

Introduction to Contemporary Political Philosophy
Instructor: Zoltán Miklósi
2020/21

The course deals with a few of the most fundamental problems of contemporary political philosophy. First among these is the ground and scope of the authority of states to rule, and of the obligation of their citizens to comply with their directives. Most people agree that governments indeed have such authority, and that citizens are usually under a moral obligation to comply with the rules made by the government. However, there are deep disagreements concerning the source of this authority as well as about its proper limits: what are the goals that the government may or must rightfully pursue and by what means? Under what circumstances are its citizens exempt from the obligation to obey its laws? These are among the questions that will be examined in this course. First, we will discuss different theories of political obligation, i.e. theories about the moral basis of our obligation, if any, to comply with laws. Within this thematic block, we conclude by discussion justified exceptions from the duty to obey, including civil disobedience and conscientious objection. We also explore whether disobedience must be “civil” or if sometimes “uncivil” disobedience may also be morally acceptable. The second thematic block explores the form of collective political decision-making that confers authority to the decisions of the government. Most contemporary theorists agree that only democracy possesses such authority, but they disagree about the grounds of the authority of democracy: we will explore instrumental and non-instrumental justifications of democracy, as well as elitist critiques of democracy. The third block will attend to the problem of distributive justice: are material inequalities between citizens unjust, and if so, under what circumstances? Which inequalities are relevant from the point of view of justice? Is the state required to pursue some profile of distribution of goods in society, and if so, what characterizes that profile? We will discuss utilitarian, egalitarian, and libertarian accounts of justice, as well as their feminist critiques. Fourth, we explore the requirements of justice in the cultural domain, and in particular in the context of culturally diverse societies. We discuss liberal multiculturalism and its critiques. Finally, we tend to questions of political theory that stretch the confines of the nation state. For example: do states have a general discretionary right to exclude noncitizens who seek admission to their territory? Alternatively, do people have a general right to enter and settle in the territory of the country of their choice? Is the organization of the world’s population into separate states with mutually exclusive territorial jurisdiction justified? Or do we have moral reasons to prefer a world state or some other alternative arrangement instead?

Requirements: students are required to read carefully all assigned readings and watch the pre-recorded videos for each week. Each week, students are required to submit 2-3 questions based on the readings that will serve as the basis of the seminar discussion during the live video sessions. The questions should reflect your understanding of the readings and probe some of the philosophical issues discussed. (In other words, they should not simply be of the form “Which is the better theory of X?”). The questions are not graded, but failure to submit them counts towards the participation component of the overall grade.

In addition, each week students must do a short quiz testing their understanding of the readings. The quiz is mandatory but not graded: its primary purpose is to help students monitor their own progress and understanding of the material. It is recommended that you do the quiz after the live seminar session each week. Though performance on the quiz is not graded, completing them counts towards the participation component of the final grade.

There will be a midterm examination and a final paper. The midterm exam takes place on week 7. By the end of week 11, every student must submit their term paper topic and 2-page outline. These outlines will be discussed in the final session of the term on week 12. The term paper must be 3,500 words on a problem in political philosophy.

Evaluation: Final paper (40%), midterm exam (30%), participation (30%)

Class meetings:

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

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

General background reading:

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

Week 1

1st session: What is Political Philosophy?

Required readings:

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

2nd session: Political Authority and Obligation: Basic Concepts

Required readings:

- Richard Dagger & David Lefkowitz, “Political Obligation,” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/political-obligation/>

Recommended:

- Jean Hampton, Chapter 1-2, *Political Philosophy* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1998).
- Joseph Raz, *The Morality of Freedom* (OUP, 1986), pp. 22-69.
- Stephen Perry, “Political Authority and Political Obligation,” in Leslie Green and Brian Leiter (eds.), *Oxford Studies in the Philosophy of Law*, vol. II. (OUP, 2013)
- John Simmons, *Moral Principles and Political Obligations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 29-56;

Week 2

Typology of theories of political obligation

1st Session: Voluntaristic theories

Required readings:

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

- Simmons, Chapter 5, 101-136.

Recommended:

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

2st Session: Justice-based theories of PO

Required readings:

- John Rawls, *Theory of Justice* §§19, 51, (Cambridge, Mass.: HUP, 1971)
- 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),

Recommended:

- Jeremy Waldron, „Special Ties and Natural Duties,” *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 22:1 (1993), pp. 3-30.
- Simmons, *Moral Principles and Political Obligations*, Chapter 6, 143-156.

Week 3 Justified exceptions

1st Session: Justified Exceptions to PO: Civil Disobedience

Required readings:

- Kimberley Brownlee, “Conscientious Objection and Civil Disobedience,” in Andrei Marmor (ed.) *The Routledge Companion to the Philosophy of Law* (Routledge, 2012), pp. 527-539.
- David Lefkowitz, “On a Moral Right to Civil Disobedience,” *Ethics* (2007), pp. 202-233.

Recommended:

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

2nd Session: Uncivil Disobedience

Required readings:

- Candice Delmas, “Political resistance: A matter of fairness,” *Law and Philosophy* 33:4 (2014), 465-488
- Ten-Herng Lai, “Justifying Uncivil Disobedience,” *Oxford Studies in Political Philosophy* vol. 5 (2019), pp. 90-114.

Recommended:

- Avia Pasternak, “Political Rioting: A Moral Assessment,” *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 46:4 (2019), pp. 384-418.
- Tommie Shelby, “Impure Dissent: Hip Hop and the Political Ethics of Marginalized Black Urban Youth,” in Danielle Allen & Jennifer S. Light (eds.), *From Voice to Influence: Understanding Citizenship in a Digital Age* (University of Chicago Press, 2015), pp. 59-79.
- “Unmute” podcast episode with Tommie Shelby <https://unmute.squarespace.com/season-3/212017/episode-023-tommie-shelby-on-dark-ghettos>

Week 4 Democratic Theory

1st session: What is democracy?

Required readings:

- Adam Swift, *Political Philosophy: A beginner's guide for students and politicians* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2014), pp. 187-210.

2nd session: What is the value of democracy?

Required reading:

- Swift, *Political Philosophy*, pp. 211-230.

Recommended:

- Thomas Christiano, *The Rule of the Many* (Westview Press, 1996), Part One

Week 5

1st Session: Theory of Justice: Overview and Utilitarianism

Required readings:

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

Recommended:

- Philosophy Bites podcast episode with Michael Sandel
<https://philosophybites.com/2011/01/michael-sandel-on-justice.html>

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

Recommended:

- Hampton, Ch 4, *PP*
- Philosophy Bites podcast with Philip Schofield
<https://philosophybites.com/2012/02/philip-schofield-on-jeremy-benthams-utilitarianism.html>

Week 6

1st Session: Theory of Justice: Liberal Egalitarianism

Required readings:

- John Rawls, *Justice as Fairness: A Restatement*, §1-2, §6-7, §12-14 (Harvard University Press, 2001)

Recommended:

- Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, §§1-4, 11-12;
- Samuel Freeman, *Rawls* (Routledge, 2007), Chapters 2-4
- Philosophy Bites podcast episode with Jonathan Wolf
<https://philosophybites.com/2010/02/jonathan-wolf-on-john-rawls-a-theory-of-justice.html>

2nd Session: Theory of Justice: Egalitarianism

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

Recommended:

- Ronald Dworkin, *Sovereign Virtue* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000), Ch. 1-2
- G. A. Cohen, "On the Currency of Egalitarian Justice," *Ethics* 99:4 (1989), pp. 906-944.
- Philosophy Bites podcast episode with T.M. Scanlon <https://philosophybites.com/2014/01/tm-scanlon-on-whats-wrong-with-inequality.html>

Week 7:

1st session: Theory of Justice: Relational Egalitarianism

Required reading:

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

Recommended:

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

2nd session: Midterm exam

Week 8

1st session: Theory of Justice: Gender Equality

Required readings:

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

Recommended:

- Gina Schouten, "Is the Gendered Division of Labor a problem of Distribution?" *Oxford Studies in Political Philosophy* (OUP, 2016)
- Kymlicka, "Feminism" *Contemporary Political Philosophy*, pp. 377-420.
- Philosophy Bites podcast episode with Amia Srinivasan <https://philosophybites.com/2017/01/amia-srinivasan-on-what-is-a-woman.html>

2nd Session: Gender equality and Political Liberalism

Required reading:

- Gina Schouten, "Citizenship, Reciprocity, and the Gendered Division of Labor," *Politics, Philosophy and Economics* 16:2 (2017), pp. 174-209

Recommended:

- Jonathan Quong, "Public Reason," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/public-reason/>

Week 9

1st session: Theory of Justice: Libertarian Critique of Liberal Equality

Required readings:

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

Recommended:

- Serena Olsaretti, *Liberty, desert, and the market: a philosophical study* (Cambridge University Press, 2004)
- Peter Vallentyne, “Left-Libertarianism and Liberty,” in Thomas Christiano and John Christman (eds.), *Debates in Political Philosophy* (Blackwell Publishers, 2007)
- Kymlicka, *Contemporary Political Philosophy*, 95-159
- Philosophy Bites podcast episode with John Tomasi <https://philosophybites.com/2012/06/john-tomasi-on-free-market-fairness.html>

2nd session: Conceptions of Liberty

Required reading:

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

Recommended:

- Isaiah Berlin, “Two Concepts of Liberty,” (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), recommended
- Philip Pettit, “Liberty as Non-Domination,” in Pettit, *Republicanism: A Theory of Freedom and Government* (Oxford: OUP, 1997), pp. 51-79 (recommended)
- Ralf M. Bader, “Moralizing Liberty,” in David Sobel et al. (eds.), *Oxford Studies in Political Philosophy* vol. IV. (OUP, 2018), pp. 141-166 (recommended)
- Philosophy Bites podcast episodes with Alan Ryan <https://philosophybites.com/2012/12/alan-ryan-on-freedom-and-its-history.html> and Philip Pettit <https://philosophybites.com/2012/04/philip-pettit-on-republicanism.html> (recommended)

Week 10

1st session: Multiculturalism

Required reading:

- Sarah Song, “Multiculturalism,” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2010) <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/multiculturalism/>
- Kymlicka, “Multiculturalism,” in *Contemporary Political Philosophy*, pp. 327-370.

Recommended:

- Jonathan Quong, “Cultural Exemptions, Expensive Tastes, and Equal Opportunities,” *Journal of Political Philosophy* 23:1 (2006)
- Paul Bou Habib, “A Theory of Religious Accommodation,” *Journal of Applied Philosophy* 23.1 (2006), 109-126.
- Philosophy Bites podcast episode Anne Philips <https://philosophybites.com/2007/07/anne-phillips-o.html>
- Philosophy Bites podcast episode with Will Kymlicka <https://philosophybites.com/2008/06/will-kymlicka-o.html>

2nd session: Multiculturalism and its Critics

Required reading:

- Brian Barry, “Equality and Culture,” pp. 19-62.

Recommended:

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

Beyond the System of States

Week 11 (deadline for submitting 2-page outline of term paper plans)

1st session: Immigration: the case for the right to exclude

Required readings:

- Christopher Wellman, "Immigration and Freedom of Association," *Ethics* (2008), pp. 109-141;
- Sarah Fine, "The Ethics of Immigration: Self-Determination and the Right to Exclude," *Philosophy Compass* (2013), pp. 254-68

Recommended:

- David Miller: "Immigration: The Case for Limits," In Andrew I. Cohen & Christopher Heath Wellman (eds.), *Contemporary Debates in Applied Ethics*. Wiley-Blackwell. pp. 193-206 (2005)
- Sarah Fine, "Freedom of Association is Not the Answer," *Ethics* (2010), pp. 338-356;

2nd session: the case for open borders

Required reading:

- Kieran Oberman, "Immigration as a Human Right," in Sarah Fine & Lea Ypi (eds.), *Migration in Political Theory: The Ethics of Movement and Membership* (Oxford University Press, 2016), pp. 2-44

Recommended:

- Joseph Carens, "The case for open borders," in *The Ethics of Immigration* (Oxford: OUP, 2013), pp. 225-254
- Philosophy Bites podcast episode with Sarah Fine
<https://philosophybites.com/2018/02/sarah-fine-on-the-right-to-exclude.html>

Week 12

Global institutional design

1st session: Why the state system?

Required:

- Thomas Pogge: "Cosmopolitanism and Sovereignty," *Ethics* 103 (1992), pp. 48-75;
- Laura Valentini, "Assessing the Global Order," *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy* (2012), pp. 593-612.

Recommended:

- Mathias Risse, *Global Political Philosophy* (Palgrave, 2012), Ch. 3, pp. 62-88
- Simon Caney, "Cosmopolitanism and Institutional Design," *Social Theory and Practice* (2006), pp. 725-756 (recommended)

2nd session: Discussion of term paper topics