

Course Syllabus
Choice, Commerce, and Conflict: An Introduction to PPE
Fall 2021
TBD

Instructor: Ryan Doody

Office hours: TBD

Course Website:

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Required Readings:

Reading will be posted online.

Course Description: This interdisciplinary course provides an overview of some of the core conceptual tools used to analyze issues at the intersection of philosophy, politics, and economics (PPE). A range of theoretical topics are covered, including: game theory, property, markets, distributive justice, public choice theory, voting, and more. We will read classical and contemporary sources on these topics as well as explore their applications to contemporary social problems (including: climate change, healthcare rationing, price gouging, universal basic income, pharmaceutical regulations, and others).

Learning Outcomes: By the end of this course, students should be able to ...

- Describe and analyze key ethical and theoretical concepts related to philosophy, politics, and economics, including: property rights, justice, (pareto-)efficiency, market prices, externalities, paternalism
- Demonstrate an understanding of key game-theoretic concepts (including: strategies, dominance, equilibria, etc.) and to identify and analyze classic game structures (including: Prisoners' Dilemmas, collective action problems, and coordination problems).
- Apply theoretical concepts to central issues of public policy, including: climate change, regulation, healthcare rationing, social assistance programs, voting, taxation, poverty.
- Develop, articulate, and critically assess arguments pertaining to the topics and concepts mentioned above. Students should be able to demonstrate an understanding of the difference between validity, soundness, and potential convincingness of arguments.

Grading Policy:

- *Reading Responses* [20%]. Each week (with a couple exceptions) you will be asked to respond to a prompt related to that week's readings. You are to post your responses under the corresponding thread on the discussion forum. They needn't (and shouldn't) be long. The purpose is to demonstrate thoughtful engagement with that week's material, which can be accomplished in various ways (including by asking thoughtful questions).

Reading responses that are turned in on time (before class on XXX) and that demonstrate thoughtful engagement with the material will be given full credit. Those that do not, will not.

- *Homework & Quizzes* [10%]. Throughout the semester, you will be assigned short homework assignments and quizzes. Some of these assignments might ask you to reconstruct and critically assess an argument from one of the readings. Some might test your understanding of some of the key concepts discussed in the material previously covered. These assignments will be turned in online.
- *Midterm Exam* [25%]. There will be a midterm exam, which will be administered around (as you might imagine) the midway point of the semester. The exam will cover the material covered up to that point. We can talk about holding a review session.
- *Final Exam* [35%]. There will be a final exam, which will be administered (you guessed it!) at the end of the semester. The exam will cover *all* of the material covered in the class, but it will focus somewhat more heavily on the material from the second-half.
- *Participation* [10%]. Ideally, this is a discussion-heavy course---with lots of spirited conversation during class. Participating in class is one way of satisfying this course's participation requirement. But it is not the only. As mentioned before (see: "Reading Responses"), we will also make use of Canvas's discussion forums for asynchronous participation. One way to earn participation credit is to read and respond to each others' reading response assignments. You are also free to take the initiative to use the discussion forum for other class-related discussions as well.

Grading Breakdown

Reading Responses	...	20%
Homework & Quizzes	...	10%

Midterm Exam	...	25%
Final Exam	...	35%
Participation	...	10%

Honor Code: All students are expected to follow the guidelines set out in Brown's [Honor Code](#). In particular, please refrain from cheating and plagiarism. It's fine to do outside research, just be sure to cite it. Furthermore, admitting that you don't know something is one of the primary philosophical virtues (e.g., Socrates: "All I know is that I know nothing"), so---even setting ethics and integrity aside---it's always better to shrug than to cheat.

Availability and Communication: I encourage you to meet with me during office hours to talk about anything related to the course. Don't hesitate to meet even if you don't have a specific question. If you can't meet during my office hours, we can make an appointment for a time that works better for you.

Exciting Extra Credit Opportunities!

Throughout the semester there will be an exciting assortment of PPE-related events that nicely complement the course ([these](#), e.g.). You are hereby strongly encouraged to attend these events. Because my encouragement might not be enough, I will offer the following incentive: for each PPE event you attend this semester, if you post a short (200-300 word) reflection about it, I will raise your final grade. For the first event, I will raise your grade one percentage point; for every event after that, you will earn half the number of points as you did on the previous occasion. (See [Zeno's Paradox](#).)

Modifications to Syllabus: I reserve the right to make changes to the syllabus---including due dates and test dates---when unforeseen circumstances occur. These changes will be announced as early as possible. These are difficult times, so I ask for your patience and flexibility.

Schedule for Choice, Commerce, and Conflict
Fall 2021
Ryan Doody

Week 1: Introductions, Prisoners' Dilemmas, and the State of Nature

Hobbes and the State of Nature

Excerpts from Thomas Hobbes' *Leviathan* (posted on Blackboard)

An Introduction to the Prisoners' Dilemma

No reading

Watch [The White Helmets](#) before class on Monday. [Warning: the film contains graphic depictions of the Syrian Civil War.]

Week 2: A Brief Primer on Game Theory

Thinking Strategically I: Dominance and Common Knowledge

Osborne, "Introduction to Game Theory"

Thinking Strategically II: Nash Equilibria

Osborne, *An Introduction to Game Theory*, 2.1-2.7

Reading Response #1 Due

Week 3: Property I

Property in the State of Nature

Excerpts from Thomas Hobbes' *Leviathan*

Property as Convention

David Hume's "Of Justice and Property"

Property as Natural Right

John Locke's "Of Property"

Reading Response #2 Due

Week 4: Property II

Property as a Problem

Karl Marx's "Primitive Accumulation", "The Communist Manifesto"

The Tragedy of the Commons

Garrett Hardin, "The Tragedy of the Commons"

Property as Institution

David Schmidtz, "Institution of Property"

Reading Response #3 Due

Week 5: Markets I: Division of Labor & Alienation

Division of Labor

Adam Smith's "Of the Division of Labor" (from *The Wealth of Nations*)

Alienation

Excerpts from Marx's Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts (1844)

Bullshit Jobs

David Graeber's "On the Phenomenon of Bullshit Jobs: A Work Rant"

Reading Response #4 Due

Week 6: Markets II: Prices, Incentives, and Trade

Price as a signal

Friedrich Hayek, "The Use of Knowledge in Society"

The Invisible Hand

[The Parable of the Polygons](#)

OPTIONAL: Edna Ullman-Margalit, "Invisible-Hand Explanations"

The Ethics of Price Gouging

Matt Zwolinski, "The Ethics of Price Gouging"

Reading Response #5 Due

Midterm Exam is released

Week 7: Markets III: Free Exchange

Exchange & Efficiency

Hausman et al., "Efficiency"

Midterm Exam is due

Noxious Markets

Debra Satz, "Market and Nonmarket Allocation"

OPTIONAL: Debra Satz, chapter 4, *Why Some Things Should Not Be for Sale: The Moral Limits of the Market*

Markets Without Limits

Jason Brennan and Peter Jaworski, chapters 1-2, *Markets Without Limits*

Reading Response #6 Due

Week 8: Market Failures

Public Goods

Tyler Cowen, "Public Goods"

Tyler Cowen 2013 *NYT* op-ed, "To Fight Pandemics, Reward Research"

Market Failures, continued

David Friedman, "Market Failures"

Healthcare Economics

Kenneth Arrow, *Uncertainty and the Welfare Economics of Medical Care* (948-54, 961-2)

Reading Response #7 Due

Week 9: Distributive Justice I

Piketty and Economic Inequality

Watch [Capital in the Twenty-First Century](#) - a film by Justin Pemberton

OPTIONAL: Thomas Piketty, "Introduction" from *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*

Rawls on Justice as Fairness

Excerpts from John Rawls' *A Theory of Justice*

Swift, "Rawls: justice as fairness"

Rawls and Equality of Opportunity

Excerpts from John Rawls' *A Theory of Justice*

Swift, "Equality of Opportunity"

Reading Response #8 Due

Week 10: Distributive Justice II

Nozick's Entitlement Theory of Justice

Excerpts from Robert Nozick's *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*

Nozick, Cohen, and Wilt Chamberlain

Excerpts from Robert Nozick's *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*

G.A. Cohen, "Robert Nozick and Wilt Chamberlain: How Patterns Preserve

Liberty”

Reading Response #9 Due

Week 11: Distributive Justice III

Utilitarianism

Excerpt from Jeremy Bentham’s *Principles of Morals and Legislation*

Utilitarianism II

Excerpt from J.S. Mill’s *Utilitarianism*

Triage

Emanuel et al., “Fair Allocation of Scarce Medical Resources in the Time of COVID-19”

OPTIONAL: Ben Bramble, Chapter 7 (“Triage”), *Pandemic Ethics*

Reading Response #10 Due

Week 12: Public Choice & Politics

Introduction to Public Choice Theory

Excerpts from Anthony Downs *An Economic Theory of Democracy*

The (ir)Rationality of Politics

Michael Huemer, “Why People Are Irrational about Politics”

Echo Chambers & Social Media

C. Thi Nguyen, “[Escape the Echo Chamber](#)”

Reading Response #11 Due

Week 13: Paternalism

Universal Basic Income

Freakonomics “Is the World Ready for a Guaranteed Basic Income?” podcast

PPE in a Time of Pandemic: Universal Basic Income video

Paternalism and Global Poverty

Esther Duflo, “Human Values and the Fight Against Poverty”

Should Medicine Be Regulated?

Jessica Flanigan, interview on her book *Pharmaceutical Freedom: Why Patients Have a Right to Self Medicate*