

Utopianism Spring 2015

PROFESSOR: BEN LAURENCE
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OFFICE HOURS: W 3-4 TH 1:30-2:30
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In this class, we will explore the idea that political philosophy is practical. We will address questions such as the following. What is the best interpretation of this idea? How might we defend it against skepticism? What consequences does it have for method? What is it for a political philosophy to be utopian? Is there a good and a bad way of being utopian? How are these to be distinguished? What is it for a political philosophy to be cynical? Does “human nature” place constraints on our political theorizing? What ought we to mean by “human nature” in this context? How do concepts like scarcity and abundance relate to the utopian enterprise?

COURSE WEBSITE: This course has a chalk. You should get in the habit of checking the website at least once a week. To access the chalk go to www.uchicago.edu and click on “student”. Chalk should appear as a button on the left hand side. Clicking on that should take you to a list of chalks for the courses in which you are enrolled. All readings are available on Chalk. Probably you should buy a copy of *A Theory of Justice: The Original Edition* if you don’t already own it.

GRADING: There are two options. Note that papers will be held to a standard commensurate with the amount of time you have had to write them. If you submit a paper during the course of the quarter, I will employ different standards than if you submit the paper at the start of Autumn Quarter 2015.

- (1) The first is to submit two short papers, roughly 7-10 pages in length each. Each is on a topic of your choosing. (We can meet to hash out a topic.) The first paper is due 5/5, and the second on 6/9.
- (2) The second is to submit one long paper, roughly 15-20 pages in length. If you wish to receive a grade during the quarter, then this paper must be submitted on 6/9. If you wish to take extra time, then come see me and we will work out a reasonable deadline. The latest possible deadline is the first day of Autumn Quarter 2015.

Syllabus of Readings and Assignments

WEEK 1: Introductions

3/31 POSING OUR BASIC QUESTION: WHAT IS IT FOR POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY TO BE PRACTICAL?

WEEK 2: Two Conceptions of Reflective Equilibrium

4/7 JOHN RAWLS, *A THEORY OF JUSTICE: ORIGINAL EDITION*, §9, PP. 46-53.
JOHN RAWLS, "THE INDEPENDENCE OF MORAL THEORY"
JOHN RAWLS, "KANTIAN CONSTRUCTIVISM IN MORAL PHILOSOPHY", PP. 515-519, 554-572
T.M. SCANLON, "RAWLS ON JUSTIFICATION"
OPTIONAL: THOMAS KELLY AND SARAH MCGRATH, "IS REFLECTIVE EQUILIBRIUM ENOUGH?"

WEEK 3: Two Conceptions of Ideal Theory I: Strict Compliance

4/14 JOHN RAWLS, *A THEORY OF JUSTICE: ORIGINAL EDITION*, 3-11, 243-251, 350-391
JOHN RAWLS, "KANTIAN CONSTRUCTIVISM IN MORAL THEORY", 515-524
PETER GODFREY-SMITH, "ABSTRACTION AND IDEALIZATION IN BIOLOGICAL SCIENCE"
OPTIONAL: MICHAEL WEISBERG, "THREE KINDS OF IDEALIZATION"
OPTIONAL: MARTIN JONES, "IDEALIZATION AND ABSTRACTION: A FRAMEWORK"

WEEK 4: Contra Strict Compliance

4/21 ONORA O'NEIL. "ABSTRACTION, IDEALIZATION, AND IDEOLOGY IN ETHICS"
CHARLES MILLS, "IDEAL THEORY AS IDEOLOGY"
LISA SCHWARTZMAN, "ABSTRACTION, IDEALIZATION AND OPPRESSION"

WEEK 5: Two Conceptions of Ideal Theory II: Realistic Utopianism

4/28 JOHN RAWLS, *THE LAW OF PEOPLES*, PP. 11-23, 89-93
JOHN RAWLS, *JUSTICE AS FAIRNESS: A RESTATEMENT*, PP. 1-5
A JOHN SIMMONS, "IDEAL AND NONIDEAL THEORY"
OPTIONAL: ADAM SWIFT AND ZOFIA STEMPOWSKA, "RAWLS ON IDEAL AND NONIDEAL THEORY"

WEEK 6: Contra Realistic Utopianism

5/5 AMARTYA SEN, "WHAT DO WE WANT FROM A THEORY OF JUSTICE?"
ELIZABETH ANDERSON, *THE IMPERATIVE OF INTEGRATION*, PP. 1-7
JOHN DEWEY, *THE THEORY OF VALUATION*, §6 "THE CONTINUUM OF ENDS-MEANS"
OPTIONAL: JOHN HERMAN RASHDALL, "THE WRONG AND THE BAD"

Week 7: A Defense of The Priority of Ideal Theory

5/12 SELIM BERKER, "THE UNITY OF GROUNDING"
ELIZABETH ANSCOMBE, "PRACTICAL INFERENCE"
OPTIONAL: ANTON FORD, "ON WHAT'S IN FRONT OF YOUR NOSE"
OPTIONAL: GIDEON ROSEN, "GROUNDING: METAPHYSICAL DEPENDENCE AND REDUCTION"

WEEK 8: *For Utopia, Against Realism I*

- 5/19 JOHN RAWLS, "KANTIAN CONSTRUCTIVISM IN MORAL PHILOSOPHY", PP. 320-322
G.A. COHEN, "FACTS AND PRINCIPLES"
DAVID MILLER, "JUSTICE FOR EARTHLINGS"
OPTIONAL: ANDREW MASON, "JUST CONSTRAINTS"

WEEK 9: *For Utopia, Against Realism II*

- 5/26 DAVID ESTLUND, "UTOPOPHOBIA"
DAVID ESTLUND, "HUMAN NATURE AND THE LIMITS (IF ANY) OF POLITICAL
PHILOSOPHY"

WEEK 10: *For Realism, Against Utopianism*

- 6/2 BERNARD WILLIAMS, *IN THE BEGINNING WAS THE DEED*, CHAPTER I, "REALISM AND
MORALISM IN POLITICAL THEORY"
RAYMOND GEUSS *PHILOSOPHY AND REAL POLITICS*, EXCERPTS
LEA YPI, "FROM REALISM TO ACTIVISM: A CRITIQUE OF RESIGNATION IN POLITICAL
THEORY"