

# PHIL 224: Political Philosophy

## King 127, Tu/Th 1:30-2:45

**Professor Amy Berg**

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**Office:** King 120A (go through the door marked King 120 and turn left)

**Office hours:** Thursdays 3-5 (Zoom by request) or by appointment

**Course prerequisite:** One previous philosophy course (or instructor consent)

### What this course is about

One of the main tasks of political philosophy is to come up with theories of justice. How should society be organized? How do we define justice and injustice? What obligations does the state have to its citizens, and vice versa? In the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, political philosophers from Rawls to Nozick to Cohen and beyond have been engaged in an ongoing conversation about these questions. But is this conversation missing something? In her classic work of feminist political philosophy, *Justice, Gender, and the Family* (JGF), Susan Moller Okin argues that theories of justice systematically ignore or distort the ways in which gender affects how we think about justice. By analyzing how this conversation develops over time, and how it changes through the work of Okin and other feminist political philosophers, we will we will:

- **Survey** influential theories of justice,
- **Assess** Okin's criticisms of these theories, and
- **Explore** what changes, if any, we should make to our understanding of justice in light of these criticisms.

### By the end of this course, you will be able to

- Explain how each theory we study understands justice
- Assess the arguments for and against each theory
- Apply each theory to situations involving gender and the family
- Argue, in discussion and in writing, for the theory you think is the closest to getting the right answers

### Course policies

#### What you'll need to have

- The readings. Complete each day's assigned reading before coming to class, and bring your **hard copy** of the reading with you to class. We will be using four required books, one optional book, and some other readings:
  - The required books are:
    - *A Theory of Justice*, **revised edition** (John Rawls, Belknap Press/Harvard University Press 1999, ISBN 978-0-67-400078-0). It's really important that you get the revised edition, because the content and page numbers are significantly different from the 1971 version.
    - *Justice, Gender, and the Family* (Susan Moller Okin, Hachette 1989, ISBN 978-0-46-503703-2).
    - *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* (Robert Nozick, Hachette 1974, ISBN 978-0-46-509720-3). Other editions should work, if you can't find this one.

- *Why Not Socialism?* (GA Cohen, Princeton 2009, ISBN 978-0-69-114361-3).
  - These books are available to rent or buy at the bookstore and elsewhere, and you must get each as a hard copy (not an e-book).
  - The optional book is *Rawls* (Samuel Freeman, Routledge 2007, ISBN 978-0-41-530109-1). This is the best explanation/analysis of/commentary on Rawls's views that I'm aware of, and some people find it more readable than *A Theory of Justice*. I'm not expecting you to buy this book or even look at it, but you may want to if a) you're really interested in Rawls or b) you're having trouble working through *A Theory of Justice*. There is a copy on reserve in the library, which should be more than enough for most of your Rawls needs. I've also asked the bookstore to buy a few copies.
  - The rest of the readings you will need are available in a packet; pick this packet up as soon as you decide to stay in this course. You can get it from the table outside my office door whenever King is open.
  - If you are having difficulty getting your own copy of the books (for any reason, including cost), please let me know as soon as possible, so I can make sure you have the resources you need to be successful in this class.
  - If you don't bring the hard copy of the reading with you to class, you will not be prepared for class. This is not a reason for me to make an exception to the course's technology policy (below).
- Access to Blackboard:
    - It's where I will post the most current version of the syllabus.
    - It's also where you can find links to the materials we will be using in class—handouts, assignment instructions, Zoom for remote office hours, and so on.
    - I love it when you send me videos, articles, and anything else you come across that's relevant to our course, and I'll post them to the Miscellaneous tab of Blackboard so other students can see them too.

## What you'll need to do

### *Assignments and assessment*

The philosophers we're reading this semester are all in conversation with one another—Nozick is responding directly to Rawls, Cohen is taking on Nozick, Okin is responding to each theory in turn, and so on. Your job this semester is to think through this conversation about justice and to add your own voice. The written assignments are designed to help you complete this project.

- **Conversation papers:** In these short papers, you will analyze the conversation about justice as it has developed in the readings and our discussions: 1) What contributions does this theory make to the conversation about justice? 2) How do others respond? 3) How might this conversation continue? These short papers will be due **in hard copy at the start of class** on March 12, April 2, and April 30.
- **Unless you're in extraordinary circumstances, you must turn in all three of these assignments in order to pass the course.** If you're in extraordinary circumstances (such as a very serious health issue), contact me to discuss whether an alternative assignment is possible.
- **Final project:** Drawing on the conversation as it's developed over the course of the semester in the readings, our discussions, and your short papers, your final project asks you to add your view. How have you concluded we should we think about justice? This project is due **in person in my office** by 11 am on May 18. **You must turn in the final project in order to pass the course.** *Note:* By default, I don't post grades or feedback for your final assignment

or your final participation grade; after the semester is over, I'm happy to provide any or all of these on request.

- I grade all assignments anonymously; put your T number, *not* your name, at the top of each assignment. At the end of each assignment, type or handwrite the Honor Pledge (“I have adhered to the Honor Code in this assignment”) and type or handwrite your T number; do not type or sign your name.
- As you have seen, the assignments for this course build on each other: the reflections require you to use your guidebooks, and the final project requires you to include excerpts from your other written work. For that reason, **it is critically important that you keep all notes, assignments, and feedback until you turn in your final project.**
- **Extension policy for written work:** Assignments must be turned in at the time and date they are due. I am happy to consider requests for extensions if you ask me before the assignment is due. I generally approve extensions due to unforeseeable events (for example, a family or medical emergency) that significantly affect your ability to complete assignments on time; I generally do not approve extensions due to foreseeable events (for example, work in other courses or extracurricular activities). If you turn in an assignment late, and you have not made prior arrangements with me, I will deduct three percent of your grade on the day it's due and three percent each day after that (so, for example, an assignment that would have gotten 100% if it were turned in on time on Tuesday would get 91% if turned in on Thursday). Turn in late work by emailing it to me. Unless you're in extraordinary circumstances, **I will not accept assignments that are turned in more than one week past the original due date and time.**
- In this course, **your writing is a public act.** I may occasionally use anonymized and (sometimes) edited versions of your work in class and in future courses in order to generate discussion, share viewpoints, ask questions, and so on.

### ***Participation***

Philosophy is a collaborative, discussion-based discipline. Your writing and thinking will benefit from considering others' views, reactions to readings, and experiences; your classmates and I will benefit from hearing your take.

- I want you to come to class and participate, but it's more important for you and others to stay safe and healthy. **Do not come to class if you feel even a little bit sick!** Please follow ObieSafe rules whenever you're in this course.
- That said, this class is discussion-based, and it's important to attend whenever you're able to and to participate when you attend.
  - Your first **two absences** are free: you can miss those classes for any reason, and you don't have to let me know what that reason is.
  - If you're absent more than twice, I'll apply the same policy as for late work. If you miss class because of an unforeseeable event, and you communicate with me about that absence in a timely way, I will generally excuse that absence; absences due to foreseeable events, or absences you don't communicate with me about in a timely way, will generally not be excused. **Absences because you're sick never count against you,** as long as you communicate with me in a timely way.
  - You count as absent if you are not present when I take attendance, even if you show up later in the class period; you also count as absent if you leave early without checking in with me. You'll lose three percentage points from your participation grade for each unexcused absence (beyond your first two).

- If you have more than ten unexcused absences, or more than five unexcused absences in either half of the semester, you will not be able to pass the course. If you have more than ten absences total, or five in either half of the semester, I may ask you to meet with me to talk about how you can be successful in the course.
- If at any point in the semester, you believe you are in a situation for which I should make an exception to these attendance policies, please talk with me outside of class.
- In order to receive the highest participation grade you can, come ready to make active, serious, charitable contributions to class discussion. To make sure our discussion is productive and includes a wide variety of voices, I may sometimes call on students at random. To help guide your participation, I will give you a participation evaluation at midsemester (separate from your midterm grade). When I grade participation, here's what I'm looking for:
  - *A range*: You take on at least your fair share of the responsibility for making sure discussion is productive, both in class discussion and in smaller groups. You frequently volunteer to speak, even when others are not. Your comments demonstrate that you've done the reading carefully (this is *not* the same thing as understanding the reading—questions count!). At the same time, you don't dominate; you listen carefully to and engage with what others are saying, and you balance taking an active role in discussion and group activities with making sure others have a chance to speak. You are never a distraction.
  - *B range*: You speak up in most but not all classes or group activities, contributing but not quite doing your fair share to make discussion productive. Your comments generally demonstrate that you've done the reading. You may have a tendency to dominate discussion, and/or your comments may not demonstrate that you're carefully listening to and engaging with others. You are never or rarely a distraction.
  - *C range*: You speak up only occasionally (less often than once per class meeting on average), doing well below your fair share to make discussion productive. Your comments demonstrate a lack of familiarity with the reading. Your comments don't do much to engage with others in the course, and/or you talk over others. You may sometimes be a distraction.
  - *D or F range*: You never or almost never speak up in class discussion and/or group activities. You may frequently be a distraction.
- Because philosophy is done best when it's done collaboratively, my goal is to create a space where productive conversations can happen. Research on classrooms and workplaces consistently supports the conclusion that, for most people, technology is a barrier to these productive conversations. (Ask me if you're curious about this research!) For that reason, **electronic devices (laptops, tablets, phones, etc.) are generally not allowed in class.** I will ask you to put these devices in your bag before you enter the classroom and leave them there until the end of class. There are, however, exceptions to this rule. **If you need an electronic device in order to be successful in this course (because of a disability, a life situation, or some other reason), please speak with me during the first two weeks of the course.** If I give you permission to use technology, it's your responsibility to work to minimize your distractions to other students (a good way to do this is to sit in the back or to the side of the classroom, so that your screen will not be visible to others).

Beyond the minimum requirements (turning in all three conversation papers, having no more than five unexcused absences in either half of the course, and turning in the final project), here's how the work in this course contributes to your final grade:

- **Conversation 1:** 14%

- **Conversation 2:** 16%
- **Conversation 3:** 20%
- **Final project:** 35%
- **Participation:** 15%

The grade scale is:

	A: 93-100%	A-: 90-92%
B+: 87-89%	B: 83-86%	B-: 80-82%
C+: 77-79%	C: 73-76%	C-: 70-72%
D+: 67-69%	D: 60-63%	D-: 60-62%
F: below 60%		

## What I'll need to do

My responsibilities in this course include:

- Making sure our discussions are productive. If at any point you're not feeling that our discussions are respectful and charitable, please come talk to me.
- Grading your work quickly and fairly. I will return all graded work no later than two weeks from the day you turn it in.
- Communicating with you over email.
  - My responsibility is to email you whenever there are time-sensitive announcements about this course; your responsibility is to check your Oberlin email (including your spam folder) every day.
  - I use Blackboard when I need to send announcements to the entire class. Replies to emails I send through Blackboard do not go to me, and I have no way to see them. **If you need to contact me over email, please make sure you're emailing my email address, [aberg@oberlin.edu](mailto:aberg@oberlin.edu).**
  - Our emails to each other in this course are professional documents, and it is my and your responsibility to write them professionally. For tips on how to write a professional email, check the email rubric posted to Blackboard. I will respond to your email no later than 5 pm on the next business day; in the rare case I do not, please feel free to follow up with me after that.
- Holding office hours, which you can use to talk to me about course content, what you've missed if you have to miss class, and so on. (This semester, office hours will be in person by default, but I'm also happy to meet over Zoom—just let me know ahead of time.) I'm happy to discuss questions about assignments and to provide feedback on your work before you turn it in; if you want me to read a complete draft of an assignment, send it to me at least one week before it's due.

## Some ways to succeed in this course

- I am committed to making sure that you can succeed in this course, regardless of whether you have a disability (visible or invisible). If you have a disability that may impact your work in this class and for which you may require accommodations, please see me and the Office for Disability and Access so that we may arrange appropriate accommodations. If you have questions, or if you need an accommodation of another type (athletic, religious, etc.), please let me know as soon as possible.
- **Every student is expected to adhere to the Honor Code.** This means in very general terms that you only submit work that is yours. More specifically, it means that you will not plagiarize;

that is, you will not appropriate the work or ideas of someone else—whether written or not—without acknowledgement, using the conventionally agreed-on scholarly practices for quoting and citation, and that you will not cheat, fabricate, collaborate on a project that is meant to be done individually (including by discussing the assignment instructions), or submit the same work for multiple classes or assignments without the prior approval of all instructors involved. This also means that you will not use artificial intelligence software or other related programs to create or assist with assignments unless otherwise specified by me and/or the Office of Disability & Access. While you are allowed and encouraged to ask for advice and help from the instructor, librarians, or official writing tutors, you are, in the end, to submit work produced by you. Some assignments may be collaborative in nature; those will be clearly identified as such. Everyone in the campus community is required to report all suspected violations of the honor code to the student honors committee. Following college-wide policy, include the Honor Pledge and your T number at the bottom of each assignment. For more information, see the Academic Integrity section of the Dean of Students website (<https://www.oberlin.edu/dean-of-students/student-conduct/academic-integrity>). Any assignment which the Student Honor Committee finds has violated the Honor Code will receive a grade of 0, and you will not be allowed to redo it.

- The Writing and Speaking Centers are peer support resources on campus to support you with the writing and speaking for your classes and beyond. You can work with a Writing Associate at any stage of the writing process - brainstorming, organization, thesis construction, proofreading, and everything in between! You can check the schedule and make an appointment at <https://oberlin.mywconline.com/>.
- You are welcome and encouraged to come to my office hours or make an appointment with me whenever you want to talk about the course material, your assignments, or any other philosophy-related concerns you have.

### Schedule of readings and assignments

Complete each day's assigned reading *before* coming to class. Readings \*\*\*with asterisks around their names\*\*\* are in the packet, which you should pick up at my office (King 120A) as soon as you can; all other readings are in one of the books (*Theory of Justice* = *TJ*; *Justice, Gender, and the Family* = *JGF*; *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* = *ASU*; *Why Not Socialism?* = *WNS*). This schedule is provisional, and you are responsible for learning about any changes we make to it; you can always find the most current syllabus on Blackboard.

Date	Topic	Reading	Assignments
Tuesday 2/6	Introduction	None	
Thursday 2/8	Liberal egalitarian justice	Rawls, <i>TJ</i> , sections 1-4	
Tuesday 2/13	Liberal egalitarian justice	Rawls, <i>TJ</i> , sections 11-13, 15-17, 46 p. 266-267	
Thursday 2/15	Liberal egalitarian justice	Rawls, <i>TJ</i> , sections 24-26	
Tuesday 2/20	Liberal egalitarian justice	Rawls, <i>TJ</i> , sections 44, 70-72	
Thursday 2/22	CLASS CANCELED		
Tuesday 2/27	Liberal egalitarian justice	Okin, <i>JGF</i> , ch. 5	Conversation 1 assigned
Thursday 2/29	Liberal egalitarian justice	None (bring <i>TJ</i> and <i>JGF</i> to class)	

Tuesday 3/5	Libertarian justice	Nozick, <i>ASU</i> , pp. 10-25 AND ***State of Nature – The Game***	
Thursday 3/7	Libertarian justice	Nozick, <i>ASU</i> , pp. 26-33 AND 108-119 (optional: 42- 45)	
Tuesday 3/12	Libertarian justice	Nozick, <i>ASU</i> , pp. 149-164	Conversation 1 due
Thursday 3/14	Libertarian justice	Nozick, <i>ASU</i> , pp. 174-178, 189-198, 228-231	
Tuesday 3/19	Libertarian justice	Okin, <i>JGF</i> , ch. 4	Conversation 2 assigned
Thursday 3/21	Libertarian justice	None (bring <i>ASU</i> and <i>JGF</i> to class)	
<b>NO CLASS TUESDAY 3/26 – THURSDAY 3/28: SPRING BREAK</b>			
Tuesday 4/2	Socialist justice	Cohen, <i>WNS</i> , chs. 1 and 2	Conversation 2 due
Thursday 4/4	Socialist justice	Cohen, <i>WNS</i> , chs. 3 and 4	
Tuesday 4/9	Socialist justice	Okin, <i>JGF</i> , ch. 8	
Thursday 4/11	Conservative justice	***Oakeshott, “On Being Conservative”***	
Tuesday 4/16	Conservative justice	***Sandel, <i>Liberalism and the Limits of Justice</i> *** AND ***Bloom, <i>The Closing of the American Mind</i> ***	Conversation 3 assigned
Thursday 4/18	Conservative justice	Okin, <i>JGF</i> , ch. 2	
Tuesday 4/23	Communitarian justice	***Walzer, <i>Spheres of Justice</i> ***	
Thursday 4/25	Communitarian justice	Okin, <i>JGF</i> , ch. 3, pp. 62-73	Final project assigned
Tuesday 4/30	Multicultural justice	***Okin, “Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women?”***	Conversation 3 due
Thursday 5/2	Multicultural justice	***Al-Hibri, “Is Western Patriarchal Feminism Good for Third World/Minority Women?”*** AND ***Nussbaum, “A Plea for Difficulty”***	
Tuesday 5/7	Art, gender, and justice	None (meet at the Print Study Room in the Allen Museum)	
Thursday 5/9	Wrap-up	None	
Saturday 5/18			Final project due <b>in hard copy in my office by 11 am</b>

