

## **Econ BC3063 Senior Seminar: Logic and Limits of Economic Justice**

**Instructor:** Professor Belinda Archibong  
**Office:** 1003 Milstein Center  
**Office Hours:** Via Zoom: Tuesdays from 8am-10am ET and 5:15pm-6:15pm ET. 8am-9am ET by sign-up and 9am-10am ET and 5:15-6:15pm ET free walk-ins: see below for details

**Office Hour Policy:** Tuesdays from 8am-9am ET by sign up here: <https://www.signupgenius.com/go/10c0b4eaaaa22abfa7-professor10> and via Zoom in 15 min slots and from 9am-10am ET and 5:15-6:15pm ET free walk-ins via Zoom

**Zoom link to register for all office hours is here:**

**Register in advance for this meeting:**  
<https://columbiauniversity.zoom.us/meeting/register/tJItdeGprzksGtZEeZtzBF7OddJZitngOycM>

**After registering, you will receive a confirmation email containing information about joining the meeting.**

**Please be sure to cancel your reservation 24 hours in advance if you will be unable to make it to your scheduled time. This is as a courtesy to your classmates as well.**

**Email:** [ba2207@columbia.edu](mailto:ba2207@columbia.edu)

### **Course Description and Objectives**

What is economic justice? What does economics have to do with ethics? And how should a society concerned with the wellbeing of its members choose between multiple 'equally efficient outcomes'? These are some of the main questions we'll be tackling in this course. One of John Maynard Keynes more famous quotes appears in the final pages of *The General Theory* and encapsulates the motivation behind this course. It goes:

“the ideas of economists and political philosophers, both when they are right and when they are wrong, are more powerful than is commonly understood...Practical men, who believe themselves to be quite exempt from any intellectual influences, are usually the slaves of some defunct economist.”

While there's no doubt a bit of exaggeration in the above quote, it is true that at the core of the study of Economics as the 'science of scarce resource allocation', are value judgments, birthed from moral (and consequently political) philosophy, so deeply embedded, that we often, naively, erroneously and deleteriously, assume that they are not there at all.

This course is, in part, an advanced introduction to welfare economics: the branch of economics concerned with understanding how to assess and improve wellbeing of members of society. It incorporates debates and insights from other fields of economics and philosophy and has influenced theory and practice in many fields of economics, including political economy, public economics, development economics, environmental economics, labor economics and feminist economics, to name a few. The goals of this course then are to ensure that by the end of it, you are able to understand, assess and critically examine the philosophical origins of contemporary economic theory and ideas, the debates among them and the implications of these theories and debates for considerations of welfare, equality, justice and freedom across a variety of economic events and policy topics.

***Prerequisites:*** Permission of the instructor and the completion of all courses (except for the senior requirement) required for the economics track, political economy track, or economics and mathematics majors. Exceptions to these prerequisites may be granted by the chair of the department only.

***Course Objectives*** (1) Be conversant about welfare economics and approaches to economic justice in economics and philosophy. (2) Demonstrate thorough understanding of published economics and philosophy research papers: their motivation, methodological choices, results, and policy implications. (3) Conduct independent welfare economics research: develop a novel research question, explore and understand the relevant literature, find appropriate identification strategies to answer the research question, and analyze results. (4) Present independent research both orally and in writing in academic economic style. (5) Engage in structured arguments on major issues of economic policy through the lens of our political economy ideas.

***Canvas/Courseworks*** Course information, required readings, the syllabus, and problem sets are posted on Canvas/Courseworks. It is your responsibility to stay up to date with the class through Canvas/Courseworks. IF THIS CLASS DOES NOT SHOW

UP ON YOUR MAIN PAGE WHEN YOU LOG-IN TO NEW CANVAS/COURSEWORKS, PLEASE EMAIL ME YOUR UNI ASAP.

*Assignments/Debates*

Every week, there will be required readings of important welfare economics and political philosophy research papers. The papers themselves are posted by topic in order on Canvas/Courseworks. The dates for the topics are listed at the end of the syllabus. All students are responsible for all readings. Attendance and participation in class discussions/debates of the papers is **15% of the final course grade**. You are expected to come to class prepared to discuss and debate the assigned readings in response to the debate questions or to those raised by others in the class. You are also encouraged to take advantage of the Canvas/Courseworks Discussion Board to post questions and thoughts you have on relevant class topics.

*Fair warning:* this class has a good deal of reading. It will be a manageable workload if you keep up with it, but putting it off and trying to cram for the debates/assignments/discussions will be very unpleasant. Readings will often report theoretical and or statistical evidence. It is important to understand the methods and substantive rationale for why these authors proceeded in the way they did, and what the substantive take-away is.

I will post a short set of questions on Canvas/Courseworks, corresponding to the readings for that week on the Wednesday before. Your brief (1-2page double spaced, 12 point Times New Roman) responses should be turned in on Canvas/Courseworks by 11:59pm on the Monday of the following week. Satisfactory completion of these assignments is worth **10% of the final course grade**.

Every class, students will engage in structured arguments and debates on major issues of economic policy through the lens of our welfare economics and political economy ideas. Teams of 3 or 4 students will oppose each other on topics announced 1 week in advance. **Each student will sign up for and participate in 5 debates during the course of the semester.** More details on expectations for the debates will be provided in class and posted on Canvas/Courseworks. You are encouraged to work with the Barnard Speaking Fellows to help improve your speaking and debate skills. The debate is **25% of the**

**final course grade.** A link to sign up for the debates will be posted on Canvas/Courseworks.

For the debates, you are strongly encouraged to work with the speaking fellows at the Barnard Speaking Center who can work with you to help improve your debate skills and provide you with support to become more comfortable and confident in your speaking abilities (From the Speaking Program). You can find details on the Speaking Center here:

<https://speaking.barnard.edu/forstudents/speakingcenter>

### ***Research Project***

You will each conduct a solo research project culminating in a final paper (~10 pages double spaced, 12 point Times New Roman font, **35% of the final course grade**) and a final presentation (~10-15 minutes, **15% of the final course grade**). Final project deliverables will be a brief ppt presentation (~4-7 slides) and the Final research paper described above. You should select a research topic and submit a short proposal (no more than 1 page) by October 6 and a bibliography (incomplete) by October 27. First paper drafts are due in class on paper on November 17 and final papers are due by 11:59pm on December 17. Presentations will be on December 1 and December 8. Your presentation slides must be posted on Canvas/courseworks under the Assignments tab by 11:59pm the day before your presentation. **A link/google spreadsheet to sign up for presentation dates will be sent out by the third week of the semester and you must sign up for a presentation day within 1 week of receiving the link.**

The paper itself will attempt to answer a novel research question of your choice related to economic policy (e.g. “What do the principles of economic justice say that a society should do about undocumented immigrants and the native born children of undocumented adult immigrants that have entered the country illegally?”).

The paper will introduce the research question and provide a thorough review of the relevant literature. In answering the research question, you can either conduct empirical analysis of an existing dataset (e.g., the General Social Survey or the World Values Survey), or you can use a theoretical approach to answer analyze a question of interest. You are encouraged to work with the Empirical Reasoning Center on econometric problems (<http://erc.barnard.edu/visit>). You are also

encouraged to visit the [Social Sciences Librarian, Jennie Correia](#) for assistance with research materials. More information on the research project will be provided on Canvas/Courseworks as well. You can find economics research materials here as well:  
<https://guides.library.barnard.edu/ECON>

### **Policy on late assignments:**

If you need more time on the assignments and final paper, you will need to optimize in light of the following time-grade tradeoff: You will lose half a point for each day the assignment is late—i.e. minus  $\frac{1}{2}$  between Monday 12:01 and Tuesday 12:00 p.m., minus 1 between Tuesday 12:01 and Wednesday 12:00 p.m., etc. Submissions will be accepted until 12:00 p.m. on the Friday (i.e. 4 days after) after the due date. After that point, your assignment/paper will be marked as a zero.

The procedure for grade grievances is as follows. If you feel that one of your test question answers was graded incorrectly, you will, within one week of receiving your grade, write a short memo to me explaining why. I will review your memo and your assignment and regrade your entire assignment; your grade could go up, stay the same, or go down.

### **Grading and Course Requirements**

- Attendance/Participation: 15%
- Homework assignments: 10%
- Debates: 25%
- Research Paper: 35%
- Research Presentation: 15%

### **Tentative Due Dates (See posted Class Calendar on Canvas/Courseworks for Details)**

- 10 Weekly Assignments- Topics issued on Mondays, due following Mondays on Canvas/Courseworks. First due date is Sept. 14, first topic issued Sept. 7. Last due date is Nov. 23.
- Research Paper proposal: due Oct. 6
- Research Paper preliminary bibliography: due Oct. 27
- Research Paper first draft: due Nov. 17
- Research Paper Final Paper: due Dec. 17
- Final Presentations: due Dec. 1 and Dec. 8 (ppt slides due on Canvas 11:59pm the day before your presentation)

### **Reference book**

The following text: Hausman, Daniel M., and Michael S. McPherson. *Economic analysis, moral philosophy and public*

*policy*. Cambridge University Press, 2006. is an excellent reference for introductory undergraduates. You are not required to purchase a copy of the book, though it is available for purchase on Amazon and Book Culture ((at 536 W. 112th Street between Broadway and Amsterdam) and through Library Reserves. Other recommended, but not required texts are listed below and on the Canvas/Courseworks page:

- Sen, Amartya. *Inequality reexamined*. Oxford University Press, 1995.
- Nozick, Robert. *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*. Basic Books, a member of the Perseus Books Group, 2013
- Little, Ian Malcolm David. "Ethics, economics, and politics: principles of public policy." *OUP Catalogue* (2002).
- Barry, Brian. *Why social justice matters*. Polity, 2005.
- Fleischacker, Samuel. *A short history of distributive justice*. Harvard University Press, 2009.
- Hayek, Friedrich A. "1960. The Constitution of Liberty." (1976).
- Rawls, John. *Justice as fairness: A restatement*. Harvard University Press, 2001.

### ***Honor Code***

All exams and assignments in this class are to be completed in accordance with the Barnard Honor Code. Upon registering for a Barnard course, Columbia students commit themselves to the Honor Code. The codes says, in part:  
“We consider it dishonest to ask for, give, or receive help in examinations or quizzes, to use any papers or books not authorized by the instructor in examinations, or to present oral work or written work that is not entirely our own, unless otherwise approved by the instructor. We consider it dishonest to remove without authorization, alter, or deface library and other academic materials.”

### ***Accommodations***

Students with disabilities who may need disability-related accommodations are encouraged to make an appointment to see me as soon as possible. Disabled students who need test or classroom accommodations must be registered in advance with the Office of Disability Services (ODS) in Milbank 008.

## **Topics and Readings (Tentative/Partial)**

(Readings below might be subject to change. Note, I will notify you via Courseworks if

there are any changes in the readings below.)

## **PART 1: WELFARE AND EFFICIENCY**

### **1. Introduction- Economic Justice, Utility theory**

Topics: Ethics in welfare economics, ethics in positive economics, recap on utility and expected utility theory

#### **Required Reading:**

- Broome, John, “Why Economics Needs Ethical Theory” (Courseworks)
- Prasch, Robert, “Are Economists Amoral? Contemporary Economic Thought and the Distinction Between Value and Prices” (Courseworks)
- McKinsey report: “Covid-19 and gender inequality, countering the negative effects”
- Hardey, Bradley and Logan, Trevon, “Racial economic inequality amid the Covid-19 crisis”. Brookings Institution

#### **Recommended Reading:**

- Ch.1 of Economic Analysis, Moral Philosophy and Public Policy (referred to as EMP from now on (Hausman and McPherson)
- Introduction of Ethics, Economics and Politics (Little)
- Introduction of ‘A Short History of Distributive Justice (Fleischaker)

### **2. Welfare and Efficiency**

Topics: standard view of welfare, wellbeing and preference satisfaction, alternate theories, efficiency and pareto optimality/efficiency, whose welfare? kaldor-hicks criterion, social choice theory and Arrow’s theorem, OLG model and intergenerational welfare concerns, climate change and intergenerational welfare

#### **Required Reading:**

- Michael Huemer, “Is There a Right to Immigrate?,” Social Theory and Practice (2010) (Courseworks)
- UNC, “The Problem of Social Choice” (Courseworks)
- Philippe Weil “Overlapping Generations: The First Jubilee”, The Journal of Economic Perspectives, Vol. 22, No. 4 (Fall, 2008), pp. 115-134

#### **Recommended Reading:**

- Ch. 13 (pp. 217-230) and ch. 3.2 in EMP
- Ch. 8 and 9, EMP

### **3. Utilitarianism and Consequentialism-**

#### **Required Reading:**

- **Watch assigned Michael Sandel lecture – Episode 2, Lecture 3 and 4: “Putting a Price tag on a life How to Measure Pleasure”:**  
<http://justiceharvard.org/lecture-3-putting-a-price-tag-on-life/>

- Aguiar and Walmsley, “Aguiar, Angel, and Terrie Walmsley. "Economic Analysis of US Immigration Reforms." 2009 Annual Meeting, July 26-28, 2009, Milwaukee, Wisconsin. No. 49302. Agricultural and Applied Economics Association, 2009. (Courseworks)
- van Houtven, George L., and Maureen Cropper. "When is a Life Too Costly to Save? The Evidence from Environmental Regulations." In *RFF*.
- Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy Entry, “[Consequentialism](#),” by Walter Sinnott-Armstrong (Courseworks)

**Recommended Reading:**

- Ch. 4- 5 Ethics, Economics and Politics (Little)
- Ch. 7, EMP

**II. CHOOSING AMONG EQUILIBRIA: ON CONCEPTIONS OF JUSTICE**

**4. Game Theory and Conceptions of Distributive Justice**

Topics: How should a state choose among efficient equilibria (need for a theory), justice, equality and freedom, on prisoner’s dilemma and the ‘problem’ of public good provision, voting paradox (and other pathologies of voting systems in the US) , wealth tax

**Required Reading:**

- “Honesty and Evasion in the Tax Compliance Game” . *RAND Journal of Economics* by Brian Erard and Jonathan Feinstein
- Saez, Emmanuel, and Gabriel Zucman. "Wealth inequality in the United States since 1913: Evidence from capitalized income tax data." *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 131.2 (2016): 519-578.
- “The Choice of Voting Systems”, Richard G. Niemi and William H. Riker, *Scientific American*, Vol. 234, No. 6 (June 1976), pp. 21-27
- Stanford Encyclopedia “Free Rider Problem” by Russell Hardin

**Recommended Reading:**

- Ch. 9-10 (pp. 89-109) Ethics, Economics and Politics (Little)
- Ch. 14 (pp. 234-251) EMP
- Ch. 1 “Why We Need a Theory”, *Why Social Justice Matters* (Barry) (Courseworks)
- Ch.7 “The Making of the Black Gulag”, *Why Social Justice Matters* (Barry)

## 5. Rawls Theory of Justice

Topics: critiques of utilitarianism for justice, original position and veil of ignorance, 2 principles of justice, towards egalitarianism, “you didn’t get there on your own”, on “natural talents”, property and taxation, 2 principles of justice, difference principle/maximin criterion, critique of Rawls

### Required Reading:

- New York Times Review of The Myth of Ownership (Courseworks)
- John Rawls, A Theory of Justice (1971), Sections 1-4 (Courseworks)
- John Rawls, A Theory of Justice (1971), Sections 10-14 (Courseworks)

### Recommended Reading:

- Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy Entry, “John Rawls,” by Leif Wenar, section 4: Justice as Fairness (Courseworks)
- Ch. 6 Ethics, Economics and Politics (Little)
- Ch. 3 (pp. 103-116), A Short History of Distributive Justice (Fleischacker)

## 6. Distributive Justice: Capabilities Approach

Topics: Sen and Nussbaum on Capabilities approach, GNP/capita and HDI, statistics on education and health and quality of life, ‘how did we get here’, critiques of ‘egalitarian’ liberal approaches, ‘if you’re an egalitarian, how come you’re so rich’, Implications for justice- the case for redistributive taxation ; on intergenerational justice and climate change

### Required Reading:

- Ch.3 (Functionings and Capability) and Ch. 5 of “Inequality Reexamined by Sen, Amartya,
- Martha Nussbaum, Creating Capabilities: The Human Development Approach (2011), excerpt (Courseworks)
- Cohen, Gerald, “If You’re an Egalitarian, How Come You’re So Rich?”, (Courseworks).
- “Economics, Ethics and Climate Change”, Chapter 2 of *The Stern Review on the Economics of Climate Change*, Sir Nicholas Stern (Primary Author)
- “Ethical Frameworks and Intertemporal Equity”, Appendix to Chapter 2 of *The Stern Review on the Economics of Climate Change*, Sir Nicholas Stern (Primary Author)

### Recommended Reading:

- Pp. 116-125, A Short History of Distributive Justice (Fleischacker)
- P. 61-64, Ethics, Economics and Politics (Little)

- Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy Entry, “The Capability Approach,” by Ingrid Robeyns (Courseworks) (skim)

### 7. **The Libertarian Pushback: Nozick’s Entitlement Theory**

Topics: historical principles vs. time-slice principles, minimal state, 3 parts: principle of justice in acquisition, justice in transfer of holdings, rectification of injustice in holdings. On affirmative action (desert, meritocracy and personal responsibility), reparations

#### **Required Reading:**

- Ch. 3 and Ch. 7 (skim), “Moral Constraints and the State” and “Distributive Justice”, and ch. 8 (pages 232-246) *Anarchy, State and Utopia* (Nozick)
- Valls, Andrew. "The libertarian case for affirmative action." *Social Theory and Practice* (1999): 299-323. (Courseworks)
- Bertrand, Marianne, Rema Hanna, and Sendhil Mullainathan. "Affirmative action in education: Evidence from engineering college admissions in India." *Journal of Public Economics* 94.1 (2010): 16-29. (Courseworks)
- Miller, Conrad, “The Persistent Effect of Affirmative Action”. *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics* 9.3 (2017): 152-190 (Courseworks)
- Reading on reparations here

#### **Recommended Reading:**

- Holzer, Harry, and David Neumark. Assessing affirmative action. No. w7323. National Bureau of Economic Research, 1999. (Courseworks)
- Mack, Eric, "Robert Nozick's Political Philosophy", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2015 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), (Courseworks) (skim)
- Michael Sandel ep. 9 on Affirmative Action

## III. **CHOOSING AMONG EQUILIBRIA: ON CONCEPTIONS OF EQUALITY**

### 8. Equality as an Objective: The Egalitarian Return Part 1.

Topics: desert, personal responsibility and meritocracy- the ceteris paribus condition, why equality and equality of what, luck vs. strict egalitarianism

#### **Required Reading:**

- Watch assigned Michael Sandel lecture Episode 8, “What’s a fair start?”,

Lectures 15-16: <http://justiceharvard.org/lecture-15-whats-a-fair-start/> (

- Ch. 1 “Equality of What”, *Inequality Reexamined* (Sen)
- Kok-Chor Tan, Justice, Institutions, and Luck: The Site, Ground, and Scope of Equality (2012), Section 4.1 (Courseworks)

- Elizabeth Anderson, “What is the Point of Equality,” (1999) (Courseworks)

**Recommended Reading:**

- Ch. 4-6, Part II (“Equality of Opportunity”) *Why Social Justice Matters* (Barry)
- Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy Entry, “Egalitarianism” by Richard Arneson (Courseworks) focus on sections 2, 3.5-3.7, 4-6, 8 (skim),

**9. Equality as an Objective: The Egalitarian Return Part 2.**

Topics: desert, personal responsibility and meritocracy- the ceteris paribus condition, why equality and equality of what, luck vs. strict egalitarianism, the ceteris paribus condition, gender equality, class tension and the education/health morass, socialism and equality, property rights and historical evidence, when ‘capital eats the world’ - debating inequality and capitalism

**Required Reading:**

- Elizabeth Anderson, “What is the Point of Equality,” (1999) (Courseworks) (again)
- Kok-Chor Tan, Justice, Institutions, and Luck: The Site, Ground, and Scope of Equality (2012), Section 4.1 (Courseworks) (again)
- Chattopadhyay, Raghavendra, and Esther Duflo. "Women as policy makers: Evidence from a randomized policy experiment in India." *Econometrica* 72.5 (2004): 1409-1443. (Courseworks)
- Julius Nyerere, “Ujamaa: The Basis of African Socialism” (1962) (Courseworks)
- Archibong and Annan- “Harmattan Winds, Disease and Gender Gaps in Education”
- Kuziemko, Ilyana, and Ebonya Washington. "Why did the democrats lose the south? Bringing new data to an old debate." *American Economic Review* 108.10 (2018): 2830-67.
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**Recommended Reading:**

- Ch. 4-6, Part II (“Equality of Opportunity”) *Why Social Justice Matters* (Barry)
- Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy Entry, “Egalitarianism” by Richard Arneson (Courseworks) focus on sections 2, 3.5-3.7, 4-6, 8 (skim),
- Naidu, Suresh, “When Capital Eats the World” *Jacobin Magazine* (Courseworks)
- Duflo, Esther. Women's empowerment and economic development. No. w17702. National Bureau of Economic Research, 2011. (Courseworks)

#### IV. **CHOOSING AMONG EQUILIBRIA: ON CONCEPTIONS OF FREEDOM**

##### 10. **Positive and Negative Freedom and the Role of the State**

Topics: positive and negative freedom, freedom and autonomy, the libertarian contention, the role of the state (constitutions), personal responsibility and freedom, policing, crime and punishment (on mass incarceration), retributive vs. restorative justice

##### **Required Reading:**

- Paul Finkelman, “The Three-Fifths Clause: Why Its Taint Persists” (Courseworks)
- Isaiah Berlin, “Two Concepts of Liberty” (1958) (focus on pages 1-10, skim the rest)
- Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy Entry, “Positive and Negative Liberty,” by Ian Carter (Courseworks)
- Michelle Alexander, “The New Jim Crow: Summary Article,” (2010) (Courseworks)
- Archibong, B. & Obikili, N., “Prison Labor: The Price of Prisons and the Lasting Effects of Incarceration”

##### **Recommended Reading:**

- Isaiah Berlin, “Two Concepts of Liberty” (1958) entire
- Constitution of Cuba, Articles 1, 9, and 53 (Courseworks)
- Sentencing Project, “Fact Sheet” (Courseworks)
- Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy Entry on “[Theories of Criminal Law](#),” by Antony Duff
- Gerald Dworkin, “[Devlin Was Right: Law and The Enforcement of Morality](#),” William and Mary Law Review (1999)
- Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy Entry on “[Punishment](#),” by Hugo Adam Bedau and Erin Kelly
- Michelle Alexander, The New Jim Crow: Introduction (2010) (Courseworks)
- Kim Pate, “Review of Angela Davis “Are Prisons Obsolete?”, Journal of Law and Social Policy (2004)
- National Advisory Commission on Criminal Justice Standards and Goals Report (1973), pp. 44-57
- Angela Davis, “Masked Racism: Reflections on the Prison-Industrial Complex” (1998)

##### 11. **Freedom, Personal Responsibility and Individual and Community Freedom**

Topics: personal responsibility and freedom, crime and punishment (on mass incarceration and retributive vs. restorative justice), fanon and communitarianism-  
**add debate about right to life/death**

##### **Required Reading:**

- Bocar, Ba, et. Al., “Spillover effects in police use of force”
- Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, “On Violence,” pp. 35-56 (first 20 pages, depending on version) (Courseworks)
- Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy Entry, “Communitarianism,” by Daniel Bell (skim)

**Recommended Reading:**

- Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy Entry, “Frantz Fanon,” by Tracey Nicholl
- Kathleen Daly, “[Revisiting the Relationship Between Retributive and Restorative Justice](#)” (1999)

**PRESENTATIONS**

12/1: Student presentations 1

12/8: Student presentations 2