

Justice, Political Science 103

Summer 2026

Preliminary syllabus - subject to change

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Encina West, Room 419

Dr. Coyne's drop-in office hours are Wednesdays 11 am to 12:30 pm in person in Encina Hall West Room 419: no appointment necessary, first-come, first-served. To meet at other times either in person or on Zoom, reach out by email.

Class format and schedule:

Everyone must attend both lectures per week and sign up for and attend one of the weekly discussion sections.

Lectures: Tuesdays and Thursdays 10:30 am to 12:30 pm.

Discussion sections: TBA

This course does *not* have an exam during final exams period.

Teaching assistant:

TBA

Course description:

Justice, as we use the term in this class, is a question about social cooperation. People can produce much, much more cooperatively than the sum of what they could produce as individuals, and these gains from cooperation are what makes civilization possible. But on what terms should we cooperate? How should we divide, as the philosopher John Rawls puts it, “the benefits and burdens of social cooperation”? Working primarily within the Anglo-American philosophical tradition, we’ll discuss different answers to this

big question as a way to bring together some of the most prominent debates in modern political philosophy. We'll study theories including utilitarianism, libertarianism, classical liberalism, and liberal egalitarianism, and we'll take on complex current issues like reparations for racial injustice, the gender pay gap, and responses to climate change. This class is meant to be an accessible entry point to political philosophy. No experience with political science or philosophy is required or assumed, and we will spend time on the strategy of philosophy as well: understanding *how* our authors make their arguments to better respond to them and make our own.

Course Requirements and Policies

Stanford as an institution is committed to the highest quality education, and as your teaching team, our first priority is to uphold your educational experience. To that end we are committed to following the syllabus as written here, including through short or long-term disruptions, such as public health emergencies, natural disasters, or protests and demonstrations. However, there may be extenuating circumstances that necessitate some changes. Should adjustments be necessary we will communicate clearly and promptly to ensure you understand the expectations and are positioned for successful learning.

Course materials:

Readings are available via Canvas and organized in the modules. Do the readings before the class day in which they're listed. Small changes to readings may be made during the quarter; the Canvas modules will always have the current readings.

Assignments and grading breakdown:

- Midterm, 800-1000 words, due July 18 (25% of final grade)
- Final paper, 1500-2000 words, due August 15 (40%)
- Four short written responses in lecture, spread throughout the quarter (20% total);
- Section attendance / participation (15%).

Grading policies:

- This class satisfies the Ethical Reasoning Way.

- Extensions for written assignments must be arranged with your T.A. in advance. Late assignments will lose one grade per day (A becomes B). Very late work may not get credit.
- Final grades are calculated using the 100-point system: 93% and above = A, 90-92% = A-, 87-89% = B+, 83-86% = B, and so on. Grades below a D- (below 60%) receive a NP.
- For students taking the class on a credit / no credit basis, credit requires earning a C- or above (at least 70%) as well as completing each of the major assignments.
- [Stanford University policy](#) is that Incompletes must be requested by the last day of class, and Incompletes are “restricted to cases in which the student has satisfactorily completed a substantial part of the course work.”
- **The Honor Code** is available [here](#). It is your responsibility to know and follow the Honor Code.

Screen-free class: To better engage with each other, both lecture and section will generally be screen-free: no laptops, tablets, phones, etc. You are welcome to use a device if you need it as an accessibility accommodation, and occasionally we may use devices for particular activities. You are encouraged to print readings and bring them to class. Stanford charges less than one cent per page for printing.

Using artificial intelligence in this class: Many of you likely already use ChatGPT or similar artificial intelligence tools. You are welcome to use these tools to learn more about the thinkers, topics, and texts of this course. If you do, however, you should check the facts you get from AI tools against another source: ChatGPT and similar tools may sometimes “hallucinate” facts. **Writing is different. Every word that you submit as part of an assignment must be your own creation, or a quotation from a source appropriately marked by a citation. Submitting any text generated by ChatGPT or other AI tools in any writing assignment for this course is not allowed and will be considered plagiarism.**

Correcting grading mistakes: Each assignment includes detailed instructions and a rubric, an explanation of how different levels of success on the assignment translate into different grades. If you're unsure why you got a particular grade or believe a mistake has been made in your grade, please start (step 1) by rereading the rubric and instructions and your T.A.'s comments on the assignment. Reach out to your T.A. (step 2) if you are still unsure. **If after steps 1 and 2, you still believe there is an error in**

your grade, please send a brief written explanation of the mistake you believe has been made to Dr. Coyne by email to review.

Attendance at lecture and attendance / participation in section are part of your grade for the course. Do not take another class whose schedule conflicts with this one.

How you'll get credit for attendance:

Section (15% of total course grade): In section, your T.A. will take attendance each day, and your score will also factor in participation.

Lecture (20% of total course grade): In lecture, on 4 unannounced days over the quarter, there will be a short in-class written response that you'll turn in on the way out of class. These are marked for full credit, half credit, or no credit if not turned in.

What to do if you'll miss class:

If you are going to miss section, let your T.A. know in advance, and you may write and submit to your T.A. a ~250-word paragraph responding to a question of your choice from the slides from the most recent lecture. Alternatively, with your T.A.'s permission you may attend a different section that week.

If you are going to miss lecture, let your T.A. know in advance, and once the day's lecture slides are posted, you may write and submit to your T.A. a ~250-word paragraph responding to a question of your choice from the lecture slides. This paragraph will give you full credit for any in-class response assignment we may have had in that day's lecture. Except in cases of emergency, if you don't tell your T.A. *in advance* that you're missing lecture, you may not make up an in-class response assignment afterwards.

The policies above are intended for small numbers of absences. If you'll miss a substantial portion of the quarter due to illness or any other reason, reach out to your T.A. as soon as possible to develop an individual make-up plan. If you will miss too much class, regardless of the reason, taking the course a future year may be the best option.

Academic accommodations: Stanford is committed to providing equal educational opportunities for disabled students. Disabled students are a valued and essential part of

the Stanford community. We welcome you to our class. If you experience disability, please register with the Office of Accessible Education (OAE). Professional staff will evaluate your needs, support appropriate and reasonable accommodations, and prepare an Academic Accommodation Letter for faculty. To get started, or to re-initiate services, please visit oae.stanford.edu.

If you already have an Academic Accommodation Letter, we invite you to share your letter with us. Academic Accommodation Letters should be shared at the earliest possible opportunity so we may partner with you and OAE to identify any barriers to access and inclusion that might be encountered in your experience of this course.

Course Calendar

Session 1.1: Tuesday, June 23: Introduction: The fundamental problem of justice

- David Hume. 1777. *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*. Excerpt on the circumstances of justice.

Session 1.2: Thursday, June 25: Climbing the egalitarian plateau

- Keith Payne. *The Broken Ladder*. 2017. Excerpts.
- Elizabeth Anderson. 2015. "What's wrong with inequality?" Interview with the *New York Times*.
- Harry Frankfurt. 1987. "Equality as a moral ideal." Excerpt.
- OPTIONAL NOW / REQUIRED LATER IN THE QUARTER: *SFFA v. Harvard*. United States Supreme Court case, excerpts from majority and minority opinions. 2022.

Session 2.1: Tuesday, June 30: Utilitarianism: justice as a math problem

- Jeremy Bentham. *Introduction to Principles of Morals and Legislation*. 1789. Chapters 1, 4.
- Peter Singer. 1972. "Famine, Affluence, and Morality."

Session 2.2: Thursday, July 2: Modern utilitarianism and critiques

- Nick Bostrom. 2003. "Astronomical waste: The opportunity cost of delayed technological development."
- Émile P. Torres. 2021. "Were the great tragedies of history 'mere ripples'?"
- William MacAskill. 2019. "Effective Altruism."
- Amia Srinivasan. "Stop the Robot Apocalypse." *London Review of Books*. 2015.

Session 3.1: Tuesday, July 7: Rights and liberty

- John Locke. *Second Treatise on Government*. 1689. Chapters 1 - 3.
- Isaiah Berlin. 1958. "Two concepts of liberty." Excerpts.
- Adam Swift. "Liberty" in *Political Philosophy: A Beginner's Guide for Students and Politicians*. 2001.

Session 3.2: Thursday, July 9: Social contract theory

- John Locke. *Second Treatise on Government*. 1689. Chapters 8 - 9.
- David Hume. "Of the Original Contract." 1752.

Session 4.1: Tuesday, Jul 14: From real to hypothetical social contracts

- John Rawls, *Justice as Fairness: A Restatement*. 2001. Sections 4 and 6-10 (pp. 10-12 and 14-29).

Session 4.2: Thursday, July 16: Justice as fairness

- John Rawls, *Justice as Fairness: A Restatement*. 2001. Part 2, Sections 12-17 (pp. 40-61).
- Martin Feldstein. 1999. "Reducing Poverty, Not Inequality." Pp. 1-2.

***Midterm paper due Friday, July 17.**

Session 5.1: Tuesday, July 21: What is property, anyway?

- John Locke. *Second Treatise on Government*. 1689. Chapter 5, "Of Property."
- Robert Nozick. 1974. *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*. Excerpts.

- Cheryl Harris. 1993. "Whiteness as Property." Excerpts.

Session 5.2: Thursday, July 23: Justice in the market economy

- Friedrich Hayek. *Law, Legislation, and Liberty*. 1973. Chapter 9: "'Social' or Distributive Justice."
- Debra Satz. *Why Some Things Should Not Be For Sale*. 2010. Chapter 1: "What Do Markets Do?" and Chapter 4, "Noxious Markets."

Session 6.1: Tuesday, July 28: Marx's critiques of liberal justice

- Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. 1848. "The Communist Manifesto." Excerpts.
- Karl Marx. 1875. "Critique of the Gotha Programme." Excerpts.

Session 6.2: Thursday, July 30: An egalitarian ethos as a basis of justice?

- G. A. Cohen. 2009. *Why Not Socialism?* Excerpts.
- Julius Nyerere. 1962. "Ujamaa – The Basis of African Socialism."

Session 7.1: Tuesday, Aug. 4: Meritocracy and justice

- Daniel Markovits. 2019. *The Meritocracy Trap*. Excerpts.
- Adrian Wooldridge. 2021. *Aristocracy of Talent*. Excerpts.
- Elsie Chen. 2021. "These Chinese Millennials Are 'Chilling,' and Beijing Isn't Happy." *The New York Times*.
- Luo Huazhong. 2021. "Lying Flat is Justice."

Session 7.2: Thursday, Aug. 6: Race and systemic (in)justice

- Isabel Wilkerson. 2020. *Caste: The Origins of our Discontents*. Chapter 6: "The Measure of Our Humanity."
- Cheryl Harris. 1993. "Whiteness as Property." Excerpts. (*Note: these are different excerpts from the ones we read for week 5.*)
- *SFFA v. Harvard*. United States Supreme Court case, excerpts from majority and minority opinions. 2022. (If you didn't read this in week 1, please read it now. If you did, please review it.)

- OPTIONAL: Kim-Mai Cutler. 2015. "East of Palo Alto's Eden: Race and the Formation of Silicon Valley."

Session 8.1: Tuesday, Aug. 11: Justice, peace, and stability

- John Rawls. *A Theory of Justice*. Sections on civil disobedience.
- OPTIONAL: Alabama Clergymen's letter to Martin Luther King, Jr., 1963, and "An Appeal for Law and Order and Common Sense." 1963.
- OPTIONAL: Martin Luther King, Jr. "Letter from Birmingham Jail." 1963.
- Tommie Shelby. 2007. "Justice, Deviance, and the Dark Ghetto."

Session 8.2: Thursday, Aug. 13: Environmental justice and intergenerational justice

- OPTIONAL: Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. 2021. "Climate Change 2021: The Physical Science Basics. Summary for Policymakers."
- Josephine Staton. 2021. Dissent in *Juliana v. United States*, with commentary by Robinson Meyer. *The Atlantic*.
- Henry Shue. 2010. "Global Environment and International Inequality."

***Final paper due Friday, August 14.**