

Course Syllabus

PHIL 0555 Choice, Commerce, and Conflict: An Introduction to PPE

Fall 2021

TTh 10:30-11:50am

Instructor: Ryan Doody

Location: Sayles Hall 204

Office hours: TTh 12-1pm

Course Website: canvas.brown.edu/courses/1086415

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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: equilibria, dominant strategies, property rights, justice, (pareto-)efficiency, market prices, externalities, paternalism.
- 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.

Grading Policy:

- *Reading Responses* [15%]. 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 5pm on Friday) and that demonstrate thoughtful engagement with the material will be given full credit. Those that do not, will not.

- *Homework & Quizzes* [15%]. 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	...	15%
Homework & Quizzes	...	15%
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.

Time Expectations: We expect to meet 26 times, for an hour and twenty minutes, so that's **34 hours** spent in class. You should expect to spend about 4 hours per class reviewing the relevant material, reading the assigned readings, and working on your weekly Reading Response assignments. This totals **104 hours**. There will be about 16 quizzes/homework activities, which you can expect to spend about an hour per activity on. That's **16 hours**. You should expect to spend about **10 hours** working on and reviewing for the Midterm, and to spend about **16 hours** on the Final Exam. So, you should expect your total time commitment for this class to be about **180 hours**.

Accessibility and Accommodations Statement. Brown University is committed to full inclusion of all students. Please inform me early in the term if you may require accommodations or modification of any of course procedures. You may speak with me after class, during office hours, or by appointment. If you need accommodations around online learning or in classroom accommodations, please be sure to reach out to Student Accessibility Services (SAS) for their assistance (seas@brown.edu, 401-863-9588). Undergraduates in need of short-term academic advice or support can contact an academic dean in the College by emailing college@brown.edu. Graduate students may contact one of the deans in the Graduate School by emailing graduate_school@brown.edu.

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

Week 1: Introductions and Prisoners Dilemmas

September 9 - First Day of Class

No Reading

Week 2: A Primer on Game Theory, I

September 14 - Hobbes and the State of Nature

Excerpts from Thomas Hobbes' *Leviathan*

September 16 - Thinking Strategically I: Dominance and Common Knowledge

Excerpts from Ken Binmore's *Game Theory: A Very Short Introduction* (p. 17-21, 158-159, 168-170)

Watch [Wi-Phi Video on Prisoner's Dilemma](#) with Geoff Sayre-McCord

Reading Response #1 Due

Week 3: A Primer on Game Theory, II

September 21 - Thinking Strategically II: Nash Equilibria

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

September 23 - Thinking Strategically III: Nash Equilibria, Part 2

Cristina Bicchieri, "Rationality and Game Theory" in *The Oxford Handbook of Rationality*

Reading Response #2 Due

Week 4: Property, Part I

September 28 - Property in the State of Nature and Property as Convention

Review excerpt from Thomas Hobbes' *Leviathan*

David Hume's "Of Justice and Property"

September 30 - Property as Natural Right

John Locke's "Of Property"

Reading Response #3 Due

Week 5: Property, Part II

October 5 - Property as a Problem

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

October 7 - Tragedy of the Commons

Elinor Ostrom, "A Behavioral Approach to the Rational Choice Theory of Collective Action: Presidential Address, American Political Science Association"

Play [The Evolution of Trust](#) Activity

RECOMMENDED:

Excerpt from Ken Binmore's *Playing for Real* ("Tragedy of the Commons")

Elinor Ostrom "Collective Action and the Evolution of Social Norms"

David Schmidtz "Institution of Property"

Reading Response #4 Due

Week 6: Markets, Division of Labor, and Alienation

October 12 - The Division of Labor

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

October 14 - Alienation and Bullshit Jobs

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

Excerpt from Smith's *Wealth of Nations*, Book V, Article II

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

Reading Response #5 Due

Week 7: Markets, Prices, and Information

October 19 - Price as a Signal & the Invisible Hand

Friedrich Hayek, "The Use of Knowledge in Society"

Play [The Parable of the Polygons](#)

RECOMMENDED:

Edna Ullman-Margalit, "Invisible-Hand Explanations"

October 21 - The Ethics of Price Gouging

Matt Zwolinski, "The Ethics of Price Gouging"

["Price Gouging in Emergencies"](#), *Rationally Speaking Podcast*

Reading Response #6 Due

Midterm Exam is Released

Week 8: Exchange and Efficiency

October 26 - The Fundamental Theorems of Welfare Economics

Allan Gibbard, "What's Morally Special About Free Exchange?"

Debra Satz, "Market and Nonmarket Allocation"

October 28 - Ethical Limits of the Market

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

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

Reading Response #7 Due

Midterm Exam is Due

Week 9: Market Failures

November 2 - Public Goods and Externalities

Tyler Cowen, "Public Goods"

Excerpts from David Friedman, "Market Failures"

November 4 - Healthcare Economics

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

Reading Response #8 Due

Week 10: Economic Justice I

November 9 - Piketty and Economic Inequality

Watch *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* - a film by Justin Pemberton

RECOMMENDED:

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

November 11 - Rawls, Justice as Fairness, and Equal Opportunity

Excerpts from John Rawls' *A Theory of Justice*

Reading Response #9 Due

Week 11: Economic Justice II

November 16 - Nozick's Entitlement Theory of Justice

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

RECOMMENDED:

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

November 18 - Utilitarianism

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

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

Reading Response #10 Due

Week 12: Introduction to Public Choice Theory

November 23 - Politics for Economists

Anthony Downs' "An Economic Theory of Political Action in a Democracy"

THANKSGIVING BREAK

Week 13: Public Choice, II

November 30 - The (Ir)rationality of Politics

Michael Huemer, "Why People Are Irrational about Politics"

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

December 2 - Should You Vote?

Geoffrey Brennan and Loren Lomasky, "Is There a Duty to Vote?"

Reading Response #11 Due

Week 14: Paternalism

December 7 - UBI, Poverty, and Paternalism

Freakonomics "Is the World Ready for a Guaranteed Basic Income?"

Esther Duflo, "Human Values and the Fight Against Poverty"

December 9 - Should Medicine Be Regulated?

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