

# Current Moral and Social Issues: Topics in Democratic Theory (01:730:105:02)

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## Course Description

In this class we will consider several pressing ethical issues that contemporary democracies face. We will think about what (if anything) justifies democracy, civil disobedience and defensive action against the state, the morality of immigration restrictions, whether we have a duty to vote, the permissibility of buying and selling votes, money in politics, the morality of wealth inequality and limits on wealth, gun rights, voter ignorance and political irrationality, and contemporary alternatives to democracy.

## Learning Goals

There are three main goals for this course. First, we will learn about some important issues that face contemporary democracies. Second, we will learn how to extract and critically evaluate arguments from texts. Third, we will learn how to write clear, well-structured papers.

## Requirements

Attendance and participation (15%)

In-class exam (40%)

5-7 page paper (1<sup>st</sup> draft, 5%; final draft, 40%)

- You will receive feedback on the first draft. The second draft will be graded partly on responsiveness to the feedback.

## Readings

No textbooks are required for this course. All readings will be uploaded to Sakai.

## Schedule

*23<sup>rd</sup> Jan:* Introduction

*25<sup>th</sup> Jan:* Amy Gutmann, 'Democracy'

*30<sup>th</sup> Jan:* Richard Arneson, 'Democracy is not Intrinsically Just'

*1<sup>st</sup> Feb:* Thomas Christiano, 'Knowledge and Power in the Justification of Democracy'

*6<sup>th</sup> Feb:* Martin Luther King Jr., 'Letter from Birmingham Jail'; Candice Delmas, 'Civil Disobedience'

*8<sup>th</sup> Feb:* Plato, 'Crito', Peter C. Myers, 'The Limits and Dangers of Civil Disobedience'

*13<sup>th</sup> Feb:* Jason Brennan, 'When May We Kill Government Agents?'

*15<sup>th</sup> Feb:* Joseph H. Carens, ‘Aliens and Citizens: The Case for Open Borders’

*20<sup>th</sup> Feb:* Hrishikesh Joshi, ‘For (Some) Immigration Restrictions’

*22<sup>nd</sup> Feb:* Loren Lomasky & Geoffrey Brennan, ‘Is There a Duty to Vote?’

*27<sup>th</sup> Feb:* Julia Maskivker, ‘Being a Good Samaritan Requires You to Vote’

*1<sup>st</sup> March:* Richard Hasen, ‘Vote Buying (1-17)’; Debra Satz and Michael Sandel (excerpts)

*6<sup>th</sup> March:* Jason Brennan, ‘Buying and Selling Votes’

*8<sup>th</sup> March:* Christopher Freiman, ‘Vote Markets’

*13<sup>th</sup> March:* Catch-up

*15<sup>th</sup> March:* **In-class exam**

*27<sup>th</sup> March:* Thomas Christiano, ‘Money in Politics’

*29<sup>th</sup> March:* Ingrid Robeyns, ‘Having Too Much’

*3<sup>rd</sup> Apr:* Mike Huemer, ‘Is Wealth Redistribution a Rights Violation?’

*5<sup>th</sup> Apr:* Peter Singer, ‘Famine, Affluence, and Morality’

*10<sup>th</sup> Apr:* Mike Huemer, ‘Is There a Right to Own a Gun?’

*12<sup>th</sup> Apr:* Jeff McMahan, ‘Why Gun ‘Control’ Isn’t Enough’; Nicholas Dixon, ‘Handguns, Philosophers, and the Right to Self-Defense’

*17<sup>th</sup> Apr:* Mike Huemer, ‘Gun Rights as Deontic Constraints’

*19<sup>th</sup> Apr:* Thomas Metcalf, ‘Gun Violence as Industrial Pollution’/ **First draft due**

*24<sup>th</sup> Apr:* Ilya Somin, ‘Knowledge About Ignorance’

*26<sup>th</sup> Apr:* Jason Brennan, ‘The Right to a Competent Electorate’

*1<sup>st</sup> May:* Alex Guerrero, ‘Against Elections’

*3<sup>rd</sup> May:* Catch-up

*10<sup>th</sup> May:* **Final draft due**