

## PPE 2894: Introduction to Philosophy, Politics, and Economics

Spring 2019

**Instructor:** Gil Hersch, Ph.D

**Email:** [hersch@vt.edu](mailto:hersch@vt.edu)

**Time and location:** Monday and Wednesday 4:00-5:15pm, Pamplin 2003

**Office:** Major Williams Hall 224

**Office Hours:** Mondays 2:30-3:30pm & Wednesdays 2:30-3:30pm. Also by appointment.

### Overview

This course offers an integrated study of philosophy, politics, and economics. The course clarifies the similarities and differences among the philosophical, political, and economic approaches, and the limitations of each when considered individually. In doing so, the course enhances students' understanding of each discipline, its conclusions, and the ways that the three disciplines can enrich and complement each other. The course is divided into four parts:

1) Methodological considerations: After a brief discussion of the subject matter and methodologies of philosophy, politics, and economics, we will discuss human nature and its modeling in the social sciences. In particular, we will focus on the *homo economicus* model and compare it with alternative models of human agency, such as *homo sociologicus* and *homo politicus*, in order to locate the adequate place of homo sapiens. Finally, a brief introduction to rational choice theory, including game theory, will be provided based on the *homo economicus* model.

2) Social cooperation: Once we adopt the *homo economicus* model, how social cooperation can arise becomes puzzling. In this section we will address this puzzle. Our analysis will begin with the Prisoner's Dilemma game in its simplest form (two-person, one-shot), which is most commonly associated with Hobbes' state of nature. We will discuss Hobbes' problem of social order and Hume's 'solution' to it. In contrast to Hobbes, Hume's state of nature is best modeled by an assurance game. In this context, we will extend our analysis to repeated games and the concepts of trust, reputation, and commitment.

3) Distributive justice: After making clear that *homo economicus* is able to cooperate, the next question we discuss is what a just form of cooperation looks like. We will focus our discussion on four prominent theories of distributive justice: utilitarianism, egalitarianism, liberalism, and libertarianism. In addition, we will discuss the justification of the state and its scope. We will assess arguments for and against the minimal state and the welfare state.

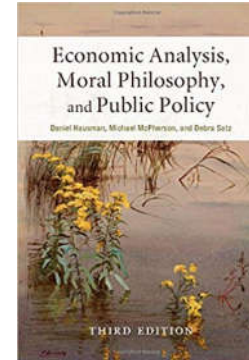
4) Democracy: The final part of the course addresses the political framework in which human cooperation occurs. We examine the ideal of democracy and consider various issues on the subject of voting. After this discussion, we will discuss issues such as how

self-interested individuals and institutions can be incentivized to promote the public good. Finally, we will analyze problems of democratic decision-making by considering the median voter theorem, Condorcet's voting paradox, and the paradox of not voting.

### Text

There is one set text for the course. (Click picture for Amazon link.)

Hausman, Daniel M., Michael S. McPherson, and Debra Satz (2017), *Economic Analysis, Moral Philosophy, and Public Policy*, third edition, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; ISBN: 9781316610886



The book provides an excellent overview of concepts in PPE, and constitutes the required reading for a number of classes in the course.

### iClicker

This course makes frequent use of the iClicker response system. You must acquire an iClicker device for this course.



### Schedule

The course has four parts. The first is devoted to methodological considerations of PPE, the second to social cooperation, the third to distributive justice, and the fourth to democracy. More information about each component can be found in the Course Description in the "Files" section of Canvas.

For each class there is an assigned reading, which you should read before the class. A great guide on how to read philosophy papers can be found [here](#). **All readings that are not from the set text can be found in the "Files" section of Canvas.**

### Learning outcomes and expectations

By the end of this course, you should be able to answer questions such as: Does economics need ethical theory? What is the difference between descriptive/explanatory and normative/justificatory theories? Is rational choice theory a descriptive or a normative theory? Can game theory be fruitfully applied to the social sciences? What are the institutional consequences when (less than) ideally rational agents cooperate with each other? What are the demands of distributive justice? Can the (welfare) state be justified? Can democracy be justified? What are the problems of democratic decision making? How can these problems be overcome, if at all?

Apart from content knowledge, you will be expected to acquire the skills that are necessary to do analytic philosophy, in particular to reason logically and analyse problems systematically. To this end, you will need to learn to distinguish between valid

and invalid arguments, sound and unsound arguments, to trace the implications of your arguments, and to consider possible objections to them. Further, you will need to learn to listen carefully, think critically, debate, and express your views clearly, both orally and in written form. The academic skills that you acquire in this course will help you to deepen your understanding of the course material, and they are often transferable to other courses that you may take, and more generally, and perhaps more importantly, to other aspects of your lives.

In order to acquire the content knowledge and academic skills that are necessary to pass this course, you will be expected to: **(i) carefully read the texts assigned before classes, (ii) attend all classes, (iii) actively participate in classroom discussions, and (iv) submit all written assignments.** Only by preparing properly for classes, participating actively in the classroom, and developing your writing skills, will you gain the level of understanding and depth of knowledge that is necessary to do well in this course. Overall, you must take an active rather than passive role in this course to make the material your own and develop independent thoughts.

### **Assessment**

The different graded elements in the course are weighted as follows:

Class participation	10%
PPE Speaker Series	10%
Quizzes	10%
Group presentation	15%
Essay	25%
Final exam	30%

**Class participation:** Your class participation grade is based on your contributions in class. Simply attending classes, which is compulsory, is not sufficient to receive a high grade in this course. The classes are for *you*, and as such, you should be prepared and actively engage in class discussions (to the extent that the class size allows). You can have up to 3 (10% of classes) absences without any penalty, no explanation needed. *Each absence beyond that deducts a third of a letter grade from your final grade.* Exceptions to this policy will only be made in the case of a *serious* extenuating circumstance (e.g. emergency medical or family problem) supported by appropriate evidence and at the instructor's discretion.

**PPE Speaker Series:** The [PPE Speaker Series](#) is an integral part of the curriculum of this course that serves as Gateway Course for the [PPE Minor](#) and [PPE Major](#) at Virginia Tech. Usually, three guest speakers are invited per semester to give public talks. The names of the guest speakers and precise dates are on the syllabus schedule. The talks replace the usual course material that is assigned for the particular class and all students are required to attend the talks. As preparation for the talks, you are asked to (i) read the papers of the

guest speakers in advance, (ii) prepare 2 questions or comments for the speakers in written form and submit the questions to the course instructor at least one day before the talk, and (iii) actively participate in the Q&A sessions of the talks. In addition, for each talk a small group of students will be selected to have lunch or dinner with the guest speaker. The talks and associated lunches/dinners are an excellent opportunity for you to advance your academic and professional skills as well as to network (Note: the meals will be paid for but alcohol is prohibited. The dress code is smart casual).

Quizzes: Throughout the course there will be several quizzes given at the beginning of classes. There is no fixed amount of quizzes, though they won't be given every class. Quizzes will be mostly be multiple choice and short answer format. The quizzes are mainly meant to check reading and comprehension of the material, and so conscientious reading before every class should almost always result in a perfect grade.

Group presentation: Starting in week 4, every class a pair of students will give a 5 minute presentation. The presentation is meant to be on the reading for that class. It should provide a clear articulation of the main claim of the reading, as well as 3 questions / discussion points that can help the class delve deeper into discussing the material.

Essay: The essay is to be written on assigned questions and should be about 1,500 words. Essay topics will be announced approximately two weeks before the submission deadline. Late essays will not be accepted and will receive a failing grade. Exemptions will be made only in the case of attested illness. The essay is important, not only because it forms a constitutive part of your grade, but also because it is crucial for the development of your philosophical writing skills. There is no better way to develop clear and precise ideas and arguments than writing essays. As such, you should take the essay seriously, as well as the feedback provided on it. If you feel that your writing skills need improvement, please come and see me during my office hours or contact the [Virginia Tech Writing Center](#).

Exam: The final assessment of the course is by a two hour (unseen, closed book) written exam. The date and time of the exam are set by the university and therefore are not subject to change. The exam will include questions that cover the major topics discussed in the course.

### Grading scheme

The assessment criteria are: 1) expression and style, 2) structure and organization, 3) understanding and use of literature, 4) quality of argument, and 5) independence and originality. The grading scheme is as follows:

A	Excellent work. Topic addressed clearly, concisely and with precision. Relevant literature understood and appropriately employed. Analysis of concepts, arguments and positions is rigorous and sufficiently thorough. Arguments are given where appropriate, and are cogent and properly supported by evidence and reasons. In addition, displays a further strength such as outstanding technical competence or
A-	

	depth of knowledge of the relevant literature, or originality in the treatment of this literature.
B+	Good work. Topic clearly and concisely addressed. Relevant literature consulted and understood. Answer is well organized. Important concepts and positions presented clearly and analyzed sufficiently. Arguments are cogent and properly supported by evidence and reasons. Some attempt at critical reflection.
B	
B-	
C+	Satisfactory work. Topic adequately formulated and understood, but not necessarily with great clarity or depth. Most relevant literature consulted and understood to a large degree. Important concepts and positions presented. Fails to meet the criteria for a B because of inadequate organization, errors of understanding, lack of analysis and critical reflection, or failure to support arguments with reasons.
C	
C-	
D+	Barely adequate work. Some familiarity with the relevant literature, but poor grasp of essential concepts. Presentation of material shows basic understanding.
D	
F	Work is totally unsatisfactory. Issues completely misunderstood or understanding of them is very poor. Fails to show even basic understanding of essential concepts and positions.

### **Classroom policies**

Students are bound by the [Virginia Tech Honor Code](#). Please familiarize yourself with its content. In particular, the Undergraduate Honor Code pledge that each member of the university community agrees to abide by states: "As a Hokie, I will conduct myself with honor and integrity at all times. I will not lie, cheat, or steal, nor will I accept the actions of those who do." A student who has doubts about how the Honor Code applies to any assignment is responsible for obtaining specific guidance from the course instructor before submitting the assignment for evaluation. Ignorance of the rules does not exclude any member of the University community from the requirements and expectations of the Honor Code. Below I stress some general rules of conduct that are particularly relevant for this course and that are not necessarily explicitly stated in the Honor Code in this form:

**Punctuality:** Be punctual for class. Latecomers will only be *very* reluctantly tolerated. Being late for class is not only impolite and disrespectful towards your peers and the instructor, but it also interrupts and often wastes valuable class time.

**Personal electronic devices** (cell phones, smart phones, laptops, tablets, etc.): **Cell phone use and laptop use is prohibited in class.** Deductions to participation points may be incurred for failure to abide by the policy. If the policy is not abided by, this may be done without warning or notification.

**Guest speakers:** Please treat our guest speakers with the utmost respect, professionalism, and hospitality. The speakers set aside valuable time to come to our class and their experience depends significantly on your engagement. Please keep in mind that you

represent the PPE Program at Virginia Tech as well as the University. It is essential that the PPE Program establishes a positive reputation on and off campus, and you are its most valuable and visible assets.

Plagiarism: The Honor Code prohibits plagiarism. In short, any work submitted by you for assessment must be your own. If you submit someone else's work or ideas as your own, then you are guilty of plagiarism. The best way to protect yourself against suspicion of plagiarism is to be scrupulous in acknowledging the source(s) (the persons or texts) of any ideas, arguments, or facts that you draw upon. Anyone caught cheating on an exam or plagiarizing an assignment will be sent directly to the Honor Court, without exceptions. In the worst case, you will be permanently dismissed from the university for plagiarism. The official sanctions are listed here.

Disabilities: If you are a student with special needs or circumstances, if you have emergency medical information to share with me, or if you require special arrangements in case that the building must be evacuated, please make an appointment with me as soon as possible during my office hours. You may also contact directly the SSD Office at Virginia Tech.

## Schedule

### **PART I: METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

#### **Week 1: Course Introduction**

W (1/23): Introductory class.

#### **Week 2: The subject matter(s): philosophy, politics, and economics**

M (1/28): Mill, John Stuart (1844), "On the Definition of Political Economy and the Method of Investigation Proper To It," in *Essays on Some Unsettled Questions of Political Economy*, second edition, 1874, London: Longmans, Green, Reader, and Dyer, Essay V extract

W (1/30): Robbins, Lionel (1935), *An Essay on the Nature and Significance of Economic Science*, second edition, London: MacMillan & Co.; Chapter 1, Section 3 (p. 4-16)

#### **Week 3: The nature of (economic) man**

W (2/4): Baumann, Michael (1996), *The Market of Virtue*, The Hague: Kluwer Law International, Chapter 1

W (2/6): **PPE Speaker Series**: Douglas Noonan, Brush Mountain A (Squires), 4-5:30

#### **Week 4: Rational choice theory**

M (2/11): Hausman, McPherson, and Satz (2017), Chapter 4

W (2/13): Hausman, McPherson, and Satz (2017), Chapter 14

### **PART II: SOCIAL COOPERATION**

#### **Week 5: Hobbes and the Prisoner's Dilemma**

M (2/18): Hobbes, Thomas (1651), *Leviathan*, Early Modern Texts; Part I, Chapters 13-15; and Part II, Chapters 17-18

W (2/20): **PPE Distinguished Public Lecture Series**: Dan Ariely, Moss Art Center, 5-7 *workshop*

**Week 6: Hume, cooperation and the future**

M (2/25): Hume, David (1739/40), *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Early Modern Texts; Book III, Part I, Section II; Book III, Part II, Sections I-II, V, VII

W (2/27): Heath, Joseph, (2013), "The Structure of Intergenerational Cooperation", *Philosophy & Public Affairs*, Vol. 41, Issue 1. Read at least pages 31-51

**Week 7: Public goods and the problem of free-riding**

M (3/4): Hardin, Garrett, (1968), "The Tragedy of the Commons", *Science*, Vol. 162, pp. 1243-1248

W (3/6): Nozick, Robert, (1974), *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, Basic Books, pp. 90-95

**SPRING BREAK 3/9-3/17**

**PART III: Distributive Justice**

**Week 8: Utilitarianism**

M (3/18): Bentham, Jeremy (1789), *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*, 1907, Oxford: Clarendon Press, Chapters 1 and 4; Mill, John Stuart (1863), *Utilitarianism*, Chapter II extract; Harsanyi, John (1985), "Rule Utilitarianism, Equality, and Justice", *Social Philosophy and Policy* 2, 115-127.

W (3/20): Singer, Peter, (1972), "Famine, Affluence, and Morality", *Philosophy & Public Affairs*, Vol. 1, No. 3, pp. 229-243

**Week 9: Liberalism**

M (3/25): Rawls, John (1971), *A Theory of Justice*, revised edition, Cambridge (Mass.): Harvard University Press, Sections 1-4, 9, 24, 25, and pp. 266-267

W (3/27): Mill, John Stuart (1859), *On Liberty*, Penguin Classics, Chapter 1

**Week 10: Libertarianism**

M (4/1): Nozick, Robert (1974), *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, pp. 1-25, 108-119

W (4/3): Nozick, Robert (1974), *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, pp. 149-182

**Week 11: Equality and Markets**

M (4/8): Hausman, McPherson, and Satz (2017), Chapter 11

W (4/10): **PPE Speaker Series**: Michael Douma, Brush Mountain A (Squires), 4-5:30

## **PART IV: DEMOCRACY**

### **Week 12: Democracy**

M (4/15): Wolff, Jonathan (2006), *An Introduction to Political Philosophy*, revised edition, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 62-77

W (4/17): Estlund, David (2008), *Democratic Authority*, Princeton: PUP, Chapter 1

### **Week 13: Who should vote?**

M (4/22): Brennan, Jason, (2009), "Polluting the Polls: When Citizens Should Not Vote", *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 87:4, pp. 535-549.

W (4/24): Otsuka, Michael, (2003) "The Problem of Intergenerational Sovereignty", in *Libertarianism Without Inequality*, Oxford University Press: Oxford

### **Week 14: Public choice theory and social choice theory**

M (4/29): Eamonn Butler, 2012, *Public Choice – A Primer*, The Institute of Economic Affairs, pp. 21-29 & 49-57 & 88 – 94

W (5/1): Hausman, McPherson, and Satz (2017), Chapter 13

### **Week 15: Revision**

M (5/6): No additional readings

W (5/8): **NO CLASS**

**FINAL EXAM:** Tu (5/14), 3:25-5:25pm. Location: Pamplin 2003.