PHIL 114: Topics in Ethical Theory
Fall 2017 – The Rights and Responsibilities of Citizenship
Prof. Kate Moran
Office Hours: TBD
kmoran@brandeis.edu
x62695

Brief Overview of the Course
This course is inspired by two observations. The first of these is the fact of pluralism in civil society. The second is the observation made by many philosophers that any claim to a right implies corresponding obligations on the part of others to protect or enforce that right. Together, these observations generate a series of questions about the fundamental rights of democratic citizenship and the obligations citizens have toward fellow citizens with whom they may disagree. In the course of this seminar, we will discuss philosophical notions of rights, the fact of reasonable pluralism, and civility in the context of democratic citizenship. Toward the end of the semester, we will discuss specific topics chosen by the class at the beginning of the semester – possibilities include: free speech, immigration, voting rights, and punishment, among others.

Required Background
Though there are no official prerequisites for the course, some familiarity with terminology in moral and political philosophy will be essential. Students without much background in philosophy may benefit from a dictionary of philosophical terms.

Outcomes and Goals
- Reading and analysis: students will improve on their ability to read texts critically.
- Philosophical discussion: students will improve on their ability to make and listen to arguments, students will discuss abstract concepts and arguments.
- Writing: students will improve on analytical writing skills.
- Content: students will become familiar with several major thinkers and arguments in 20th century political philosophy, students will become familiar with the arguments surrounding several contemporary discussions in political/legal philosophy.

Four-Credit Course (with three hours of class-time per week). Success in this 4 credit hour course is based on the expectation that students will spend a minimum of 9 hours of study time per week in preparation for class (readings, doing exercises, problem sets, discussion sections, preparation for exams, etc.).

Disability. If you are a student with a documented disability at Brandeis University and wish to have a reasonable accommodation made for you in this class, please see the course instructor immediately.
A Note About Class Discussion
Throughout the course, we will be discussing questions related to free expression and disagreement. By enrolling in this course and attending class, you are agreeing to have a respectful and free-ranging conversation about these matters. We will discuss what to expect on the first day of class. If you miss the first day of class, or have concerns, please see me before the enrollment period ends.

Academic Integrity
You are expected to be honest in all of your academic work. The University policy on academic honesty is distributed annually as section 5 of the Rights and Responsibilities handbook. ALL instances of alleged dishonesty will be forwarded to the Office of Campus Life for possible referral to the Student Judicial System. Potential sanctions include failure in the course and suspension from the University. If you have any questions about my expectations, please ask.

Communications. The course will have a mailing list on LATTE. Information about snow days, changed deadlines, and so forth will be broadcast on that mailing list.

Texts
Please bring texts with you to every class meeting!

(1) John Rawls, Political Liberalism
What it’s about: John Rawls was one of the most important political philosophers of the 20th century. His most famous book, A Theory of Justice, brought about a major shift in political philosophy when it was published. However, many critics argued that Rawls’s argument in A Theory of Justice presumed a specific background moral theory that not all citizens necessarily share. Political Liberalism is Rawls’s attempt to respond to this criticism and work out a theory that accommodates a more pluralistic citizenry.

(2) Ronald Dworkin, Justice for Hedgehogs
What it’s about: The title of the book is a reference to the saying that ‘the fox knows many things, but the hedgehog knows one big thing.’ Dworkin argues in favor of the hedgehog in this book – in this case what he calls ‘the unity of value.’ Dworkin argues that in order to give a coherent account of political rights and obligations, one must connect such an account to an argument about ethics and what it is to live well. You can watch a short video of Dworkin discussing his book here.

(3) Other (chapter/article-length) texts will be made available on the course website (LATTE). We will choose topics for the last part of the semester together during the first weeks of class.

Course Requirements
Weekly Reading Responses (25% of the final grade)
Two 5-7 page papers (25% each)
Final Exam (25%)
Course Schedule

Friday, September 1: Overview and Discussion: Rights, Obligations, and Pluralism

Tuesday, September 5 – Obligations and Rights
Onora O’Neill, “The Dark Side of Human Rights”

Friday, September 8 – Friday, September 29: John Rawls, Political Liberalism

Friday, October 6 – Friday, October 27 Ronald Dworkin, Justice for Hedgehogs

Tuesday, October 31 – Tuesday, November 7: Civility


Friday, November 10 – Friday December 8 – Class Choice of Topics (to be chosen before the add/drop deadline)