

WHAT IS JUSTICE?

Fall 2025

Mondays and Wednesdays

Maxey 204

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Office Hours: Tuesdays, 2-4 pm, and Wednesdays, 10:30-11:30 am, or by appointment

Course Description

Political theory has long been critiqued as an out-of-touch approach to understanding or responding to “real world” problems. Some have even suggested that by prioritizing questions regarding how our shared political institutions *ought* to function, political theory does little to ameliorate *actual* instances of injustice, inequality, or unfreedom. In this course, we will challenge such critiques by not only engaging with a variety of theories on how government should function, but also applying these same theories to concrete, contemporary concerns. We will take as our guiding questions: What do justice, equality, and freedom mean, and how might we arrange our political system to best realize these values? If we desire a “just” society, how should we distribute goods like educational opportunities, income and wealth, and political power? What could justify the presence of political, social, or economic inequalities? How should we balance individual liberty against the collective well-being? What responsibility do individuals and states have in rectifying the unfreedoms experienced by their peers and constituents? And finally, can true freedom ever be reached in political society?

By way of exploring possible answers to these questions, we will undertake a sustained engagement with four leading philosophies in Western political thought: utilitarianism, libertarianism, egalitarian liberalism, and Marxism. To assess the strengths and weaknesses of these philosophies, we will consider their applications to and implications for a range of complex socio-political issues, including racial and gender justice, public health concerns, civil disobedience, and more. Our goal in bringing these philosophies to bear on these issues is not to provide definitive solutions to any problems that may arise from our inquiries, but rather to think more deeply and holistically about the benefits and drawbacks that emanate from reconceptualizing the foundations of our political order, and to write and argue about them in a persuasive way. We will, in other words, emerge from this course better equipped to think carefully and critically about competing accounts of “the political good” and to assess the impact that the implementation of these accounts would have on: 1) improving our collective wellbeing by 2) addressing persistent social, legal, and economic ills.

One of the key ways in which we will add to our understanding of “the political good” as a guiding concept for our collective and individual well-being will be to treat our course as an incubator for “political community.” What this means, in practice, is that we will be cultivating an atmosphere of active learning and engagement – we will each bear responsibility for teasing out the implications of a given work of political philosophy on the “real world” through participation in small groups, large groups, discrete written work and exams, and durable forms of philosophical interpretation that will persist across future semesters. Our overarching pedagogical motivation, in other words, is to consider what we might owe to one another as philosophers in an intentional political community.

Learning Objectives

This is a course in political theory taught in the liberal arts tradition of close reading, thoughtful writing, interactive discussion, and critical thinking. This course will introduce you to several of the key texts, questions, and concepts in political philosophy, and several of the modes of thinking and argument in political philosophy. As such, the learning objectives of this course are as follows:

- 1) Develop skills of careful and thoughtful reading
- 2) Improve the ability to follow and assess arguments
- 3) Enhance critical writing skills and creative thinking about complex topics
- 4) Make progress in being able to articulate relevant thoughts in front of others
- 5) Learn and engage with key arguments in the tradition of Western political thought

An Inclusive Learning Environment

Creating Community. Due to the collaborative nature of this course, I encourage your consistent attendance and participation. At the beginning of each class, I will take roll and I will invite you to: 1) put away your electronic devices and 2) take out that day's assigned reading. Because this is a large class, it is important for us to intentionally and creatively build community with one another, which rests on removing barriers to seeing and engaging with those around us. I will also – at crucial points during class and over the course of the semester – make space for us to use small group discussions and engage with movement as a tool of learning.

Classroom Climate. One key feature of creating an inclusive classroom is to understand the classroom as a cooperative learning community that cultivates an atmosphere of active, mutual respect for all. To this end, and given that this course covers sensitive materials, I have zero tolerance for belittling, harassment, or abusive and inappropriate language and behavior. Over the course of the semester, we will read works that make us uncomfortable or unsure about ourselves and our knowledge. These feelings of uncomfortableness or unsureness are welcome and encouraged; indeed, such feelings motivate discussion, critical engagements with the text, and reassessment of our own opinions, biases, and commitments. Uncomfortableness or unsureness is not an appropriate reason for opting-out of discussion or delegating textual interpretation to other individuals; if you feel hesitant about speaking in class on sensitive or difficult topics, please do come see me and we can work together to create a plan for your engagement with the class.

Flexibility. I recognize that this semester, as with the last several semesters, poses significant challenges to learning. We are in the wake of a pandemic, and we are learning how to adapt to new and emerging difficulties in the realm of politics – and we, unfortunately, cannot predict what the next several months will look like. Many of us are also reckoning with forms of harm or trauma that are deep-seated. Because of this, the readings, assignments, and guidelines in this course have been designed to keep flexibility and accessibility in mind. If you are struggling with anything – adjusting to life on campus, this course or its materials, problems at home, mental health – please do consider me a source of support.

Course Materials and Reading Preparation

Plato, *Five Dialogues: Euthyphro, Apology, Crito, Meno, Phaedo*, Hackett edition, 978-0-87220-633-5

John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism*, Hackett edition, 978-0-87220-605-2
John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*, Hackett edition, 978-0-915144-43-3
Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State, Utopia*, 978-0-465-05100-7
John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* 978-0-674-01772-6
Additional readings as posted to the course Canvas page

In this course, it is not required (although it is recommended) that you purchase the texts from which we will draw. I will make sure that all the readings contained in the syllabus are uploaded to our shared Canvas site; if you have difficulty accessing our texts online, please do not hesitate to be in touch. If you do purchase the books listed above, please do not purchase e-books as they often make use of different pagination.

I have high expectations for your ability to keep up with the assigned materials. Indeed, the texts we are reading must be approached with care, as the phrasing and language used can initially appear quite opaque. Moreover, the provocations, subtleties, and tensions in our readings cannot be captured by online summaries. It is important to keep up with the reading schedule as you may otherwise be lost in class and unable to participate. I follow Whitman College's guidelines on out-of-class preparation: you are expected to spend at least three hours outside of class on course materials for every hour you spend in class. Please budget your time wisely.

Office Hours

I hold two drop-in sets of in-person office hours on Tuesdays from 2-4 pm and Wednesdays from 10:30-11:30 am, and I am also available by appointment (this may be via Zoom). You may drop into my office hours in Maxey 130 at any point during my availability – no notice or appointment necessary.

I much prefer to discuss substantive matters (like questions on a given text or expectations for an essay) face-to-face (via Zoom or in-person meeting), rather than over email. Please think of me as a resource – office hours are a space in which you can pose questions, deepen your knowledge of course materials, discuss paper ideas, connect the themes of the course to your other intellectual interests and pursuits, and more. I especially encourage you to meet with me if you have any reservations about participating in class, or if there is anything outside of class that impacts your ability to learn.

Grading Policy and Assignments

This course will be letter graded, and the assignments in this course have been designed to give you some creative space to explore connections between our course, your community, and our shared world. All work submitted must be your own. Your final grades will be assigned based on the following rubric, rounding up at the .5 mark:

A: 100-93	B: 87-83	C: 77-73	D: 67-63
A-: 92-90	B-: 82-80	C-: 72-70	D-: 62-60
B+: 89-88	C+: 79-78	D+: 69-68	F: 59 and below

Each assignment is briefly described below the table, but we will discuss them in a more in-depth fashion as the semester progresses. The relative weight and due date of each component is as follows:

Assignment	Grade Percentage	Modality	Due Date
Engagement, Attendance, and Participation (inclusive of being on call)	20%	Letter Grade	Ongoing
Theory in Practice Paper	10%	Credit	See schedule below
Take Home Midterm Exam	25%	Letter Grade	The midterm exam will be distributed on Tuesday, October 12, at 12 pm. It will be due on Thursday, October 14, at 11:59 pm.
Pay it Forward (creative assignment)	15%	Letter Grade	Friday, December 3, at 11:59 pm
Take Home Final Exam	30%	Letter Grade	The final exam will be distributed on Thursday, December 9 at 12 pm. It will be due on Monday, December 13, at 2 pm.
Extra Credit Opportunities • Midterm Exam Review • Final Exam Review	Points added to your exams or participation grade	Points Added	See schedule below

Engagement, attendance and participation. Your consistent attendance and thoughtful participation are essential to achieving the learning outcomes identified for this course. You are allowed **two** absences over the course of the semester, no questions asked – these absences, however, do not apply to the day that you are “on call,” unless in the event of an illness or an emergency. Any absence beyond these two initial absences will reduce your overall attendance and participation grade by one step (for example, from a B+ to a B). If you have ongoing concerns (parenting or familial responsibilities, etc), something troubling arises, or you experience an emergency, please contact me as soon as you are able – we will work together to come to a solution.

Please know that participation extends beyond merely showing up. I expect the classroom to be a kind of intentional community, where the free and vital exchange of ideas is encouraged; respect for

persons is fundamental to cultivating this atmosphere. Participation includes asking questions, actively listening, offering an interpretation of a text or of a peer's comments, providing oral or written feedback on peers' essays, synthesizing differing arguments, promoting classroom discourse, attending office hours, and meeting with a Writing Center consultant, just to name a few. If you feel hesitant about speaking in class on sensitive or difficult topics, as will happen over the course of the semester, please do come talk to me and we can work together to create a plan for your engagement with the class.

However, if you feel sick, please do not come to class – I would also encourage you to seek Covid testing. If you are ill, do let me know as soon as you are able, so that I may anticipate your absence. If you have been exposed to Covid, I would be happy to welcome you to class with a negative Covid test – if you have difficulty accessing a Covid test, please do not hesitate to reach out. If you miss two or more consecutive classes due to illness, it is expected that you will respond to course materials in writing.

The practice of cold calling. In popular culture, cold calling – which is the practice of calling on students who have not raised their hands – is associated with high-stress situations and public humiliation. Such representations often depict a professor with a nearly impossible to answer question choosing an unsuspecting student at random – and then making an example of the student's answer.

This is not something I practice. Over the course of the semester, I will ask pre-assigned small groups of students to be “on call” twice. Individuals within these groups will be asked to take the lead in recalling what we discussed last class period, interpreting a particular passage, posing questions to the group, and more – think of yourselves as the starting line-up for a given class period. Following the “cold call,” the discussion will be opened up to the entire class. This may seem stressful at first, a feeling with which I sincerely empathize. However, studies have shown that, in classes with low-stakes cold calling, student comfort with voluntarily participating in class rises and holistic understanding of the material significant increases. These studies also report that students feel more comfortable in a class in which all students have a “stake” in the conversation – and it allows me to hear from those that often feel lost in larger classes like ours. If you have accommodations that exempt you from speaking in class, or if you have ongoing trauma associated with class participation, please do come speak with me and we can set up an alternative arrangement.

Formation of small groups. Below, you will find your small group assignments. These groups will determine when you are on call, when you turn in your theory in practice paper, and your review groups for exams. More will be said about these assignments below. Your small groups, and the associated deadlines, are as follows:

[Redacted]

Theory in Practice Leadership and Short Papers. Over the course of the semester, we will bring our philosophical texts into conversation with problems, examples, or conundrums drawn from “the real world.” These examples will be accompanied by a series of prompts on Canvas that will guide our in-class discussions. In the table above, you will see that you have been assigned a leadership role and a paper for one theory in practice day. This means that, on the day of your assigned theory in practice, you will have a short, 2-3-page, double-spaced paper due by 12 pm. You should endeavor, in response to the prompts outlined, craft an argumentative thesis that clearly states your position, details the nuances of the problem or example at hand, and then resolves it via your engagement with the text.

This paper will be graded credit/no credit in order to allow you to argue freely and creatively. You should then also be prepared to use the argument contained in your paper to move our collective class discussion forward.

Take Home Midterm Exam. The midterm exam will be distributed on Tuesday, October 12, at 12 pm and will be due on Thursday, October 14, at 11:59 pm. You can expect to be asked to complete several short answer questions and two longer essay questions. Time in class will be devoted to collective review and there will be an extra credit opportunity associated with your preparation.

Pay it Forward Assignment. This course asks you to consider what you owe to one another as philosophers in a political community. One of the key components of this is considering how we might teach one another the core tenets of political philosophy. This assignment asks you share what you have learned with your peers, both in this course and in future iterations of this course, by creating a durable resource. Moreover, it asks you to do so in a way that allows you to be creative – to think beyond the normal confines of a paper. In the latter half of the semester, I will circulate a sign-up sheet that asks you to choose a discrete topic from our course; ideally, you will choose one that you find interesting or compelling or challenging. Once you have a good grasp of the topic, create a resource to help others. Some possibilities include: graphic novella (in which you create a short story that explains a key idea); mind-map (construct a mind-map for a specific topic); power-point deck (create a short series of lecture slides that teach a major point of a lesson); news story video (present a key idea from a lesson as if it were a breaking story for a television news program); audio (create a short podcast that provides a tutorial on a key idea in a lesson or that connects to a key idea in a public debate); photo essay (use a photo or series of photos to illustrate a key idea in a lesson, and then use short amounts of text to explain how the photos illustrate the idea); social media activity (create a TikTok or a Twitter thread with gifs that explain a core concept covered in a lesson). You should accompany this durable resource with a 2-3-page, double-spaced paper explaining what concept you are portraying and why you chose your particular medium. This assignment will be letter graded.

Take Home Final Exam. The final exam will be distributed on Thursday, December 9 at 12 pm. It will be due on Monday, December 13, at 2 pm. It will be open book and open notes, and it will be cumulative. You can expect to complete several short answer questions and several longer essay questions. Time in class will be devoted to collective review and there will be an extra credit opportunity associated with your exam.

Extra Credit Opportunities. There will be several opportunities to earn extra credit in this course, and more will be said about these opportunities as the dates near.

Paper Formatting

Where specified, written work must be uploaded to our Canvas site by the date and time assigned. Your papers should be formatted as follows: 1-inch margins (top, bottom, left, and right), 12-point Times New Roman font, and double-spaced line formatting. Your papers should also be submitted in .doc or .docx format. *Do not submit a .pdf or share a Google doc with me.*

For citations, I would prefer in-text parenthetical citations (rather than footnotes), and I would ask that if an assignment is 3 pages long (for instance), you write to the end of the third page (rather than stopping at 2.25 pages).

Late Policy

The principle guiding belief in this course is flexibility and accessibility. We do not know what challenges await us, and many of us struggling with emergent issues related to health, economic stability, and technology.

The central assessments in this class – the midterm exam, the pay-it-forward project, and the final exam – come with an automatic 24-hour grace period. This means that, if the midterm exam is due on Thursday at 11:59 pm, you may take until Friday at 11:59 pm with no questions asked and no penalty. Every student in this class also has a one-time 3-day extension that they may take advantage of (with respect to the central assessments), with the exception of the final exam. In order to take advantage of your extension, please email me to let me know that you will be using your extension.

Email and Communications

I will endeavor to respond to any questions you send me within 24 hours, although I may take up to 48 hours over the weekend or during a break. While you should feel free to contact me with any questions regarding the course, I prefer not to engage in a substantive discussion about the material over email. If you would like to talk to me about the reading or would like to discuss a particular topic further, ask in class, come to office hours, or schedule an appointment.

Academic Integrity, Plagiarism, and Large Language Models

Broadly understood, plagiarism is the presentation of another's words or ideas as one's own without attributing the proper source. Plagiarism includes copying material from books and journals, as well as taking material from the internet. Plagiarism also includes privately purchasing or obtaining papers from others, which one then presents as one's own. Any material taken word-for-word from another source must be placed in quotation marks and footnoted or cited within the text. You can use ideas and information from other authors without directly quoting from them, but you must acknowledge them in your footnotes or parenthetical documentation.

For any student discovered to have committed plagiarism, I will refer the matter to Whitman College's office of academic integrity. The procedures and definitions of plagiarism can be found here: <https://www.whitman.edu/dean-of-students/student-handbook/student-rights-and-responsibilities/academic-integrity-policy>.

In this course, I encourage you to be skeptical of open-sourced websites like Wikipedia and SparkNotes. If you feel lured to them regardless, you must cite them and you ought to remain intellectually vigilant and adopt a critical stance towards these sources.

Your use of large language models (like ChatGPT, but inclusive of other AI generators) is prohibited in this class, and the use of large language models in this class will constitute a violation of my academic integrity/plagiarism policy. Because one of the goals of this class is to develop your knowledge of the law, and to investigate the nuances of it, you would undermine your learning by using large language models and/or AI technology. If you feel attracted to these technologies because of feeling like you are overwhelmed or unsure, please reach out to me – I can help or I can direct you to further resources, like the Writing Center.

Three primary reasons drive my decision to ask you to refrain from large language models (like ChatGPT and other AI generators): 1) the [massive environmental degradation](#) that results from its use; 2) the [detrimental impacts that it has on intellectual development and individual growth](#); and 3) the [likely illegality of its use of copyrighted material](#).

Electronic Etiquette Policy

Computer use (and the use of tablets and e-readers) during class is by permission only, as the minimization of electronic devices also minimizes the chances of distraction. There is the inevitable temptation to text, check email, scroll Instagram, or buy a pair of shoes from your favorite online retailer. I ask that, to the best of your ability, you take notes with pen and paper – but if you are a student who wishes to use a laptop for notetaking, please come see me during office hours or catch me after class. For more on the benefits of a no-laptops policy, see:

<https://www.newyorker.com/tech/elements/the-case-for-banning-laptops-in-the-classroom>.

This class may be audio recorded by students who have an accommodation to do so as granted by Access and Disability Services. Recording of any session in this course other than for the above purposes is strictly prohibited, and it would be in violation of Washington’s Wiretapping and Electronic Surveillance laws.

Title IX Disclosure

As a member of Whitman College’s faculty, I am a mandatory reporter for instances of sex- or gender-based harassment and sexual violence. This means that I am required – by law – to report to Whitman any mentions or observances of sex- or gender-based discrimination and assault. Because our course may engage with narratives of sex- and gender-based harms, please be aware that *specific* discussions of such harms will be reported to our Title IX office. In sum: I can promise you respect and privacy, but not absolute confidentiality. If you have any questions about Title IX, please reach out.

Religious Accommodations Policy

In accordance with Washington State Law and the College’s Religious Accommodations Policy, I will provide reasonable accommodations for all students who, because of religious observances, may have conflicts with assignments or required attendance in class. Please review the course schedule at the beginning of the semester to determine any such potential conflicts and send me an email by the end of the second week of class so that I can take note of your religious accommodations. If you believe that I have failed to abide by this policy, here is a link to the [Grievance Policy](#), where you can pursue this matter.

Accommodations

Learning Accessibility. Whitman values diverse types of learners and is committed to ensuring that each student is afforded equitable access to participate in all learning experiences. If you have (or think you might have) a learning difference or a disability – including a mental health, medical, or physical impairment – that would hinder your access to learning or demonstrating knowledge in this class, please contact Assistant Director of Academic Resources: Disability Support. They will confidentially explain the accommodation request process and the type of documentation that they will need to determine your eligibility for reasonable accommodations.

Physical Accessibility. My office is located on the 1st floor of Maxey Hall and our classroom is located on the 2nd floor of Maxey Hall. Maxey has an elevator, which can be accessed in the main vestibule of the building, next to the administrative office. If the elevator is out, or if you have challenges navigating the building, do let me know and we will work together to identify accessible arrangements.

I reserve the right to revise or alter this syllabus as the semester progresses, particularly given the challenges of Covid.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Unit 1: What is Justice?

Wednesday, September 3

Introductions

Ursula Le Guin, “The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas,” pp. 1-5

Study questions: 1) What comes to mind when you hear the word “justice”? 2) Is justice about producing good consequences for the greatest number of people, or is there a constraint against doing or permitting harm that is always wrong to violate? 3) Le Guin’s story explores whether it is ever right to sacrifice one person (or a few people) for the good of many people. What do you think of those who remain in Omelas and those who leave? If you were in Omelas, what would you do?

Monday, September 8

Law, morality, and justice, part 1

Plato, “Apology” in *Five Dialogues*, pp. 21-44

Study questions: 1) For what crime(s) is Socrates on trial? 2) How does Socrates characterize his actions? For what purpose did Socrates act and how does he understand the law to constrain his actions? 3) How does Socrates envision an Athenian state and the role of dissent within it? 4) How does Socrates respond to his ultimate sentence? Why does he respond, in your view, the way he does? 5) Do you agree with Socrates’ sentence? How might you have reacted if you were Socrates?

Wednesday, September 10

Law, morality, and justice, part 2

Plato, “Crito” in *Five Dialogues*, pp. 45-57

Study questions: 1) In the “Crito,” Socrates concludes that he must obey Athenian law and accept his death sentence even though he seems to think the sentence is unjust. Should a person obey an unjust law? Why or why not? 2) Is it ever right to sacrifice a single person or a minority of people for the good of the majority? Ursula Le Guin’s story from August 31 asks what price can be paid for an idyllic life. How would Socrates respond to those who stay in and those who leave Omelas?

Monday, September 15

Theory in practice: civil disobedience and political obligations

Martin Luther King, Jr. “Letter from a Birmingham Jail,” pp. 1-6

Short paper due: Group 1

Unit 2: What is Utilitarianism?

Wednesday, September 17

Hedonistic utilitarianism

Jeremy Bentham, *Introduction to the Principles & Morals of Legislation*, chs. 1-4, 13, and 17 (sec. 1)

Study questions: 1) What is Bentham's "principle of utility" or "greatest happiness principle"? 2) Bentham says that pleasure is the only thing that is good in itself. Is he right? What about knowledge? Or beauty? Or achieving the goals you set for yourself? 3) How could Bentham make a utilitarian case against slavery or against punishing the innocent? 4) In Bentham's view, should a community enforce its public morals through legal sanctions? Why or why not?

Monday, September 22

A deontological challenge to utilitarianism: the murderer at the door!

Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, excerpts
Immanuel Kant, "On the Supposed Right to Lie," pp. 63-67

Study questions: 1) Why does Kant believe a "metaphysics of morals" to be absolutely necessary? 2) How does Kant want us to discover, and subsequently act in accordance with, such morality? Why do you think Kant wants us to reject the use of examples to guide our understanding of morality? 3) Kant writes, "There is, therefore, only a single categorical imperative and it is this: act only in accordance with that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it become a universal law." What does he mean by this? 4) How does Kant's interpretation of lying follow from the categorical imperative? 5) Do you think that Kant is right? Would you lie to protect a friend or family member from harm?

Wednesday, September 24

Continued: the murderer at the door!

Please re-read the texts from Monday, September 22

Monday, September 29

Theory in practice: the trolley problem and terroristic threats

Michael Walzer, "Political Action: The Problem of Dirty Hands," pp. 160-168

Short paper due: Group 2

Wednesday, October 1

Mill's revisionist utilitarianism: the value of self-development

John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism*, chs. 1-2, 5

Study questions: 1) How does Mill distinguish between higher and lower pleasures? What does it mean to say that the quality of the pleasure is higher? 2) Is Mill right about the kinds of pleasures that those “competent” to judge would prefer? What sorts of people are “competent” to judge the quality of pleasures and the goodness of lives? 3) Does Mill’s higher/lower distinction reflect an objectionable kind of elitism or an undue emphasis on intellectual pleasures? 4) Do you agree with Mill that it is better “to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied?”

Monday, October 6

Reconciling individual liberty with utilitarian philosophy
John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*, chs. 1-2

Study questions: 1) Mill says that *On Liberty* defends “one very simple principle,” also known as the Harm Principle (p. 9). What does this principle say? 2) Consider Mill’s utilitarian argument for the Harm Principle. How is the general welfare improved by tolerating religious, philosophical, and moral dissent? What are the costs of such toleration? Why does he think the benefits of tolerating dissent outweigh the costs? 3) Mill defends freedom of speech. Why is freedom of speech valuable? When, if ever, can freedom of speech be restricted in Mill’s view?

Wednesday, October 8

Limits on individual freedom
John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*, chs. 3 and 5

Study questions: 1) In chapter 3, Mill discusses the freedom to *act* upon one’s beliefs and opinions. When it comes to *self-regarding* acts, Mill argues that one should be permitted great freedom in carrying one’s beliefs into practice. Why? Be sure to examine Mill’s discussion of individuality. 2) Do you think that conduct should only be regulated if it is *harmful* to others? What about regulating conduct out of a concern for the person’s own welfare (e.g. drugs, seat belts), or because it is repulsive (e.g. bestiality), or because it is offensive to others (e.g. public nudity), or because some judge it to be morally wrong (e.g. suicide, physician-assisted suicide)? 3) In chapter 5, Mill discusses the use of drugs and drug sales, gambling, prostitution, the decision to procreate, and education. Does he think any of these activities should be subject to government regulation? Why or why not? 4) What might Mill say about legal restrictions on racist hate speech or restrictions on pornography?

Monday, October 13

In-class review for midterm exam
Extra credit opportunity available

Wednesday, October 15

No Class – Take Home Midterm Examination
Prof. Heard will be in her office during class time if you have questions

Unit 3: What is Libertarianism?

Monday, October 20

Possessive libertarianism

John Locke, *Second Treatise on Government*, ch. 5

Study questions: 1) In Locke's view, what is the relationship between human labor and private property? 2) Do you agree with Locke that most of the value of an appropriated thing (e.g. a cultivated piece of land) is due to human labor? 3) What moral constraints does Locke impose on the acquisition of private property?

Wednesday, October 22

Possessive libertarianism: defending a minimal state

Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State, Utopia*, pp. xi-xiv, ch. 2, pp. 26-35 and 48-53 of ch. 3, and pp. 113-119 of ch. 5

Study questions: 1) What is a "minimal state"? Do you think Nozick provides a plausible story of how the state could emerge in a morally permissible way, without violating anyone's rights? 2) Nozick thinks about individual rights as "side constraints" (p. 30). What is this idea? 3) Nozick criticizes utilitarianism for its inability to deal with "utility monsters." What are they? Do you agree that Bentham and Mill's utilitarian theories cannot address this problem? 4) How does Nozick address the problem of the individual anarchist or "independent" who initially refuses to accept the protective services of the state?

Monday, October 27

Possessive libertarianism: historical entitlement and justice

Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State, Utopia*, pp. 149-164 and 167-82 of ch. 7

Study questions: 1) What are the three principles that make up Nozick's theory of justice? 2) What is the difference between "historical" and "end-state" principles of justice? Which type of theory is Nozick's? 3) Riffing on Marx, Nozick sums up his theory with the following maxim: "From each as they choose, to each as they are chosen." In prizing individual choice and liberty above all, what, if anything, does his theory fail to account for? 4) Nozick famously said: "Taxation of earnings from labor is on par with forced labor" (p. 169). Do you see any differences between taxing someone's earnings and forcing someone to labor? Are these differences morally significant?

Wednesday, October 29

Theory in practice: reparations

Ta-Nehisi Coates, "The Case for Reparations," excerpts

Short paper due: Group 3

Unit 4: What is Egalitarian Liberalism?

Monday, November 3

Rawls's theory of justice

John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, sections 1-5

Study questions: 1) Rawls presents the ideal of a fair society in which life chances are not settled by differences in social backgrounds or native endowments. Is this ideal attractive to you? Why or why not? 2) Are native endowments (one's natural talents) morally on a par with the contingencies of social background (e.g. one's social class)? What does it mean to say that both are "arbitrary from a moral point of view"? 3) Following Locke, Rousseau, and Kant, Rawls's approach to justice is to imagine a social contract in which individuals come together to choose the basic principles that will govern their society. Is the idea of a hypothetical social contract a good way to think about justice? 4) what is the "original position" and what role does it play in Rawls's theory? 5) What does Rawls mean when he says, "Utilitarianism does not take seriously the distinction between persons" (p. 27)?

Wednesday, November 5

No Class – Prof. Heard Away at the Association for Political Theory

Please use this time to rest and relax

Monday, November 10

Reconciling liberty and equality: Rawls's two principles of justice

John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, sections 11-13, 22, 24-25, 29

Study questions: 1) Which liberties does Rawls include in his list of "basic liberties"? 2) In sections 12-13, Rawls provides an informal argument for his second principle of justice. He lays out three interpretations of the second principle, which states, "Social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that they are (a) reasonably expected to be to *everyone's advantage*, and (b) attached to positions and offices *open to all*" (p. 60). He argues that "democratic equality" (a.k.a. the difference principle) is the best interpretation in contrast to the systems of "natural liberty" and "liberal equality." What are the differences between these three systems? Which, in your view, is the most desirable? 3) Is the difference principle fair to people who would be better off under a less egalitarian principle? 4) What is fair equality of opportunity, and why is it a more compelling idea than formal equality of opportunity? 4) In section 22, Rawls discusses the "circumstances of justice." What are they? What role do they play in his theory? 5) In section 24, Rawls discusses the "veil of ignorance." What kind of information is blocked by the veil? 6) What principles

would people choose behind the veil of ignorance, in a hypothetical “original position”?

Wednesday, November 12

Challenges to liberal egalitarianism: gender

Susan Moller Okin, *Justice, Gender, and the Family*, ch. 5

Study questions: 1) Okin criticizes Rawls’s theory of justice for being insufficiently attentive to sex and gender. How exactly is Rawls’s theory guilty of “blindness to sexism”? 2) Feminists have long criticized the distinction between public and private. What is this distinction and why is it a problem? 3) Rather than rejecting Rawls’s theory, Okin seeks to revise it toward developing a liberal theory of gender justice. What revisions does she call for? Do her revisions answer the objections she raises against Rawls? 4) Okin argues for “minimizing” gender and its eventual “disappearance.” Do you agree with Okin that this is a desirable goal? What sorts of policies would get us there?

Monday, November 17

Challenges to liberal egalitarianism: race

Charles Mills, “Racial Equality,” pp. 43-71

Study questions: 1) How does Mills conceive of race? 2) He distinguishes between ideational racism and socio-institutional racism. What’s the difference? 3) Mills suggests four different senses or dimensions of racial equality. What are they and how do they fit together? 4) Mills argues that Rawls and his followers have largely ignored race and racism in theorizing justice. What reasons does he give for his silence? 5) Mills proposes some revisions to Rawls’s theory in order to address racial injustice. What specific revisionist principles does Mills propose?

Wednesday, November 19

Theory in practice: can institutions set you free?

Audre Lorde, “The Master’s Tools,” pp. 110-113

Short paper due: Group 4

Monday, November 24

No Class – Thanksgiving Break

Please use this time to rest and relax

Wednesday, November 28

No Class – Thanksgiving Break

Please use this time to rest and relax

Unit 5: What is Radical Egalitarianism?

Monday, December 1

Principles of communism

Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, pp. 469-491

Study questions: 1) Marx and Engels link their theory of history with revolutionary politics. What is the prime driver of history? 2) Mull over this passage: “The development of Modern Industry [...] cuts from under its feet the very foundation on which the bourgeoisie produces and appropriates products. What the bourgeoisie, therefore, produces, above all, is its own grave-diggers. Its fall and the victory of the proletariat are equally inevitable” (p. 438). How does capitalism produce its own grave-diggers? 3) What is “the distinguishing feature” of communism? 4) What do Marx and Engels mean when they say, “The working men have no country” (p. 488)? 5) How do Marx and Engels critique the bourgeois family? How would things be different for women and children under communism?

Wednesday, December 3

Thinking beyond political institutions

Dean Spade, “Solidarity Not Charity: Mutual Aid for Mobilization and Survival,” pp. 131-147

Study questions: 1) How does Spade characterize the social, political, and legal conditions of our contemporary lives? 2) Given these conditions, how does Spade define mutual aid and what role is it meant to assume in our community? 3) What distinguishes mutual aid from charity? What examples does Spade provide? 3) Can governments and their associated institutions engage in mutual aid? If so, what are the dangers of aligning government with mutual aid? 4) What does it mean to achieve liberation in the context of solidarity? How does this differ from the concepts of freedom, liberty, and equality we encountered earlier on in the semester?

Friday, December 5

Pay it Forward Assignment Due

Due to Canvas by 11:59 pm

Monday, December 8

Theory in practice: a return to Omelas

Ursula Le Guin, “The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas,” pp. 1-5

Short paper due: Group 5

Wednesday, December 10

Conclusion and final review

Extra credit opportunity available

Take Home Final Exam Due on Thursday, December 18, at 4 pm

SOME SUGGESTIONS FOR STUDYING POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

Make judicious use of highlighters. Mark up your books, but use a pen or pencil instead of a highlighter so you can jot down notes in the margins or on sticky notes, underline key passages, and summarize arguments in your own words – and then use highlighters to keep track of quotes that exemplify an argument. Use page flags to make finding important, confusing, or interesting passages easy. If you find an idea recurring through a text that seems important, keep track of the page numbers by creating your own “index” on a blank page in the book or in your notes. Write a keyword or phrase at the top of every page so often that will remind you of what is happening in the text below. This will also allow you to find specific passages more easily during discussion.

Read slowly! These texts cannot be skimmed or breezed through if you really want to understand them. They will likely take longer to read and digest than more expository texts, like textbooks, or something you might read for pleasure outside of class. Be sure to give yourself adequate time. Do not feel compelled to read all of the assigned reading in one sitting – break it up into manageable chunks and give yourself (for example) an hour to work through a 15-20 page section. The only way to read poorly is to read too quickly.

Take notes. After every reading assignment, write down its main argument, its strengths, and its weaknesses. Note what its “big idea” or concept is. Taking notes will help you understand a text, especially difficult ones, and make it easier to return to a work later. Writing down questions that arise as you’re reading can be especially helpful. If you can include page numbers, do so.

Think big! These texts ask the big questions in order to understand what counts as justice. Are politics and morality incompatible? Why have societies premised on the equality of human beings produced so much inequality? How can we attain knowledge and how will we know if our knowledge is correct? And so on. Your goal in reading these works is to ask and answer these questions as well, using the texts to help you. Ask yourself what question the author is trying to answer and how they are setting about doing so.

Context matters. Who was originally intended to read this work? Do you know anything about its reception? Does the context in which the work was created have any obvious effects on its content? What assumptions, beliefs, and claims underlie it? Why (and how) do we still read it today?

Discuss the texts with others. You will be surprised at the many different interpretations your fellow students will have of the same text. Your understanding of the text – even a text you think you fully understand – will be greatly improved by talking over these interpretations. Use class time, study groups, and email to discuss the texts.

Comprehension must come before critique. You need to understand an argument before critiquing it. Even if you do ultimately reject an argument, can you think of who might find it persuasive and why? On what grounds do you reject it?

Ask questions. If you don’t understand a passage or even the main argument of a text, don’t sit in silence. Ask about it in class. Chances are other students have the same question – or they might have an answer. If you understand a text, but have a question about its larger historical, political, or social significance, ask that too. Asking questions always provokes discussion about a text, and therefore helps you understand.