriate the questions or the presentation.
- Students should prepare *two to three questions to be discussed in class* motivated and based in each required reading. Your questions might have the following structure or include some of the following points: a) what is the main claim expressed by the author? b) what are the main arguments in favour of it? c) what are the main arguments against it? d) which arguments are stronger or better justify the point? Does the overall argument work? e) is it inconsistent with a widely accepted belief? *Students should send the questions at least 12 hours in advance to the session via Moodle.*
- Students should prepare *one presentation based on at least one of the required readings*. A power point might be used, but the presentation should take *no longer than 5-7 minutes*. It should include questions to be discussed in class motivated by the reading. Students can use the structure described to inspire both the structure of the presentation and the questions for discussion. Students should send the presentation to the instructor no less than 12 hours in advance to the session so that it can be projected in class.

### ➤ **Short assignment: Mid Term Exam (30 %)**

- What: mid term exam on any of the topics covered from weeks 1 to 4.
- When: October the 25th in class.
- How: the exam will be based on the material discussed during weeks 1 to 4. Students should re-read at least the required readings associated with each week. Reflect on the problems and challenges raised by each paper, the main arguments proposed by each paper, and, when appropriate, the main critiques considered by the author and further critiques that someone might raise.

### ➤ **Final paper and outline (45 %)**

- What: 2500 words *essay* on a topic of the student's choice. 400 words *outline* to be discussed in class on the 12<sup>th</sup> week.
- When: December the 8<sup>th</sup>, by noon (12:00pm).
- How: the paper should state the problem very clearly, defend a concrete claim, clearly engage with the literature on the selected topic, develop an analysis of the reasons in favour and against your major claim. It could be a topic of your choice but within the topics covered by this programme, as well as including some of the literature (at least two works) required and/or recommended in this course's programme.
- *Please do start the outlining and then writing process as early as possible.*
- *I strongly encourage you to read the writing guidelines, as they will save you a lot of work and upsetting grades.*

- Submission: by email to the instructor.

## **Grades**

According to the CEU grading system, your work and performance in this course will be judged in light of the following grading system:

- F= Fail. Poor. Considerable further work is required.
- C+= Minimum Pass. Performance meets the minimum criteria.
- B- = Satisfactory. Fair, but with significant shortcomings.
- B = Good. Generally sound work with a number of notable errors.
- B+ = Very good. Above the average standard but with some errors.
- A- = Excellent. Outstanding performance with minor errors.
- A = Outstanding. Outstanding performance.

To interpret these grades, students should consider the quality of their performance in the course requirements and assignments. The quality of the performances includes the level of clarity in concepts, rigour in analysis, and in-depth understanding of the ideas expressed.

### ***Description of requirements (dates, other comments, suggestions to students)***

According to the university's policy: Students must comply with the given deadlines for submitting course assignments. In case of late submissions, 0.5 grade point from the final grade of the assignment should be deducted every 24 hours. Extensions will only be granted in exceptional cases; a justification is required.

### ***Writing Guidelines***

It is not easy to write philosophical essays, to help you do so, I recommend to read James Pryor's excellent 'Guidelines on Writing a Philosophy Paper': <http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/writing.html> and Helena de Bres 'The Pink Guide to Philosophy': <https://sites.google.com/a/wellesley.edu/pinkguidetophilosophy/>.

***Plagiarism and Academic Integrity [Extract from CEU Library, for more information: <https://ceu.libguides.com/citing/plagiarism>]*** Plagiarism occurs when you borrow another's words or ideas and do not acknowledge that you have done so. It is considered a form of academic misconduct and is a serious offense. If you have been found to have plagiarized -- deliberately or inadvertently -- you may face serious consequences. Please refer to CEU's [Policy on Plagiarism](#) and [Code of Ethics](#) for specific details.

The best way to avoid plagiarism is to always cite your sources - both within the body of your paper and in a bibliography of sources you used at the end of your paper. Citing gives credit to the original author and allows the reader to check the ideas on which you have based your own argument. It is an essential practice for good writing and academic integrity!

Please, be aware that the plagiarism policy has been updated to include the use of AI tools: <https://documents.ceu.edu/documents/p-1405-1v2201>

### ***Inclusion, Accommodations, and Learning***

To ensure that students do not face any learning barrier due to disability and in accordance with the university's commitment to diversity, the instructor can be contacted to discuss each particular case jointly with the university's [Services for Students with a Disability](#).

In case of psychological distress, be aware that the university has a [Psychological Counselling](#) service that can be used by students.

## **Course programme**

### **Week 1 – Introduction: political theory and its methods (18.09.2023)**

This week will focus on what does it mean to do political philosophy and reflect on its methodology.

#### **Session 1**

##### Required:

- Adam Swift and Stuart White. 2008. "Political theory, social science, and real politics." In David Leopold and Marc Stears (edit) *Political Theory: Methods and Approaches*, Oxford University Press.

##### Recommended:

- Andrew Walton, William Abel, Elizabeth Kahn, and Tom Parr, 2021. "Doing Political Philosophy", in *Introducing Political Philosophy: A Policy-Driven Approach*, Oxford University Press.

#### **Session 2**

##### Required:

- Christian List and Laura Valentini, "The Methodology of Political Theory", *Oxford Handbook of Philosophical Methodology*, 2016.

##### Recommended:

- Zofia Stemplowska and Adam Swift. 2012. "Ideal and nonideal theory." *The Oxford Handbook of Political Philosophy*, pp. 373–389.

### **Week 2 – Political Authority and Political Obligation**

Should we obey the commands given by the political institutions of our country of residence? Do we have a special obligation towards these institutions? What are the foundations of these special obligations, if any?

##### Required:

- John Simmons, *Moral Principles and Political Obligations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), 29-56;

##### Recommended:

- John Simmons, *Moral Principles and Political Obligations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), Chapter 3 & 4.
- 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).

- Yael Tamir. 1993. *Liberal Nationalism*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

### **Week 3 – Legitimate Political Authority I**

Is it more important that some people live better than others? Who is responsible for this? What is the metric of a good life? Those questions are especially relevant in pluralist societies governed by political institutions. However, are those institutions justified? Is political authority, i.e., a sovereign justified?

#### Required reading:

- Ronald Dworkin, 'Equality and the Good Life', *Sovereign Virtue*, Chapter 6.

#### Recommended:

- T. M. Scanlon, 'The Status of Well-Being', *Tanner Lectures on Human Values* 16: 91-143, 1996
- D. Schmidtz, 'Justifying the State,' *Ethics* (1990).
- Margaret Moore, Cara Nine, David Miller, and Anna Stilz, 'Symposium on Boundaries of Authority,' *Politics, Philosophy & Economics* (2020)

### **Week 4 – Legitimate Political Authority II**

When is authority, power, legitimate? How has the right to rule? Which considerations should guide the ruler? How does it affect the reasoning of those with a subsequent obligation to obey?

#### Required reading:

- Joseph Raz, 'Authority and Justification', *Philosophy & Public Affairs* (1985)

#### Recommended:

- Paul Billingham and Tom Parr, 'Enforcing Social Norms: The Morality of Public Shaming', *European Journal of Philosophy*, pp. 1– 20, 2020.

### **Week 5 – The Concept of Justice: distributive and social justice**

Distributive and Social views of justice. How should a liberal society distribute property? How should the institutions of a just society deal with individual capacities?

#### Required:

- Jonathan Wolff, "The Distribution of Property", pg. 133 – 166.
- Philosophy Bites, Jonathan Wolff on Disadvantage: [https://philosophybites.libsyn.com/jonathan\\_wolff\\_on\\_disadvantage](https://philosophybites.libsyn.com/jonathan_wolff_on_disadvantage)

#### Recommended:

- Iris Marion Young, "Five Faces of Oppression," in *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011),
- Martha Nussbaum. Capabilities as Fundamental Entitlements: Sen and Social Justice. *Feminist Economics* 9.2-3 (2003), 33-59.
- Cohen, G.A., 1997, "Where the Action Is: On the Site of Distributive Justice," in *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 26: 3–30.

## **Week 6: Egalitarian Justice: Liberal Egalitarianism**

Liberal egalitarianism has been one of the most discussed and influential views in the second half of the XXth century. This week will introduce, discuss, and consider some critiques to it.

### **Session 1**

#### Required:

- John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, Revised Edition, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999) §§1-4 (pages 3-19), §§10-16 (pages 47-86), §§22-24 (pages 109-123), 41-42 (pages 228-242).
- Simone Chambers, "The Politics of Equality: Rawls on the Barricades," *Perspectives on Politics*, 4, 1, 2006, (81-89).

#### Recommended:

- Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, 149-182. (Critique to Liberal Egalitarianism).

### **Session 2 (23.10):**

- *Mid Term Exam (in class)*

## **Week 7 – Equality of Opportunity and Rival Views**

The notion of equality of opportunity and fair equality of opportunity and rival views, including those focus on outcomes. Some rival view argue that equality of opportunity is not enough.

#### Required reading:

- Susan Moller Okin. (1989) *Justice, Gender, and the Family*. New York: Basic Books, Ch. 5: "Justice as Fairness – For Whom?"

#### Recommended:

- John Rawls, *A theory of justice*, sections 12-14.
- John Rawls, *Justice as Fairness: A restatement*, sections 17, 18, 20, 21.
- Anne Phillips. (2004) 'Defending Equality of Outcome', *The Journal of Political Philosophy* 12(1): 1–19.

## **Week 8 – Egalitarian Justice: Luck-Egalitarianism**

Is to face the same array of options in comparison to others the best egalitarian distribution? Is it better than a strict equality counterpart as it better captures responsibility for actions?

#### Required reading:

- Richard Arneson. "Equality and Equal Opportunity for Welfare". *Philosophical Studies* 56/1 (1989): 77-93.

#### Recommended:

- Ronald Dworkin. 'Equality of Resources' in Clayton, M. and A. Williams (eds.) *Social Justice* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), pp. 110-133.
- K. C. Tan, "A Defense of Luck Egalitarianism." *The Journal of Philosophy*, 105/11 (2008), 665-690.

## **Week 9 – Egalitarian Justice: Relational Egalitarianism**

Relational equality was first presented as a refocus for egalitarian views aiming at a society of equals. However, other authors do not see different egalitarian views as incompatible.

### 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.
- Kasper Lippert-Rasmussen. (2018). ‘(Luck and Relational) Egalitarians. *Oxford Studies in Political Philosophy* Volume 4, 4, 81.

## **Week 10 – Egalitarian Justice: Feminist Theory**

Feminism theory, trans philosophy, intersectionality, and critiques to analytical methods.

### Required reading:

- Anca Gheaus, “Gender Justice,” *Journal of Ethics and Social Justice* 6:1 (2011), pp. 2-29.

### Recommended:

- Talia Mae Bettcher, 2019, “What Is Trans Philosophy?”, *Hypatia*, 34(4): 644–667
- Susan Moller Okin. “Toward a Humanist Justice”. *Justice, Gender and the Family* (New York: Basic Books, 1989), 170-86.
- Tina Fernandes Botts, 2018, “Race and Method: The Tuvel Affair”, *Philosophy Today*, 62(1): 51–72. (Critique to analytical methods, analytical feminism).

## **Week 11 – Democratic Theory**

Democracy have been justified, due to its intrinsic or instrumental value. Those arguments have often been mutually exclusive. Democratic scholars often relate democracy with equal treatment.

### Required reading:

- Richard J. Arneson. 2003, “Defending the Purely Instrumental Account of Democratic Legitimacy”, *Journal of Political Philosophy*, 11(1): 122–132.
- Steven Wall, “Democracy and Equality,” *Philosophical Quarterly* (2007), pp. 416-438

### Recommended:

- Richard J. Arneson. 2004, “Democracy Is Not Intrinsically Just”, in *Justice and Democracy*, Keith Dowding, Robert E. Goodin, and Carole Pateman (eds.), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 40–58
- Thomas Christiano, “The Authority of Democracy,” *Journal of Political Philosophy* (2003).
- Viehoff, Daniel, 2014, “Democratic Equality and Political Authority”, *Philosophy & Public Affairs*, 42(4): 337–375.
- Niko Kolodny. 2014a, “Rule Over None I: What Justifies Democracy?”, *Philosophy & Public Affairs*, 42(3): 195–229.

## **Week 12 (04.12 and 06.12)– Final Term Paper Outline Presentation and Discussion**

### ***Disclaimer***

The final programme of the course might be subjected to changes due to time constraints and class dynamics that might affect the capacity to cover all proposed readings. In any case, readings will be available at the course Moodle and students can discuss them with the instructor during office hours.