

Theory of Politics 2016/17

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A. Course Information

Tutorials

In this course we will explore some of the key debates and issues in contemporary political theory. We will have **eight tutorials**, and so cover eight topics, the first four of which I have already allocated. There is a choice of topics for the following four weeks.

You are expected to write **six essays** on six topics of your choice among those we cover. You should still do the reading for the other two topics, and should write a brief essay plan in those weeks. If you decide not to write an essay on a topic then please let me know at least three days before the relevant tutorial.

Essays should be around **2,000 words** (2,500 words maximum), and must be emailed to me by **2pm on the day before the tutorial**. They should include a bibliography of everything that you've read, and footnoted references where appropriate. Essays should also be emailed to your tutorial partner, so that they can read through them before the tutorial. Please also email essay plans in the relevant weeks.

In each tutorial, one of you will give a **five minute presentation** of your essay. I would suggest that you read out your introduction, summarise the argument of each paragraph, and then read out your conclusion. The student who does not present will respond to the argument, raise questions etc., and we will then have a discussion based on the issues that are raised. In advance of the tutorial, please think about what you would say if you gave the presentation. Checking that you are able to summarise the key arguments you make in an essay is a good way to ensure that it is cogent and coherent.

Below you will find reading lists and essay questions for the first four topics. There is a choice of essay questions each week, and you are free to choose whichever question you prefer.

The readings lists are divided into three sections:

- Useful overview(s), which are a good place to start. These really are useful, and you should read (at least) one of them each week. (Note that these are not neutral sources – the writers are still seeking to convince you of their own position on the issue.)
- Essential readings, which you should read all of. I have tried to give these in a logical order, such that they will make most sense if you read through them in this order.
- Recommended readings, which you should dip into for things relevant to your chosen essay question, and come back to during your exam revision. (If you want to know which readings are particularly relevant to the essay question you've chosen then feel free to ask.)

These readings are based on the department's reading list, which you may want to consult if you wish to do any further reading for a topic. If you have trouble finding any of the readings then please let me know in advance of the tutorial.

Below I have also given sample questions for the optional topics. We will discuss in due course which of these topics to cover in the final four tutorials. If there are any other topics on the department's reading list which you are interested in studying but for which I have not given sample questions then feel free to ask about those.

Essay tips

Essays should be focused on the specific question asked, and provide a clear answer to that question.

The aim is not to write everything you possibly can about a topic, but to give a focused and coherent answer to the specific essay question. This requires you to present and defend a thesis: it is important that you make an argument, rather than just presenting several sides of a case. For some questions, in order to remain focused, you may need to narrow down the question to one of several possible interpretations.

Your essays should begin with a clear introduction, in which you briefly state your answer to the essay question and summarise how your explanation and defence of that answer will develop through the course of the essay.

I have sent you a writing guide to political theory papers, which I recommend that you read carefully.

Lectures

The department runs a lecture series throughout Michaelmas and Hilary terms. These lectures give an excellent general sense of the debates in contemporary political philosophy. I would encourage you to attend them, even when their topic is not directly relevant to any of our tutorial topics.

Contacting me

If you have any problems or questions then please email me. If you are struggling with the workload at any point then please get in touch in advance of that week's tutorial. Please also get in touch if there is an item on the reading list that you are struggling to locate.

B. Reading lists

I. Introductions and anthologies

The books below provide useful introductions to political theory. I would recommend that you read one or two of them over the vacation before the term in which we are meeting, as preparation for the course.

- Will Kymlicka, *Contemporary Political Philosophy: An Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2nd ed., 2002).
- Adam Swift, *Political Philosophy: A Beginner's Guide for Students and Politicians* (Cambridge: Polity, 3rd ed., 2014).
- David Miller, *Political Philosophy: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

Other useful resources:

- *Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*: <http://plato.stanford.edu/>.
 - This contains excellent overviews of every topic we will cover.
- Gerald Gaus and Fred D'Agostino (eds.), *The Routledge Companion to Social and Political Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 2013).
 - This book contains helpful surveys of the contemporary debates within political philosophy on a plethora of issues, including all those we will cover.

II. Weekly reading lists

1. Liberty

Useful overviews:

- Adam Swift, *Political Philosophy: A Beginner's Guide for Students and Politicians* (Cambridge: Polity, 3rd ed., 2014), part 2.
- David Miller (ed.), *The Liberty Reader* (London: Paradigm Publishers, 2006), Introduction.

Essential:

The first four of these readings are contained both in Miller's *The Liberty Reader*, and his earlier anthology *Liberty* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).

- Isaiah Berlin, 'Two Concepts of Liberty'.
- Charles Taylor, 'What's Wrong with Negative Liberty'.
- Gerald MacCallum Jr., 'Negative and Positive Liberty'.
- Gerald Cohen, 'Capitalism, Freedom and the Proletariat'.
- Quentin Skinner, 'The Paradoxes of Political Liberty', in Miller (ed.), *Liberty*.
- David Miller, 'Constraints on Freedom', *Ethics*, 94(1) (1983).

You may well already be familiar with many of these from prelims. If so, please ensure that you read some of the optional readings too.

Recommended:

- Philip Pettit, *Republicanism: A Theory of Freedom and Government* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1997), chs. 1-3.
- Ian Carter, *A Measure of Freedom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), especially chs. 1-3.
- Jeremy Waldron, 'Homelessness and the Issue of Freedom', *U.C.L.A. Law Review*, 39(1) (1991). Also in Jeremy Waldron, *Liberal Rights: Collected Papers 1981-1991* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993) and in Robert Goodin and Philip Pettit (eds.) *Contemporary Political Philosophy: An Anthology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2nd ed., 2006).
- Philip Pettit, 'The Instability of Freedom as Noninterference: The Case of Isaiah Berlin', *Ethics*, 121(4) (2011).
- Hillel Steiner, 'Individual Liberty', in Miller (ed.), *The Liberty Reader*, or in Miller (ed.), *Liberty*.
- John Christman, 'Saving Positive Freedom', *Political Theory*, 33(1) (2005).

Essay questions:

- Under what conditions can we plausibly say that someone is unfree?
- Does poverty constitute a constraint on freedom?

Past exam questions:

- Is it possible for citizens living under an authoritarian political regime still to be 'free'? (2005)

- ‘A person is free to the extent that he is himself the source of the decisions that are embodied in his actions; unfree to the extent that these can be traced back to another agency.’ Discuss. (2005)
- Can state coercion increase the freedom of the individual? (2006)
- Is political democracy necessary to individual liberty? (2007)
- ‘A person is free to the extent that she or he is not subject to power.’ Discuss. (2008)
- What makes a society a free society? (2009)
- Is liberty a value? (2010)
- Is freedom a value, or just a set of conditions for avoiding certain harms and achieving certain goods? (2011)
- “Poverty restricts freedom; disability does not.” Do you agree? (2012)
- ‘An individual is free when others do not interfere with what she has a right to do.’ Discuss. (2013)
- How (if at all) should we distinguish lack of freedom and lack of ability? (2014)
- If freedom cannot be quantified or measured, can it still play a meaningful role in a political theory? (2015)
- Would a state make its citizens more or less free if it outlawed monasteries? (2016)

2. Rawls on justice

Useful overview:

- Will Kymlicka, *Contemporary Political Philosophy: An Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2nd ed., 2002), ch. 3.

Essential:

- John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, rev. ed., 1999), chs. 1-3 and pp. 506-14 ('Concluding Remarks on Justification').
- Ronald Dworkin, 'The Original Position', in Daniels, Norman (ed.), *Reading Rawls* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1975).

Recommended readings on Nozick's critique of Rawls:

- Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State and Utopia* (Oxford: Blackwell 1974), ch. 7.
- John Rawls, *Justice as Fairness: A Restatement* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University press, 2001), pp. 50-57. (Rawls's reply to Nozick.)

Recommended readings Cohen's critique of Rawls:

- Gerald Cohen, 'Where the Action Is: On the Site of Distributive Justice', *Philosophy & Public Affairs*, 26(1) (1997), or his *If You're an Egalitarian, How Come You're So Rich?* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), chs. 8 & 9.
- Andrew Williams, 'Incentives, Inequality, and Publicity', *Philosophy & Public Affairs*, 27(3) (1998). (A Rawlsian reply to Cohen.)
- Gerald Cohen, *Rescuing Justice and Equality* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2008), ch. 8. (Cohen's reply to Williams.)
- Samuel Scheffler, 'Is the Basic Structure Basic?', in Christine Sypnowich (ed.), *The Egalitarian Conscience: Essays in Honour of G.A. Cohen* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), or in Samuel Scheffler, *Equality and Tradition: Questions of Value in Moral and Political Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

Recommended readings on communitarian critics of Rawls:

- Michael Sandel, 'The Procedural Republic and the Unencumbered Self', *Political Theory*, 12(1) (1984).
- Stephen Mulhall and Adam Swift, 'Rawls and Communitarianism', in Freeman, Samuel (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Rawls* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

Essay questions:

- 'Principles of justice are justified because they are chosen in the original position.' Discuss.
- Should principles of justice guide individuals' choices as well as the design of basic social institutions?
 - You will need to read the Cohen and Williams optional readings in order to answer this question.

Past exam questions:

- 'It may be thought ... that the principles of justice do not apply to the family and hence those principles do not secure justice for women and their children. This is a misconception.' (RAWLS) Is it? (2005)
- Does a hypothetical social contract provide a satisfactory way to identify principles of social justice? (2006)
- What role, if any, should the notion of entitlement OR incentives play in our thinking about distributive justice? (2007)
- To what extent (if at all) is justice a matter of distributing goods and bads according to desert? (2008)
- What, if any, are the distributive implications of the principle that the state should treat its citizens with equal concern and respect? (2009)
- Is it sufficient for a just society that its coercive institutions are just? (2009)
- Does justice ever require some individuals to work for the benefit of others? (2010)
- Do the industrious owe anything to the lazy or the reckless? (2012)
- Should principles of justice guide individuals' choices as well as the design of basic social institutions? (2013)

3. Equality

Useful overviews:

- Matthew Clayton and Andrew Williams, 'Some Questions for Egalitarians', in their (eds.), *The Ideal of Equality* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002).
- Adam Swift, *Political Philosophy: A Beginner's Guide for Students and Politicians* (Cambridge: Polity, 3rd ed., 2014), part 3.

Essential:

- Gerald Cohen, 'On the Currency of Egalitarian Justice', *Ethics*, 99(4) (1989).
- Elizabeth Anderson, 'What is the Point of Equality?', *Ethics*, 109(2) (1999).
- Zofia Stemplowska, 'Luck Egalitarianism', in Gerald Gaus and Fred D'Agostino (eds.), *The Routledge Companion to Social and Political Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 2013).
- Derek Parfit, 'Equality and Priority' in *Ratio* (new series), 10(3) (1997), or in Clayton and Williams (eds.), *The Ideal of Equality*.
- Harry Frankfurt, 'Equality as a Moral Ideal', *Ethics*, 98(1) (1987), and in his *The Importance of What We Care About* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), ch. 11.

Recommended:

- Ronald Dworkin, 'What is Equality? Part 2: Equality of Resources', *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 10(4) (1981). Reprinted as Chapter 2 of Ronald Dworkin, *Sovereign Virtue* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002).
- Samuel Scheffler, 'What is Egalitarianism?', *Philosophy & Public Affairs*, 31(1) (2003).
- Richard Arneson, 'Luck Egalitarianism and Prioritarianism', *Ethics*, 100(2) (2000).
- Richard Arneson, 'Luck Egalitarianism Interpreted and Defended', *Philosophical Topics* 32(1-2) (2004).
- Serena Olsaretti, 'Responsibility and the Consequences of Choice', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 109(1pt2) (2009).
- Larry Temkin, 'Equality, Priority, and the Levelling Down Objection', in Clayton and Williams (eds.), *The Ideal of Equality*.
- Paula Casal, 'Why Sufficiency Is Not Enough', *Ethics*, 117(2) (2007).
- Christian Schemmel, 'Why Relational Egalitarians Should Care About Distributions', *Social Theory and Practice*, 37(3) (2011).

Essay questions:

- What kind of equality, if any, is a justified goal of social and political organisation?
- 'It is important to reduce some inequalities in society, but not because equality itself is of value.' Discuss.

Past exam questions:

- Egalitarianism's 'purpose is to eliminate *involuntary disadvantage*, by which I ... mean disadvantage for which the sufferer cannot be held responsible, since it does not appropriately reflect choices that he has made or would make.' (COHEN) Should this be egalitarianism's purpose? (2005)

- 'The correct focus of egalitarian concern is not the distribution of anything, but the quality of social relations.' Discuss. (2006)
- 'It is important to reduce some inequalities in society, but not because equality itself is of value.' Discuss. (2007)
- Is equality of opportunity an ethically preferable objective to equality of welfare? (2008)
- 'What, if any, are the distributive implications of the principle that the state should treat its citizens with equal concern and respect?' (2009)
- Can one be an anarchist and an egalitarian? (2010)
- Is equality of opportunity an intelligible objective? (2011)
- Do the industrious owe anything to the lazy or the reckless? (2012)
- What should egalitarians believe? (2012)
- Do inequalities of income and wealth only matter insofar as they contribute to inequalities of power or status or both? (2013)
- Why should the state treat citizens with equal respect if they act in ways that make them unequally deserving? (2014)
- 'The poor, as well as the rich, have a duty to act in such a way as to reduce the level of distributive inequality in society'. Discuss. (2015)
- If their states will not do so, should (relatively) wealthy egalitarians compensate the victims of bad luck? (2016)

4. Political obligation (and civil disobedience)

Note: This reading list focuses on political obligation. Civil disobedience is a sub-category within this, which some exam questions focus on. There is a reading list for this below, which you are welcome to delve into if you are interested in that topic.

Useful overviews:

- A. John Simmons, *Political Philosophy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), chs. 2-3.
- John Horton, *Political Obligation* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1992), chs. 2 & 4.

Essential:

- A. John Simmons, 'Justification and Legitimacy', *Ethics*, 109(4) (1999).
- Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* (Oxford: Blackwell 1974), pp. 90-95.
- George Klosko, *The Principle of Fairness and Political Obligation* (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, new edition, 2004), chs. 2 & 4.
- Jeremy Waldron, 'Special Ties and Natural Duties', *Philosophy & Public Affairs*, 22(1) (1993).
- Christopher H. Wellman, 'Toward a Liberal Theory of Political Obligation', *Ethics*, 111(4) (2001).

Recommended readings on political obligation:

- A. John Simmons, *Moral Principles and Political Obligations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), chs. 3 (on consent), 4 (on tacit consent), 5 (on fair play theory), and 6 (on natural duty).
- David Schmidtz, 'Justifying the State', *Ethics*, 101(1) (1990).
- Hanna Pitkin, 'Obligation and Consent', in W.G. Runciman, Peter Laslett, and Quentin Skinner (eds.), *Philosophy, Politics and Society: Fourth Series* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1972).
- Daniel McDermott, 'Fair-Play Obligations', *Political Studies*, 52(2) (2004).
- George Klosko, 'Multiple Principles of Political Obligation', *Political Theory*, 32(6) (2004).
- John Horton, 'In Defence of Associative Political Obligations: Part One', *Political Studies*, 54(3) (2006), and 'In Defence of Associative Political Obligations: Part Two', *Political Studies*, 55(1) (2007).
- George Klosko, *The Principle of Fairness and Political Obligation*, chs. 3, 5 & 6.
- George Klosko, 'Samaritanism and Political Obligation: A Response to Christopher Wellman's "Liberal Theory of Political Obligation"', *Ethics*, 113(4) (2003).

Recommended readings on civil disobedience:

- John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, rev. ed., 1999), pp. 108-117 & ch. 6.
- Ronald Dworkin, 'Civil Disobedience', in *Taking Rights Seriously* (London: Duckworth, 1977).
- Joseph Raz, *The Authority of Law* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), chs. 14 & 15.

Essay questions:

- What is the problem of political obligation? Can it be solved?
- 'If everyone else obeys the law it is only fair that you do too.' Could this be a good argument?
- 'Civil disobedience violates political obligation.' Discuss.

Past exam questions

- If citizens in a liberal democracy have a duty to obey just laws, do they also have a duty to disobey unjust laws? (2005)
- Is there any persuasive argument for the legitimacy of political authority? (2006)
- How would you distinguish between justified and unjustified cases of civil disobedience? (2006)
- Does legitimate political authority depend on consent? (2007)
- Is civil disobedience justified only in response to laws which have been made undemocratically? (2007)
- Is the state a necessary evil? (2007)
- Since there is a duty to resist injustice, in what sense (if any) is there an obligation to obey the state? (2008)
- Do you agree that civil disobedience is possible only within a liberal state? (2009)
- 'If everyone else obeys the law it is only fair that you do too.' Could this be a good argument? (2009)
- Why should citizens obey the law? (2010)
- When, if ever, should citizens disobey the law? (2011)
- "Citizens have political obligations, but the obligation to obey the law is not one of them." Do you agree? (2012)
- 'If there are no general political obligations, then states cannot merit our support.' Discuss. (2013)
- What, if anything, is wrong with 'philosophical anarchism'? (2013)
- 'A problem still in search of a solution.' Explain whether this is a fair assessment of the debate over political obligation. (2014)
- 'Citizens generally do not consent to the authority of their states; nor do children generally consent to the authority of their parents. In neither case do these facts undermine their obligations of obedience'. Discuss. (2015)
- Can a state be just even though it is illegitimate? Can a state be legitimate even though it is unjust? (2016)
- Could a state's legitimacy deny its citizens the right to emigrate? (2016)

III. Optional Topics – Sample Questions

1. Democracy

- ‘The justification for democracy is that everyone who is affected by a decision should have an equal say in it.’ Discuss. (2007)
- ‘Democracy is justified by its consequences, not by its supposed intrinsic fairness.’ Discuss. (2008)
- To what extent does the ideal of democracy require that collective decision-making strives for consensus? (2013)
- ‘Democracy is justified because it is the uniquely fair way to handle political disagreement’. Discuss. (2014)

2. Feminism

- Should feminists demand equality or insist on ‘difference’? (2009)
- Is feminism more than a set of demands for the rectification of past and present injustices against women? (2011)
- Is feminism best understood as a doctrine of equal rights? (2013)
- Should feminists accept inequalities produced by other women’s choices? (2016)

3. Global justice

- ‘Thanks to globalisation, our duties to foreigners are now as strong as those to our fellow citizens.’ Discuss. (2009)
- Does justice recognise borders? (2010)
- Are questions of immigration, questions of justice? (2011)
- ‘The principles of justice that apply within nation-states are different from those that apply between them.’ Discuss. (2012)

4. Liberalism

- Is liberalism too individualistic? (2007)
- Is there a distinctive liberal conception of the good life? (2010)
- Is liberal conservatism a contradiction in terms? (2011)
- Does liberalism stress individual freedom to the detriment of civic duty? (2013)

5. Multiculturalism

- Do supporters of cultural rights value the interests of groups over those of individuals? (2006)
- Is ‘culture’ of more significance than ‘life-style choices’? (2011)
- Should minority groups have cultural rights? (2012)
- Do minority groups have a human right to the protection of their culture? (2014)

6. Nozick’s libertarianism

- Does justice ever require some individuals to work for the benefit of others? (2010)
- Is taxation ‘on a par with forced labour’?
- Is private property just? (2014)
- Does anything of value in Nozick’s entitlement theory survive the claim that all property holdings are ultimately rooted in bloody injustice? (2015)

7. Power

- Is all power political? (2010)
- Is power best understood as a relationship or as a capacity? (2011)
- How can we tell when people are subject to power? (2012)
- Does describing something as 'an exercise of power' presuppose that there is a conflict of preferences? (2014)

8. Rights/human rights

- Must claims to human rights rest on an interest-based account of rights? (2009)
- Is it ever permissible to violate individual rights? (2010)
- On what basis should we distinguish human rights from other kinds of rights? (2013)
- Is there a human right to the satisfaction of basic needs? (2014)