

## **Discussions of Justice: Democracy, Inequality, and Justice, Now**

Meeting Location: Carl Becker Seminar Room (G32)

Meeting Time: Wednesdays, 7:30pm – 8:20pm

Instructor: Augie Faller

Office Hours: T-Th 3-4pm at Goldwin Smith 219

### **Course Description**

We will discuss urgent moral questions about what it means to live in a just society. For example, politicians and activists often call attention to economic and political inequality. But is it really unjust that some people have more money or political influence than others, regardless of the minimum amount? Why or why not? We have also heard discussions of the limits of our moral obligation to take in immigrants. Is it morally wrong to deny certain people a life in the U.S.? We will also investigate issues related to patriotism, misogyny, and racism. What does it mean to be a misogynist, and how does misogyny differ from sexism? Do (white) Americans owe reparations to the victims of American racism and/or slavery? Why or why not? Is it moral to be patriotic, even if this means overlooking some of the flaws of your nation?

### **Learning Objectives**

The goal of this class is for you to develop the competency to tackle complex philosophical topics and the confidence to engage in thoughtful discussions (oral and written) about those topics. To achieve this goal, you will need to acquire the following skills: You will learn to (i) extrapolate philosophical arguments from a given text, (ii) present arguments clearly and in your own words, (iii) analyze arguments carefully and critically, (iv) weigh and evaluate objections, (v) respond to objections thoughtfully.

### **Required Readings**

All readings are on Blackboard.

For each session, read the texts in the order in which they are on the syllabus.

### **Evaluation of Student Performance and Grading**

#### *One Credit Option:*

- Participation (includes participation in class discussions, attendance, professional attitude, discussion question/comment, in-class quizzes): 100%

*Participation* | You ‘participate’ when you contribute to the progress of our inquiry, not when you take up air time. Note that there are many ways to contribute to the progress of inquiry. Giving ‘correct’ answers is only one way; other extremely valuable ways include asking questions, giving ‘incorrect’ answers, and providing criticism and objections.

*Attendance* | Your active participation in class discussions is required both for the course to succeed and for you to succeed in the course. If you are absent, you cannot participate. You will be allowed two absences without penalty, but every subsequent absence will result in a grade deduction. Missing six or more classes will automatically result in an “F”. If you miss

class, it is in your responsibility to (i) turn in whatever work is due that day, and (ii) contact colleagues to find out what you missed. There are no make-up assignments or quizzes.

*Professional Attitude* | I think of our classes as team meetings in which we aim at making progress together. Contributing to this progress is part of your job, and as in any other work environment, you are expected to be a mature and responsible team member. As such, you are expected to (i) read the assigned texts before class, (ii) let me know if you cannot come to class or submit an assignment, (iii) turn off your phone in class and use your laptop for work purposes only, (iv) reach out to me if you need further support to flourish academically, and support your colleagues. Further, as in any other work environment, you will be asked to give short presentations and to exchange your work with others; you might also explicitly be encouraged to contribute (i.e. be called-on). Unprofessional attitude (such as being late, distracting, unsupportive) will be reflected in your grade.

*Homework and quizzes* | Discussion questions/comments must be submitted every week. They are due every Wednesday at 3pm on BB (under “Discussion”). These should be about a paragraph. You may comment on an aspect of the reading you found compelling, ask a question about something you don’t understand, or add a new resource, for example a statistic that you think would be relevant to our discussion. In each case you should say why you are commenting/questioning/adding what you chose.

In-class quizzes will not be announced. They are a good way for me to check whether material is understood or needs to be reviewed. Those quizzes also help you to self-evaluate your performance in class.

#### *Two Credit Option:*

- All one credit requirements: 50%
- 2 papers: 50%
  - 1<sup>st</sup> paper (max. 3 pages): 25%
  - 2<sup>nd</sup> paper (max. 4 pages): 25%

*Philosophy Papers* | Philosophical writing is different from the writing you are asked to do in other courses. Before you start working on your paper, read the texts under “Writing Philosophy Papers” on Blackboard.

*Paper Formatting* | 1.5 spaced, Times New Roman 12-point font, with 1-inch margins, Word Document. This way, the attention of your reader is on the content of your paper, rather than the formatting. A paper needs to fulfill these formatting requirements to count as submitted.

*Paper Submission and Responsibility* | All papers must be submitted on Blackboard. Electronic difficulties may very well happen. It is entirely in your responsibility to make sure that your papers are submitted on time. I strongly advise you to (i) save multiple drafts of your work in multiple places as you write, and (ii) after you submitted a paper on BB, download and open the file to ensure that it actually went through and is readable.

*Late Papers* | To ensure your progress in this class, deadlines are strict for all assignments. Papers that are late will receive a 1/3 letter grade penalty per day (i.e., if the paper is due 1pm Sunday and you turn it in 2pm Sunday, an original grade of “A” will become a “A-”). If you are late turning in a draft, this grade deduction will be applied to the final paper.

### **Code of Academic Integrity**

Each student in this course is required to adhere to Cornell’s Academic Integrity Code (<http://cuinfo.cornell.edu/aic.cfm>). Plagiarism, i.e., representing the work of others as one's own, is a serious violation of the code and may result in a failing grade for the course, or for some portion of it. Code violations will be reported to the dean of the student's college, and the student's transcript will show that s/he has been "declared guilty of violation of the Code of Academic Integrity". Such an entry may have a significant impact on the student’s future career. It may, for example, decrease the chances of getting into medical or law school. To avoid plagiarism, all work submitted must be the student’s own, and all sources must be properly cited. The student is responsible for providing the source of any idea that is not his/her own, whether s/he got the idea from a written text or from talking to a peer. The ownership of the content must be unambiguously clear to the reader.

### **Course Readings**

#### **Week 1 (Jan 23)**

Introduction

#### **Week 2 (Jan 30): Rawls on Inequality**

John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (excerpt)

*Empirical data:*

Dan Ariely, “Americans Want to Live in a Much More Equal Country (They Just Don't Realize It)”

Washington Post, “The richest 1 percent now owns more of the country’s wealth than at any time in the past 50 years”

#### **Week 3 (Feb 6): Nozick, Libertarianism and Anarchism**

Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State and Utopia* (excerpts)

Berkman, *What is Communist Anarchism?* Chapter 1 and part of Chapter 29

Chomsky, Excerpt from interview with Michael Wilson

#### **Week 4 (Feb 13): Frankfurt on Equality**

Harry Frankfurt, “Equality as a Moral Ideal”

**Week 5 (Feb 20): The Right to a Say**

Richard Arneson, “The Supposed Right to a Democratic Say”  
Sheri Berman, “Why are we so dissatisfied with democracy? The reasons are many”

**Week 6 (Feb 27): The Value of Democracy**

Elizabeth Anderson, “Democracy: Instrumental vs. Non-Instrumental Value”

**Week 7 (March 6): What is Misogyny?**

Manne: *Down Girl* Chapter 1 and 2  
♪ This American Life: *Five Women*.

**Week 8 (March 13): What is Misogyny?**

Manne: *Down Girl* Chapter 8

**Week 9 (March 20): Nationalism and Patriotism 1**

David Miller, “The Ethical Significance of Nationality”  
Jamie Dominguez, “Should I or Shouldn’t I?”

**Week 10 (March 27): Nationalism and Patriotism 2**

Simon Keller, “Patriotism as Bad Faith”  
W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (Excerpt)

**Week 11 (April 10): Colonialism: Then and Now**

Aimé Césaire, “Discourse on Colonialism” Excerpt  
Hickel, *The Divide*, Chapter 7 “Plunder in the 21st Century”

**Week 10 (April 17): Immigration Part 1**

Joseph Carens, “Migration and Morality: A Liberal Egalitarian Perspective”  
Joseph Nevins, “How US policy in Honduras set the stage for today’s migration”

<https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/the-consequences-a-look-behind-the-claims-on-immigration/>

**Week 12 (April 24): Immigration Part 2**

David Miller, “Immigration: The Case for Limits”  
Farhad Manjoo, “There’s Nothing Wrong with Open Borders” (NYT Opinion)

## **Week 13 (May 1): American Racial Inequality**

James Baldwin Debates William F. Buckley (video) (Buckley's response optional)

Ta-Nehisi Coates, "The Case for Reparations"

Dylan Matthews, "The massive new study on race and economic mobility in America, explained"

Optional:

James Baldwin, "Letter to My Nephew"

Michael Dawson Lecture (online)

[#MLKNow](#) 2019 by Blackout for Human Rights (video): Ta-Nehisi Coates and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez in conversation

Angela Davis, *Are Prisons Obsolete?*, Chapter 2, "Slavery, Civil Rights, and Abolitionist Perspectives Toward Prison," and Chapter 6, "Abolitionist Alternatives"

Devah Pager, "Marked: Race, Crime, and Finding Work in an Era of Mass Incarceration"