

LIBERTARIANISM, GOVT60.14

Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, 12:50–1:55 PM

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Course Description

This course explores the political theory called *libertarianism*. Libertarianism endorses strong individual rights against coercion, and as a result, strictly limited government, free exchange in markets, and social toleration. For this class, libertarianism is not so much a political program as a unique approach to thinking about people's moral rights and the purpose and legitimacy of the state. We will engage both defenses and criticisms of libertarianism, as well as different varieties such as left-libertarianism, natural rights libertarianism, utilitarian libertarianism, and anarcho-capitalism. We will use tools drawn from analytic philosophy, economics, and political science.

We will consider the following questions, among others:

1. Do people enjoy strong moral rights that limit justifiable coercion from others? What do those rights, if any, look like?
2. What place do economic and public-choice arguments properly hold in a political theory?
3. How persuasive are the moral cases for free markets and free experiments in living?
4. How persuasive are various arguments for the moral legitimacy of the state?
5. What is the proper relationship of freedom and equality of condition in our moral decision-making? Which should have ultimate priority?

The learning objectives of the course are as follows:

1. To understand and be able to explain how libertarianism differs from other major political theories such as conservatism and liberal egalitarianism;
2. To understand the outlines of major deontological and consequentialist arguments for strong personal rights, laissez-faire capitalism, or both;
3. To understand the main weaknesses of those arguments;
4. To be able to evaluate arguments about the purpose and legitimacy of the state using the tools of analytic philosophy, economics, and political science;
5. To understand and be able to explain the differences between several varieties of libertarianism and the extent to which they are compatible or incompatible.

Course Requirements and Grading

Assignments

This class is heavy on discussion, and attendance is required. You must do all the reading for a particular class meeting before that class. Class participation (quality and quantity) comprises 25% of your course grade. There is one 1500-word essay with a special “for and against” structure, due **Wednesday February 1**, which will count as 10% of your grade. There will be four short-answer quizzes, worth 5% of your grade each.

The remaining 45% of your grade comes from a final, 4000-word paper, which will be on a topic of your choice. You should submit a paragraph explaining your topic by **Friday February 10** (2% of your grade if on time, all or nothing). There will be a pre-approved list of topics, but you can meet with me to get approval for topics off that list. Then you should submit a working bibliography of at least five sources related to your topic by **Monday February 20**. This bibliography should contain a paragraph summarizing what each of your sources says about your topic. This is worth 4% of your course grade. You will then submit a rough draft of your paper project by **Friday March 3**. I will evaluate your rough draft for *completeness* rather than the quality of the arguments or the style, but I will comment on the arguments and style to help you improve them. This is worth 4% of your course grade. Your final paper will be due by **Wednesday March 15** at 4 PM. I will evaluate your final paper on the basis of the quality of the arguments and style and the thoroughness of the research. It is worth 35% of your course grade. The papers must meet all the requirements of a standard academic paper, including citations of sources.

I encourage you to work together with other students to toss around ideas and work out arguments. You must acknowledge the source of your ideas, and standard academic integrity requirements apply to all assignments. Students who witness an academic integrity violation should take appropriate action, as required by the Dartmouth Academic Honor Principle.

Absences, Late Work

Excused absences from in-class assignments must be discussed with the instructor. In the case of a scheduled, College-sponsored or College-recognized, extracurricular event, you must inform me at least a week in advance to make alternative arrangements. For family and medical emergencies, you must obtain documentation and contact me as soon as practicable after returning to campus. For take-home assignments, I do not offer extensions except in extraordinary cases of long-lasting family and medical emergencies, but you may obtain permission to submit an assignment electronically.

Work that is late without an excuse will be deducted half a letter grade up to a week, a letter grade at a week, and another letter grade at each week thereafter.

Required Books

The following books are required for this course and are available at the bookstore, as well as online.

- Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*

- G.A. Cohen, *Self-Ownership, Freedom, and Equality*
- Michael Huemer, *The Problem of Political Authority*
- Milton & Rose Friedman, *Free to Choose: A Personal Statement*
- John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*
- Bryan Caplan, *The Myth of the Rational Voter*

Topics and Readings

Concepts and Foundations

- **Wednesday January 4:** Immanuel Kant, “On the Common Saying: ‘This May Be True in Theory, But It Does Not Apply in Practice,’” in Steven M. Cahn (ed.), *Political Philosophy: The Essential Texts*, 2nd ed. (Oxford University Press), pp. 508–27. (19 pages)
- **Friday January 6:** Judith Shklar (1989), “The Liberalism of Fear” in Nancy L. Rosenblum (ed.), *Liberalism and the Moral Life* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP), pp. 21–38. (17 pages)
- **Monday January 9:** Mill, chapter I. (14 pages)
- **Wednesday January 11:** Huemer, chapter 1. (17 pages)
Quiz #1

Rights and the State

The State

- **Friday January 13:** Huemer, chapters 2 & 3. (39 pages)
No class Monday January 16 (Martin Luther King, Jr. Day).
- **Wednesday January 18:** Nozick, chapters 2 & 3. (44 pages)
- **Friday January 20:** Nozick, pp. 54–71. (17 pages)
- **Monday January 23:** Nozick, pp. 71–87, 96–113. (33 pages)
Quiz #2

Property Rights and Justice

- **Wednesday January 25:** Nozick, pp. 149–64, 174–82, 224–31. (30 pages)
Short essay topics announced.
- **Friday January 27:** Cohen, chapter 1. (19 pages)
- **Monday January 30:** Cohen, pp. 38–53, 67–84, 112–15. (35 pages)

The Consequences of Freedom

Markets in Goods and Ideas

- **Wednesday February 1:** Mill, chapters III & IV. (36 pages)
List of pre-approved final paper topics revealed.

Class canceled Friday February 3.

- **Monday February 6:** Robert P. George, *Making Men Moral: Civil Liberties and Public Morality*, pp. 110–28. (19 pages)
Short essay due.
- **Tuesday February 7 (X hour):** Guest lecture from Dr. William Ketterer. Reading: Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, p. 195. (1 page)
- **Wednesday February 8:** Friedman & Friedman, chapter 1. (29 pages)
- **Friday February 10:** Friedman & Friedman, chapter 2. (32 pages)
Topic paragraph due.

Modern Democracy

- **Monday February 13:** Huemer, chapter 5 & pp. 137–60. (44 pages)
- **Wednesday February 15:** Huemer, pp. 161–79. (19 pages)
Quiz #3
- **Friday February 17:** Caplan, Introduction & chapter 1. (22 pages)
- **Monday February 20:** Caplan, chapter 2. (27 pages)
Bibliography due.

Class canceled Wednesday February 22.

- **Friday February 24:** Caplan, chapter 6. (24 pages)

Varieties of Libertarianism

Left-Libertarianism, Libertarian Feminism, and Virtue Libertarianism

- **Monday February 27:** Tomasi, John, *Free Market Fairness*, chapter 8 & Conclusion. (46 pages)
- **Tuesday February 28 (X hour):** Roderick T. Long & Charles W. Johnson, “Libertarian Feminism: Can This Marriage Be Saved?,” pp. 1–4 & 22–25; Nick Gillespie, William Ruger, Jason Sorens, Steven Horwitz, & Katherine Mangu-Ward, “Libertarianism, Yes! But *What Kind* of Libertarianism?,” Reason.com (15 pages)
Quiz #4

Anarcho-Capitalism

- **Wednesday March 1:** Huemer, chapter 10. (35 pages)

Applications

This is the choose-your-own adventure part of the course. A student vote will determine which topic and set of readings we'll do. Here are the options.

Social Welfare

- **Friday March 3:** David Schmidtz, "Taking Responsibility," in David Schmidtz & Robert E. Goodin (eds.), *Social Welfare and Individual Responsibility*, sections 1.1 & 1.5. (36 pages)
Rough drafts due.
- **Monday March 6:** Robert E. Goodin, "Social Welfare as a Collective Social Responsibility," in Schmidtz & Goodin (eds.), *Social Welfare and Individual Responsibility*, sections 2.1 & 2.4. (32 pages)

Paternalism

- **Friday March 3:** Miron, Jeffrey A. and Jeffrey Zwiebel (1995), "The Economic Case Against Drug Prohibition," *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 9(4), 175–192. (18 pages)
Rough drafts due.
- **Monday March 6:** Douglas Husak (2000), "Liberal Neutrality, Autonomy, and Drug Prohibitions," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 29 (1): 43–80. (37 pages)

Education

- **Friday March 3:** Stephens, Melvin Jr. and Yang, Dou-Yan (2014) "Compulsory Education and the Benefits of Schooling," *American Economic Review* 104 (6): 1777–92. (16 pages)
Rough drafts due.
- **Monday March 6:** Friedman & Friedman, chapter 6. (38 pages)

Environment

- **Friday March 3:** Terry L. Anderson & Jane S. Shaw, "Is Free-Market Environmentalism 'Mainstream'?", *The Social Studies*. (5 pages)
Rough drafts due.
- **Monday March 6:** Matt Zwolinski (2015), "Libertarianism and Pollution," in Benjamin Hale and Andrew Light, eds., *The Routledge Companion to Environmental Ethics*. (34 pages)

Conclusions

- **Wednesday March 8:** No reading.