**Contemporary Political Theory: The ‘What?’ and the ‘How?’ of Distributive Justice**

**POLI 363 Instructor: Joseph Van Weelden**

**Winter 2018** joseph.vanweelden@mcgill.ca

**CURRIE 408/9 TA: Matthew Scarfone**

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**Office Hours: Thursday and Friday, 2-4**

This course aims to provide students with a thorough grounding in the contemporary literature on *distributive justice*. It will be roughly divided into two parts. In the first part of the course we will consider several answers to the question of what the appropriate *currency* of distributive justice is (candidates discussed will include well-being, resources, Rawlsian primary goods, and capabilities). We will then turn our attention to the question of *how* we can best distribute *whatever it is* that is to be distributed. Is equality itself valuable, or is what matters just that everybody has enough, or that those who are worst off are as well off as possible? If inequality is bad, is this only where it results from chance rather than choice? Throughout, we will also reflect on the ways in which distinct answers to the ‘what?’ and the ‘how?’ questions might turn out to be mutually supporting (or incompatible).

**Prerequisites**

This is a 300-level course. In accordance with departmental regulations, this means that students must have taken a 200-level course in the same field (i.e. POLI 231 or 232).

**Required Texts**

All readings are either freely available online through the McGill Library or will be made available on **myCourses**.

**Methods of Assessment**

The final grade for this course will be based on two short papers, each of approximately 1000 words (each worth 1/6 of the final grade), one long paper of approximately 2000 words (worth 1/3 of the final grade), and a take-home final exam (worth 1/3 of the final grade).

A selection of topics for each paper will be handed out 2 weeks before the due date (if you wish to write on a topic of your own choice, you may do so only with the instructor’s approval).

The final exam will consist of several short essay questions, ranging over all the course material.

To pass the course, you must hand in all three papers and write the final exam.

Finally, note that although there is no formal participation grade, class participation may be factored in when the grade is otherwise on the borderline (for instance, if a student’s GPA lies between a B+ and an A -, participation will serve as a tie-breaker).

**Course Policies**

Generally, papers should be submitted in hard copy by the end of class on the date indicated on the syllabus. If there are special circumstances preventing you from handing your paper in in hard copy, please notify me of this in advance of the due date. With permission, you may then email the paper directly to the TA, by the end of class on the due date.

Late papers will be docked one third of a letter grade for every day late, including weekends.

Requests for extensions must be addressed to the instructor (the TA will not grant extensions). No extensions will be granted on (or after) an assignment’s due date.

My aim is to make this course as intellectually rewarding for you as I can. I must ask for each of your assistance in achieving this aim, however. It has been shown repeatedly that students learn more when they actively engage with the material and participate in the learning process, as opposed to passively listening to a lecturer. Group discussion is therefore an important aspect of this course. I will do my best to initiate and facilitate such a dialogue, but your role here is crucial. It is expected that you come to each session ready to raise, and respond, to questions about the material discussed (you should aim, whenever possible, to do **all the readings** for the week prior to the Wednesday session).

McGill University values **academic integrity**. Therefore, all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the **Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures** (see mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/ for more information)

In accord with McGill University’s Charter of Students’ Rights, students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French any written work that is to be graded.

Conformément à la Charte des droits de l’étudiant de l’Université McGill, chaque étudiant-e a le droit de soumettre en français ou en anglais tout travail écrit devant être noté.

Students, per McGill policy, have the right to request that their work be re-read and re-assessed. The Department of Political Science’s Assessment and Re-Read Policy applies. If the assignment was graded by the TA, any concerns about grading/assessment must always be brought to them first. All requests must be accompanied by the **original assessment** including the grades, comments, and annotations made by the TA or the professor, as well as by **a brief one-paragraph explanation** why the student deems the grade inappropriate.

It is of the utmost importance that every student in the class feels that they can express themselves, in the knowledge that their person and contributions will be respected by their peers. Kindness and civility are not only compatible with spirited intellectual debate, but essential to it. Please do not hesitate to let me know if you have any concerns about the overall climate of this course, or if more specific issues arise.

As the instructor of this course, I will endeavor to provide an accessible and inclusive learning environment. However, if you experience barriers to learning, please do not hesitate to discuss them with me and/or with the Office for Students with Disabilities, (514) 398-6009.

A note on the readings: Although none of the readings for this course pre-date the 1970s, some of them nonetheless contain terminology and assumptions that would today be considered both outdated and offensive (particularly relating to disability). Since this was until recently (and unfortunately, to some extent still is) a persistent and regrettable feature of the literature on distributive justice, we cannot really avoid confronting this issue. I pledge to do my best to acknowledge, and correct for, this tendency in my own presentation of the views discussed. I ask only that students do the same.

In the event of extraordinary circumstances beyond the University’s control, the content and/or evaluation scheme in this course is subject to change.

**Class Schedule**

W, Jan.10: Intro, Run-through of Syllabus. Readings: None

F, Jan. 12: Intro to Unit 1: Currency (The ‘What’). Readings: Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy Entry on “Egalitarianism” (section 3)

W, Jan.17: Well-Being. Readings: Parfit “What Makes Someone’s Life Go Best”, Keller “Welfarism”

F, Jan.19: Well-Being cont’d. Readings: Tiberius and Haybron “Well-Being Policy: What Standard of Well-Being”?

W, Jan.24 Well-Being cont’d. Readings: Dworkin “What is Equality? Part 1: Equality of Welfare” (through section iv)

F, Jan.26 Well-Being cont’d. Readings: Dworkin “What is Equality? Part 1” (section v to end), Arneson “Welfare Should be the Currency of Justice”

W, Jan.31 Resources. Readings: Dworkin “What is Equality? Part 2: Equality of Resources” (sections i, ii, and vii)

F, Feb.2 Access to Advantage. Readings: Cohen “On the Currency of Egalitarian Justice”

W, Feb.7 Primary Goods. Readings: Rawls “Social Unity and Primary Goods”

F, Feb.9 Capabilities. Readings: Sen “Equality of What?”

**First Short Paper Due**

W, Feb.14 Capabilities cont’d. Readings: Nussbaum *Creating Capabilities* Preface, Chs 1 and 2

F, Feb.16 Capabilities cont’d. Readings: Nussbaum Chs 3 and 4

W, Feb.21 Capabilities cont’d. Readings: Nussbaum Ch 8

F, Feb.23. Redistribution and Recognition. Readings: Fraser “Redistribution, Recognition and Participation” (through page 38), Robeyns “Is Fraser’s Critique Justified?”

W, Feb.28. Relational Goods. Readings: Ghaeus “Hikers in Flip-Flops: Luck Egalitarianism, Democratic Equality and the *Distribuenda* of Justice”

F, Mar.2 Unit 1 Recap

**Second Short Paper Due**

W, Mar.14 Intro to Unit 2: Distributive Principles (The ‘How’?). Readings: Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy Entry on “Egalitarianism” (section 6)

F, Mar.16 Telic Egalitarianism. Readings: Parfit “Equality or Priority”

W, Mar.21 Telic Egalitarianism cont’d. Readings: Temkin “Equality, Priority and the Leveling Down Objection”

F, Mar. 23 Prioritarianism. Readings: None

W, Mar.28 Against Prioritarianism. Readings: Otsuka and Voorhoeve “An Argument Against the Priority View”

W, Apr.4 Sufficientarianism. Readings: Crisp “Equality, Priority, and Compassion”, Casal “Why Sufficiency is Not Enough”.

F, Apr.6 Luck Egalitarianism. Readings: Dworkin “What is Equality? Part 2” (read only section iii).

**Long Paper Due**

W, Apr.11 Against Luck Egalitarianism. Readings: Anderson “What is the Point of Equality?”(read only up to pg. 307), Hurley “Luck and Equality I”, Arneson “Luck and Equality II”.

F, Apr.13 Unit 2 Recap. Readings: None

**F, April 27th: Take-Home Exam Due**