

POL 457/2057 2015-16
Markets, Justice and the Human Good

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How should we organize the production and distribution of goods and services in the contemporary world, if we were free to do so in whatever way we chose? The modern capitalist order may be inevitable, but is that something we should celebrate or bemoan? And if it is inevitable, does that inevitability rest upon unavoidable features of the human condition or on other, more contingent facts about history and power? To the extent that it is the latter, what features of contemporary capitalism (if any) would it be desirable to change, if we could, and what features would it be desirable to preserve? If we had the capacity to re-order the world, taking human beings as they are (or might become) and social institutions as they might be, what should we do about the ordering of human economic life and why?

These are big questions. On the other hand, economic activity is only one aspect of human life and it is plausible to suppose that one cannot answer these questions satisfactorily without addressing still broader questions about how human beings should organize their lives politically and socially and, indeed, questions about how human beings should live and why.

This course will not try to provide answers to these big questions or the bigger ones just evoked, but it will try to keep them in mind, while providing a context within which we can begin to explore some aspects of them. The references to economic activity and the contemporary world already limit the inquiry (in underspecified ways). To limit it still further (so as to make it somewhat manageable), the course will focus on the intersection of one type of institutional arrangement that is central to the modern politico-economic order, namely the market, and one philosophical tradition that is central to the modern world, namely liberalism. It will ask what are the virtues and defects of market arrangements from the perspective of liberal justice. Of course, there are many versions of liberalism and there are many different types of actual and possible market arrangements. So, the course will really be asking is this: what is the best account of liberal justice and what does this entail for the uses and limits of markets (in various forms) as ways for organizing aspects of human life?

Needless to say, even this question is much too big for a single course. What this course can really offer is a few baby steps in the direction of an inquiry. We will consider what a few thoughtful authors have said about the virtues and limits of the market from a liberal perspective. For all of its limitations, the course will give you a chance to begin to think in a careful way about what justice requires with respect to the distribution of income, leisure, work, opportunity, and freedom; to consider the way knowledge, scarcity, risks, incentives, and other factors matter in the organization of economic activity; and to assess the adequacy of alternative arrangements in addressing the complex challenges of organizing human economic activity. Throughout the course we will also pay attention to what we are presupposing in any particular inquiry, so the course will also provide an opportunity to reflect upon some of the methodological questions one must face in doing contemporary political theory.

REQUIRED TEXTS:

John Rawls, *Justice As Fairness: A Restatement* (Harvard)

G.A. Cohen, *Rescuing Justice and Equality* (Harvard)

Other readings to be posted on Blackboard

The Cohen book is available electronically from the library. Both Rawls and Cohen are available at most academic bookstores and through online book dealers.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND GRADING:

I. Short Papers and Participation (20 % of final grade). This includes the following:

A) Three short papers on the readings during each semester of the course. In the first semester, this must include at least one paper on Rawls.

The comments are an opportunity to reflect upon the readings in a way that will provide a stimulus and focus for class discussion. You should not summarize the readings. Instead you should take a position or sketch an argument or indicate what you find interesting or puzzling or problematic about some part of the readings. The comments need not cover every topic. You need not try to work out a detailed argument and indeed will probably not have the space to do so.

You must post your comments on Blackboard by **6:00 pm on the Monday evening** before the class in which the material is to be discussed. The maximum length is one page single spaced (12 point type, 1" margins). **Late papers (i.e., papers submitted after 6 p.m.) will not be accepted.**

B) Active and informed participation in class discussion, including having read the comments of your fellow students.

II. First term paper (40 % of final grade)

15 pages for undergraduates; 20 pages for grad students. Analytical and critical paper on some aspect of the debate between Rawls and Cohen. Due January 8.

III. Second term paper. (40 % of final grade)

15 pages for undergraduates; 20 pages for grad students. Details with second semester syllabus. Due April 8.

Submission: All papers should be submitted electronically to the instructor in .doc or .rtf format.

Late Penalties: Late papers will be penalized one point per day including weekends, unless an extension is explicitly granted in writing in advance.

SCHEDULE OF FALL READINGS:

- Sept. 15: Introduction
- Sept. 22: Rawls, *Justice As Fairness*, Part I
- Sept. 29: Rawls, *Justice As Fairness*, Part II.
- Oct. 6: Rawls, *Justice As Fairness*, Part III.
- Oct. 13: Rawls, Rawls, *Justice As Fairness*, Part IV.
- Oct. 20: Martin O’Neill, “Free (and Fair) Markets without Capitalism: Political Values, Principles of Justice, and Property-Owning Democracy.”
Thad Williamson, “Who Owns What? An Egalitarian Interpretation of John Rawls’s Idea of a Property-Owning Democracy.”
- Oct. 27: Cohen, *Rescuing Justice and Equality*, Chapter 1.
- Nov. 3: Cohen, *Rescuing Justice and Equality*, Chapters 2 and 3.
- Nov. 10: Fall break. No Class.
- Nov. 17: Joseph H. Carens, "Rights and Duties in an Egalitarian Society."
Lucas Stanczyk, “Productive Justice.”
- Nov. 24: Joseph H. Carens, “The Egalitarian Ethos as a Social Mechanism.”
Lisa Herzog, “Distributive Justice, Feasibility Gridlocks, and the Harmfulness of Economic Ideology.”
- Dec 1: Emily McTernan, “The inegalitarian ethos: Incentives, respect, and self-respect.”
Miriam Ronzoni, “Life is not a camping trip – on the desirability of Cohenite socialism.”
Hillel Steiner, “Greed and Fear.”
- Dec. 8: Philippe Van Parijs, “Why surfers should be fed: The liberal case for an unconditional basic income.”
Simon Birnbaum, “Should surfers be ostracized? Basic income, liberal neutrality, and the work ethos.”