Phl 492  
Seminar for Majors  
Spring 2002

John Rawls' Social and Political Philosophy

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Office Hours: W 2:00-3:30; F 1:00-2:30  
and by appointment

TEXTS:

Required:

Recommended:
2. Samuel Freeman, ed., The Cambridge Companion to Rawls (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) [To be placed on reserve at main library]

TENTATIVE SCHEDULE:

Jan 7  Introduction

I. A THEORY OF JUSTICE

Jan 9  Justice as Fairness: An Overview  
TJ, pp. xi-xix, 3-19;¹ [vi-viii, 3-21]

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Jan 14  The Principles of Justice

¹ Pages listed first are for the revised edition (1999); pages listed in brackets are for the original edition (1971). Some or all of the editions on reserve in the library will be the original edition.
Jan 16  
**The Original Position (I)**  
*TJ*, pp. 52-77, 86-93; [60-90, 100-108]

Jan 21  
**The Original Position (II)**  
*TJ*, pp. 102-105, 109-12, 118-30; [118-22, 126-30, 136-50]

Jan 23  
**Equal Liberty and the Kantian Interpretation**  
*TJ*, pp. 171-94, 221-27; [195-221, 251-57]

**II. POLITICAL LIBERALISM**

Jan 28  
**Introductions**  
*PL*, xv-xxxii, xxxvii-lxii

Jan 30  
**Fundamental Ideas**  
*PL*, 3-46

Feb 4  
**Powers of Citizens and Their Representatives**  
*PL*, 47-88

Feb 6  
**The Idea of an Overlapping Consensus**  
*PL*, 133-72

Feb 11  
**Priority of Right and Ideas of Good**  
*PL*, pp. 173-211

Feb 13  
**The Idea Public Reason**  
*PL*, pp. 212-54

**III. THE IDEA OF PUBLIC REASON REVISITED**

Feb 18  
**The Idea of Public Reason Revisited**  
*LP*, 131-80

**IV. JUSTICE AS FAIRNESS**

Feb 20  
**Fundamental Ideas**  
*JF*, xi-xiii, xiv-xviii, 3-38
Feb 25  The Principles of Justice  
*JF*, 39-79

Feb 27\(^2\)  The Argument from the Original Position (I)  
*JF*, 80-110

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March 4-6  *Spring Break -- No Class*

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March 11  The Argument from the Original Position (II)  
*JF*, 111-134

March 13  Institutions of a Just Basic Structure (I)  
*JF*, 135-152

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March 18  Institutions of a Just Basic Structure (II)  
*JF*, 153-79

March 20  The Question of Stability  
*JF*, 180-202

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**V. THE LAW OF PEOPLES**

March 25  The First Part of Ideal Theory  
*LP*, 3-58

March 27  The Second Part of Ideal Theory  
*LP*, 59-88

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April 1  **Nonideal Theory**  
*LP*, 89-128

April 3  **Concluding Reflections**  
No reading assignment

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\(^2\) Since the instructor will be at the annual meeting of the Association for Practical and Professional Ethics at this time, this class meeting will be rescheduled for either the late afternoon or early evening of Feb 25 or on Feb 26.
VI. WORK-IN-PROGRESS SEMINAR

April 8 Abstracts, Outlines, Drafts of (Parts of) Term Papers

April 10 Abstracts, Outlines, Drafts of (Parts of) Term Papers

April 15 Abstracts, Outlines, Drafts of (Parts of) Term Papers

April 17 Abstracts, Outlines, Drafts of (Parts of) Term Papers

April 22 Abstracts, Outlines, Drafts of (Parts of) Term Papers

April 24\(^3\) Abstracts, Outlines, Drafts of (Parts of) Term Papers

WRITTEN REQUIREMENTS

1. Short Papers

Seminar participants are required to write one short (6-8 page) paper. There will, however, be some choice with respect to subjects and due dates. A paper on A Theory of Justice will be due on January 30, a paper on Political Liberalism on February 25, a paper on Justice as Fairness on March 27, and a paper on The Law of Peoples on April 8. Participants may write any one of these four papers. The general assignment is the same for each paper. In your paper you are to: (1) identify an unresolved philosophical question raised in or by the relevant reading and class discussion; (2) indicate why this problem is interesting, difficult, and important; (3) propose and defend a resolution to the problem; and (4) anticipate and respond to possible objections to the paper's major claim(s) and argument(s).

Papers will be assessed on the author's ability to identify and explain a interesting, difficult, and important philosophical problem as well on his or her efforts to resolve it.

Papers are due at the beginning of class. Late papers will be accepted without penalty only in unusual circumstances and only if cleared with the instructor in advance. Late papers not arranged in advance will have their overall grade lowered by 0.5 for each 24-hour period for

\(^3\) Since the instructor will be attending the annual meeting of the Central Division of the American Philosophical Association on this day, this meeting of the seminar will be rescheduled.
which the paper is late. The first such period starts at the beginning of class on the date that the paper is due.

Students may, if they wish, write two short papers, in which case the paper receiving the lower grade will be disregarded in calculating the final grade.

2. **Term Paper**
   A term paper (12-20 pages) addressing a course-related topic will be due in the Philosophy Department Office at 2:45 p.m. on Monday, April 28. Like the short papers, the term paper must identify and attempt to resolve an interesting, difficult, and important philosophical question or problem raised in or by the readings for the seminar. The paper will be assessed, in part, on the philosophical depth and understanding reflected in the author's selection of the main topic.

   The term paper should not be mainly historical or comparative. It should, like the short papers: (1) identify and explain an unresolved philosophical problem or question; (2) indicate why this problem is interesting, difficult, and important; (3) propose and defend a solution to the problem; and (4) anticipate and respond to possible objections to the author's major claim(s) and argument(s). Seminar participants are encouraged to meet with the instructor to explore possible topics and the structure of this paper.

   A one-page prospectus of the term paper is due on Friday, March 28 by 5:00 p.m. The prospectus should be e-mailed as an attachment in either WordPerfect or Microsoft Word to all seminar participants, including the instructor. The prospectus should include a brief statement of the problem you plan to address, an indication of the position you are inclined to take on it, and a preliminary bibliography. The instructor will respond to each author via e-mail with written comments, questions, and suggestions. Other participants are encouraged to do the same. The last three weeks of the seminar will provide an opportunity for each participant to obtain comments and suggestions from the group on an abstract, aspect, or a complete or partial draft of his or her term paper.

   The same policy for late short papers will be applied to late term papers.

3. **Reflections Papers**
   Eight very short (no more than one double-spaced page) papers will be due in class once a week beginning the week of January 14. In these papers students will respond to two different questions:

   (1) What, to your mind, is the most interesting or important unanswered question raised in or by the seminar meeting prior to the day the paper is due—and why?

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4 By "unanswered question," I mean a question that is important, but to which there is, at this point, no clear or obvious answer.
(2) What, to your mind, is the most interesting or important point raised in or by the reading assigned for the day the paper is due—and why?

These papers are due in class at the beginning of class. They will be read, evaluated, and returned at the following class meeting. Late papers or e-mailed papers will be accepted only in very unusual circumstances and only if cleared with the instructor in advance. Late papers not arranged in advance will receive a grade of 0.0. To do well on these papers, it is important that you answer the specific question being asked, paying special attention to the italicized expressions.

Students in the first half of the alphabet will submit their Reflections papers on Tuesdays for the first five weeks in which they are due and on Thursdays after this. Students in the second half of the alphabet will submit Reflections papers on Thursdays for the first five weeks in which they are due and on Tuesdays for the last five weeks.

Reflections papers will not be due during the last three weeks of class. Since each student will have ten opportunities (during ten weeks) to write the eight papers, there will be no make-ups for unexcused absences. Those electing to write nine or all ten papers will, for purposes of the final grade, be evaluated only on their eight best papers.

CRITERIA EMPLOYED IN EVALUATING PAPERS INCLUDE THE FOLLOWING:

1. To what extent has the author identified at least one difficult, interesting, and important philosophical problem?

2. How well does the author understand and appreciate the complexity of the problem(s) and issue(s) he or she is addressing? To what extent has the author made judicious use of the clearly relevant concepts, categories, distinctions, positions, arguments, etc. that have been included in the course readings and that have emerged in discussion?

3. Is the paper clearly written? Are its claims precise? Does it have an explicit overall direction? Would it be intelligible to another student at this level who is interested in the topic, but not enrolled in the course?

4. To what extent has the author identified the assumptions or presuppositions underlying his or her position? And to what extent is he or she aware of possible difficulties with them?

5. Are the author's claims and arguments supported by cogent arguments? Are claims and arguments included in different parts of the paper consistent with each other?

6. Has the author been fairly thorough? Can the reader think of some fairly obvious objection to the author's position, raised in class or in the readings, that he or she has not anticipated and addressed?
ATTENDANCE POLICY

Attendance will be taken. Students are permitted two unexcused absences. For every unexcused absence more than two, 0.1 will be deducted from the final raw average. Students inexcusably absent from a particular seminar meeting cannot write about that meeting in a Reflection paper.

GRADING AND EVALUATION

The short paper counts for 26 percent of the final grade. Each of the eight reflections papers will count 3 percent, for a total of 24 percent. The term paper will count 50 percent of the final grade. Adjustments (upward) will be made for informed, thoughtful, and fairly regular participation in discussion, a very good class presentation on the reading, exceptionally thoughtful Reflections papers, and steady and unmistakable improvement in written work. Except in the case of consistently excellent papers of near-professional quality, a good class presentation and participation in discussion will be necessary for receiving a final grade at the higher end of the scale.