

ABC'S POLITICS - SYLLABUS SEMINARS (Group A)

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Please note: students must read all compulsory texts listed in the program before each session to actively participate in discussions.

Continuous Evaluation:

1. Oral presentation (25%):

- 15 minutes (neutral) presentation of one of the articles listed in the syllabus as readings for oral presentations
- 30 minutes in-class (critical) discussion - Presentations will be carried out by groups of two students (+ one of three)
- Students will choose one of the texts indicated for each session as readings for oral presentations
- They must read, analyse, and introduce it to the class
- Power Point (or other programs for the presentation) is strongly recommended
- Students must book their place on doodle by September 15 [please note that when there are two readings for oral presentation the first time slot corresponds to the first text listed in the session and the second time slot to the second text].

2. Generative AI exercise (25%)

- Individual critical analysis of a text produced by an AI program (ChatGPT, Perplexity, or Copilot)
- Students will be provided with different prompts
- Analysis of the prompt: how accurate it is, if it makes mistakes, whether the argument can be integrated and how
- Half-page text.

3. Midterm exam (50%):

- 3 hours written in-class analysis of one philosophical excerpt
- Explain the main claim(s)
- Identify possible objection(s) and counter-objection(s)
- Distinguish the author(s)'s view from other(s)'s view(s) mentioned
- Write a brief conclusion including a personal critical analysis.

Seminar 1. Methodology – Monday, 8 September

In this seminar we will examine the methodology of a core branch of contemporary political theory or philosophy: "analytic" political theory. After (very briefly) distinguishing analytic political theory from continental political theory and from other related fields such as political science, moral philosophy, and legal theory, the article discusses the analysis of the notions of principles and theories, as distinct from concepts, and examines the methods of evaluating such principles and theories for the purpose of justifying or criticizing them. Finally, we consider the distinction between Ideal and Non-ideal theories, and the debate on how abstract and idealised political theory should be and assess the significance of disagreement.

Moreover, students will receive a detailed explanation of the expectations for their oral presentations, including guidance on how they should be delivered and the criteria that will be used for evaluation.

Exercise (in-class group work):

Analyse the philosophical text Shacknove, A. E. (1985), “Who is a Refugee?”, *Ethics*, 95(2), pp. 274-284 in order to be able to answer the following questions:

- What is the main claim of the article?
- What are the steps in the argument to support this claim?
- Is it a case of ideal or non-ideal theory? (explain why and what leads you to the answer)
- Find in the text an example of concept clarification and/or of definitory work typical of the analytical methodology

Preparatory (elective) readings:

- Shacknove, A. E. (1985), “Who is a Refugee?”, *Ethics*, 95(2), pp. 274-284

Seminar 2. Methodology – Monday, 15 September

In this second methodological seminar, we will focus on a typical method of philosophical theorising and controversy. In particular, in the first part of the seminar we will focus on the method of the thought experiment: a hypothetical situation in which a hypothesis, theory or principle is tested in order to think through its consequences and draw appropriate conclusions, which is carried out in the imagination - e.g. the 'trolley problem', where a trolley driver has to choose between turning a trolley so that it runs over an innocent man attached to a rail, or allowing the trolley to run over and kill five innocent people. In the second part of the seminar, we will see how a single issue can be the subject of opposing theories. In particular, we will analyse a classic controversy in political philosophy (of migration), the open borders vs. closed borders debate.

Exercise (in-class group work): Debate on *Should states be free to impose restrictions on immigration?*

The students are divided into four groups. Two groups will be against immigration restrictions and two groups will be for immigration restrictions. Each group will have to find two arguments to support the position they are defending (based on the methods discussed in the previous and current seminar sessions). Finally, each group will present their findings to the class (5 minutes) and the rival groups will have time to challenge their arguments (5 minutes).

Preparatory (elective) readings:

- Carens, J. (1987), “Aliens and Citizens: The Case for Open Borders”, *The Review of Politics*, 49:2, pp. 251-273.
- Miller, D. (2014), “Immigration: The Case for Limits”, in Cohen A. and Wellman C.H. (eds.), *Contemporary Debates in Applied Ethics*. Oxford: Blackwell, pp. 364-375.

Seminar 3. Intergenerational Justice – Monday, 22 September (SP)

Equality and fairness are principles that apply not only to people living today but also to past and future generations, and they also have a significant age dimension. This includes questions about our duties toward those who do not yet exist, whether and how past injustices should be addressed, and how goods, opportunities, and risks should be distributed fairly between younger and older generations. Scholars also examine what kinds of institutions and policies can help secure justice over time. In this seminar, we will focus particularly on what we owe to future generations, while also providing an overview of approaches for assessing equality between coexisting age groups, such as the Complete Life View. Throughout, we will explore both the

relational and distributive dimensions of intergenerational justice, considering how fairness can be upheld across generations.

Readings for oral presentations (compulsory):

- Bidadanure, J. (2016), “Making sense of age-group justice: A time for relational equality?”, *Politics, Philosophy & Economics*, 15(3), 234-260. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1470594X16650542> (Original work published 2016).

Seminar 4. Democracy in Ageing Societies – Monday, 29 September (SP)

In ageing societies, demographic trends increasingly create a representation gap: political influence tends to skew towards older generations, while younger citizens are left structurally disadvantaged in shaping and controlling collective decisions. This imbalance raises important questions about democratic fairness and intergenerational justice. In response, scholars have proposed a range of reforms. Some are highly controversial, such as disenfranchising older citizens, while others are more moderate, including lowering the voting age, introducing youth quotas in representative bodies, weighting votes differently, or making voting compulsory. In this seminar, we will examine these proposals, assess their merits and drawbacks, and discuss whether and how they might contribute to a more balanced and inclusive democracy.

Readings for oral presentations (compulsory):

- Biale, E. and Zuccarelli, G. (2025), “Empowering the Young in an Aging Democracy”, *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy*, 1–22.

Seminar 5. Methodology: Midterm Exam + Censorship – Monday, 6 October (SP)

In this seminar, we will build on what we explored in the first session by practicing how to analyze a philosophical text, with a particular focus on strategies relevant to the midterm exam. Following this, we will turn to the topic of censorship, using pornography as a case study. We will examine arguments (Dworkin 2025; MacKinnon 2005) that certain forms of pornography should be censored because they contribute to sexual harassment and trafficking, and we will encourage open discussion and critical reflection on the ethical and philosophical issues involved.

Exercise (in-class group work): 30-minute mock midterm exam based on an excerpt from an article or chapter, followed by a 15-minute discussion addressing common questions and mistakes.

Readings for oral presentations (compulsory):

- Dworkin, Ronald (1981), “Is There a Right to Pornography?”, *Oxford Journal of Legal Studies*, 1(2): 177–212. doi:10.1093/ojls/1.2.177.

Seminar 6. Methodology: Generative AI + Fake News – Monday, 13 October (SP)

This seminar will be devoted to exploring generative AI tools, including ChatGPT, Perplexity, and Copilot. We will examine how to use these tools effectively, what they are capable of, and the common mistakes they make. We will also discuss the biases that can be reflected or amplified through AI, as well as patterns in how these tools respond to different queries and prompts. Through hands-on examples, students will gain practical experience while also critically evaluating the strengths and limitations of generative AI in research and writing.

Afterwards, we will turn to the topic of fake news, building on what has been discussed in the course, and explore whether citizens have responsibilities for the information they share on public and social media.

Readings for oral presentations (compulsory):

- Ferretti, M.P. (2023), “Fake News and the Responsibilities of Citizens”, *Social Theory and Practice*, 49(4), pp. 629-651.

Seminar 7. Freedom as Non-Domination – Monday, 20 October (SP)

Beyond Isaiah Berlin’s (1969) well-known distinction between negative and positive liberty, political philosophers have proposed a third conception of freedom: *freedom as non-domination*. As developed by Philip Pettit, this idea lies at the heart of neo-republicanism, a contemporary revival of the republican tradition. In this view, freedom is defined not simply as non-interference, but as the condition of not being subject to another’s arbitrary power—echoing the classical republican contrast between freedom and slavery. Unlike Berlin’s positive liberty, it does not require self-realization, and unlike negative liberty, it is concerned with protection from domination rather than mere absence of interference. This session will explore this third conception of freedom, asking whether domination constitutes a distinctive form of unfreedom and how it relates to the other two accounts.

Readings for oral presentations (compulsory):

- Gädeke, D. (2020), “Does a Mugger Dominate? Episodic Power and the Structural Dimension of Domination”, *Journal of Political Philosophy*, 28: 199-221. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jopp.12202>.
- Pettit, Philip (1996). Freedom as antipower. *Ethics* 106 (3):576-604.

Seminar 8. Disobedience in Migration Governance – Monday, 3 November (SP)

Some political philosophers argue that all restrictions on immigration are inherently unjust. Others maintain that immigration restrictions are not unjust in themselves, but that certain existing immigration laws are unfair. This raises important questions for individual ethics: should citizens disobey laws they consider unjust, or should they comply if the state issuing them is legitimate? How does disobedience differ when it is a personal refusal to participate in wrongdoing versus a political or communicative act aimed at challenging injustice? This seminar will explore these questions, focusing specifically on the debate around non-compliance with laws that enforce illegitimate immigration restrictions.

Readings for oral presentations (compulsory):

- Hidalgo, J. (2016), “The Duty to Disobey Immigration Law”, *Moral Philosophy and Politics*, 3(2).

Seminar 9. Methodology for the Final Exam - Monday, 10 November

This seminar is dedicated to how to structure a philosophy essay, to better prepare for the final exam of this course. Using a paper on *just war theory* as a concrete example, we will illustrate how to develop a clear thesis, construct arguments, and engage critically with the literature. This will include guidance on how to introduce a topic, outline competing positions, defend a specific view, and anticipate objections. More generally, we will consider how to approach an essay question: how to unpack its key terms, identify the underlying philosophical issues, and organize an argument in response. The aim of this session is to provide students with practical tools for planning and writing well-structured, rigorous essays.

Exercise (in-class group work): 60 minutes mock final exam based on an essay question + 20 minutes for peer-to-peer correction and discussion, followed by a general discussion of common doubts and mistakes.

Seminar 10. Global justice and Climate Change – Monday, 17 November (SP)

There is overwhelming evidence that human activities are changing the climate, including rising temperatures, higher sea levels, and more frequent extreme weather events, such as floods and hurricanes. These changes raise pressing questions of justice, including how to assess and weigh the impacts of climate change, what responsibilities current generations owe to future ones, and how political actors should account for risks and uncertainties in climate projections. The seminar will also explore who bears responsibility for addressing climate change and what constraints should guide climate policies. Concrete issues, such as the displacement of communities due to rising sea levels or climate-related migration, will illustrate the ethical and political challenges that climate change poses across generations and societies.

Readings for oral presentations (compulsory):

- Caney, S. (2014), "Climate Change, Intergenerational Equity and the Social Discount Rate", *Politics, Philosophy & Economics*, 13(4): 320–342.

Seminar 11. Political Regimes: Justice vs. Injustice - Monday, 24 November (SP)

As Judith Shklar observes, 'liberalism has only one overriding aim: to secure the political conditions necessary for the exercise of personal freedom'. While mainstream (Rawlsian) liberalism suggests that liberalism derives its legitimacy from the pursuit of justice, Shklar sees injustice as deserving of moral attention in its own right. For Shklar, the capacity to perceive injustice is separate from, and potentially more morally and politically significant for liberalism than the typically emphasised sense of justice. This understanding shaped Shklar's concept of a 'liberalism of fear', driven not by the pursuit of a summum bonum (an ultimate good) but by the need to avoid a summum malum (an ultimate evil): specifically, cruelty and the fear it generates. Liberalism should be driven by the unique political harm of living in fear of state violence and cruelty typical of authoritarian political regimes, and Shklar's liberalism of fear does this by replacing an idealised approach to political philosophy with a non-utopian methodology that clearly states what should be avoided in the political sphere and how to identify and deal with injustice (negative perspective).

Readings for oral presentations (compulsory):

- Shklar, J. (1989), "Giving Injustice its Due", *The Yale Law Journal*, 98, pp. 1135-1151.

Seminar 12. Intersectionality – Monday, 1 December (SP)

The concept of 'woman' has been a topic of debate within the feminist movement for some time, with discussions centring on the disadvantages and oppressions that follow from the term. Intersectional approaches question the use of binary categories such as "masculinity/femininity," which often assume the social positions of privileged individuals as the norm, and highlight that identities are not binary. The insights of black feminism, intersectionality, queer theory, critical race theory, disability studies, and transfeminism, among others, support the view that there is no universal definition of femininity or of the category of woman that can be applied to all women in all contexts. Furthermore, they indicate that the disadvantages suffered vary depending on other factors involved, such as race, sexual orientation, and class. Some of these philosophers argue that the distinctive moral and valuing experiences of women and individuals of all genders may be unjustly overlooked or denied by a conception of women or femininity that is inherently biased towards white, ableist, and cisgender perspectives. In other words, a non-intersectional approach to feminism would fail to

address the specific experiences of women from other backgrounds, such as women of colour, women from lower socioeconomic groups and women who identify as LGBTQ+.

Readings for oral presentations (compulsory):

- Crenshaw, K. (1989), “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics”, *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, 1:8, pp. 139-167.
- Martin, A. (2024), “Intersectionality without Fragmentation”, *Ethics*, 134:2, pp. 214-245.