

Gov 63, Spring 2017  
“Research Practice Course”  
Tuesday 2-4, CGIS K401

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## RECENT POLITICAL THEORY

### Course Description

This class is designated as a “research practice course”, which means that it is particularly aimed at students in the Government Department who are thinking about writing a Senior Honors Thesis in political theory. However, if there are spaces available, students from other years (and other departments) are very welcome to join. Some background knowledge of political theory is assumed.

The focus will be on contemporary political philosophy as practised in the English-speaking world.

The best way to express what we are trying to achieve in this class is that it is aimed at helping students to make the transition from consumer to producer of political theory – to go from being a reader, by way of being a critical and informed reader, to someone who has their own point of view to add to the debate. To do that well, of course, the first thing to be able to do is to know the debates and move around in them with some confidence. Furthermore, you need to be aware of the way in which the smaller, more manageable problems that are suitable for a term paper or an undergraduate thesis are embedded within a wider context of thought and argument. Political theory is unlike the study of empirical politics in that there aren’t specific methodological tools that you need to acquire, but you do need to be able to think clearly and to be able to express complex arguments lucidly in writing.

For that reason, the class is structured in three parts, all of which are aimed at helping participants write a term paper that, in turn, might act as a launching point for a future thesis. In the first part, we shall read some of the most important recent work in political philosophy. In the second part, we shall continue our survey more selectively, choosing our readings to suit the interests of the seminar participants. In the third part students will be presenting their own work in draft form.

### Assignments

Students will be expected to participate actively at all stages. In the first weeks, they will be expected to provide introductory presentations to the assigned readings (approximately 10 minutes, single-page hand-out recommended). In the second section, students will be encouraged to collaborate with me in the selection of appropriate readings and to provide introductory presentations. A meeting will be arranged with the Government Department liaison librarian, Kathleen Sheehan, who will help to introduce

you to library research methods. In the third stage, students will present their own work and assign an appropriate reading to accompany it.

A research paper of 15-25 pages is due at **noon on Tuesday, May 2**. It is expected that it will be based on the participant's presentation to the class.

Grades will be determined based on class presentations and participation (50%) and the research paper (50%). Late papers will be penalized at the rate of 1/3 of a grade a day (this penalty will be waived only in the case of medical emergencies). Plagiarism will be reported to the Harvard administration. All assignments must be completed to pass the course.

## SCHEDULE

*Week 1 (January 24) Planning and Introductory Presentation*

*Week 2 (January 31) Rawls and – some of – his critics*

Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, Chs. 1 and 2

Thomas Pogge, *Rawls: His Life and Theory of Justice*, Ch. 2

Susan Okin, "Justice and Gender", *Philosophy and Public Affairs (=PPA)* 16 (1987), pp. 3-46

G. A. Cohen, "Incentives, Inequality and Community", *Tanner Lectures on Human Values*

*Week 3 (February 7) Luck Egalitarianism*

G. A. Cohen, "On the Currency of Egalitarian Justice", *Ethics* (1989), pp. 287- 337

A. Sen, "Equality of What?", *Tanner Lectures on Human Values* (1980), also in Sen, *Choice, Welfare and Measurement*

R. Dworkin, *Sovereign Virtue*, pp. 11-64

Elizabeth Anderson, "What is the Point of Equality?", *Ethics* (1999), pp. 287-337

*Week 4 (February 14) Rights (1) – basic ideas*

*Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, article "Rights"

*Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, article "Human Rights"

Jeremy Waldron, Introduction to Waldron (ed.), *Rights* (Oxford Readings in Philosophy)

Ronald Dworkin, *Taking Rights Seriously*, Ch. 7

Leif Wenar, "The Nature of Rights", *PPA* 33 (2005), pp. 223-53

*Week 5 (February 21) Rights (2) – critical perspectives*

Richard Rorty, "Human Rights, Rationality and Sentimentality", in *Philosophical Papers*, Volume 3

Jeremy Waldron, "Security and Liberty: the Image of Balance", *Journal of*

*Political Philosophy* 11 (2005), pp. 223-53  
Joseph Raz, "Human Rights without Foundations", *Oxford Legal Studies Research Paper* No 14 (2007) downloadable from *Social Science Research Network*  
Will Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship*, Chs. 1, 3

*Weeks 6 (February 28), 7 (March 7), 8 (March 21) – readings to be decided in class by group according to student interest*

Reading topic options in the past have included:

- Immigration and Citizenship
- Libertarianism (Left and Right)
- Dignity
- Freedom of Speech
- Free Choice of Occupation
- Distribution and Desert
- Punishment
- Deliberative Theories of Democracy
- Ideal and Non-Ideal Theory

*Week 9 (March 28) – Library Meeting*

Harvard University Library liaison for the Gov. Dept., Kathleen Sheehan, will be meeting in Lamont Library

*Week 10 (April 4) – session on Writing Political Theory*

*Week 11 (April 11) – student presentations, readings to be decided by members of class*

*Weeks 12 (April 18), 13 (April 25) – student presentations, readings to be decided by members of class*

If you have any questions, please feel free to e-mail me.