PHIL 835:
Liberal Neutrality and Civic Obligation

This course aims to provide students with a graduate-level familiarity with contemporary political philosophy. We will begin with an exploration of the Rawlsian liberal political tradition and some of its detractors, with a special focus on the liberal commitment to neutrality and its role within liberalism. We will go on to consider the nature of voting in a democracy, with an eye towards the costs and rationality of informed political decision-making and the ethical duties of voters. Finally, we will examine the nature of civic obligation within a liberal democratic society, questioning both the strength of civic obligations and their demandingness as well as how well this demandingness comports with liberal neutrality among competing conceptions of the good.

Required Texts
Course readings will draw heavily from the following books:

All other required course readings will be made available electronically no later than the Wednesday before each class meeting.

Course Requirements
Short Response Pieces – 20% - 6 short response pieces, with the lowest grade dropped. No longer than 3 double-spaced pages, the goal of the response piece is not expository but analytical. Argue for a thesis, raise an objection, or clarify a point that you think is important and interesting. Short response pieces are due no later than 8am on the day of class, and may (will) be used during class discussion. Each student must turn in at least one response piece during each of the months Sept, Oct, and Nov.

Conference Paper & In-Class Presentation – 25% - A conference-length (~3000 words) paper which you will present in class on a week of your choosing. Papers must be distributed to all members of the group no later than 8pm the night before your presentation. Students are expected to read each other’s papers and come to class ready to give constructive feedback.

Conference Paper Re-Write – 35% - A revision of your presented paper in light of our discussion on your presentation day and my comments. All students will have at least two weeks to complete their revisions.
In-Class Participation – 20% - Please complete all readings before class & come to class prepared to contribute to discussion. In particular, be prepared to explain the major theses of assigned readings, the arguments for those theses, and to critically evaluate those arguments. Each week, one participant will be responsible for leading our discussion by providing a critical précis of the reading and raising a few interesting points for discussion. Discussion leaders are encouraged to use their short response pieces as jumping-off points for discussion.

Class Policies
Late short response pieces are not accepted. Late papers will be penalized half a letter grade (5 points) for every day or portion of a day that they are late. In this class there is a zero-tolerance policy for cheating: any student found to have plagiarized on any assignment will receive a failing grade for the entire course, and all available institutional penalties will be sought.

If you wish to request an accommodation due to a documented disability, please notify me and contact Disability Resources at: access@andrew.cmu.edu or 412-268-2013 as soon as possible.

Outline of Topics & (Tentative) Schedule of Readings

Part I: Political Liberalism, Perfectionism, and the Nature of Neutrality
1st Meeting (28 Aug)

2nd Meeting (4 Sept)
Theory of Justice, Ch. 1, §§1-6 and Ch. 2, §§11-15.

3rd Meeting (11 Sept)
Theory of Justice, Ch. 3, §§22-29.

4th Meeting (18 Sept)
Theory of Justice, Ch. 5, §50
5th Meeting (25 Sept)

6th Meeting (2 Oct)
*Political Liberalism*, Intro pp. xv-xxx & Lecture I, §§1,2,5,6,7

7th Meeting (9 Oct)
*Political Liberalism*, Lecture IV, §§1-5

8th Meeting (16 Oct)

9th Meeting (23 Oct)
*Political Liberalism*, Lecture V, §§1-7

**Part II: Democracy & Democratic Rationality**

10th Meeting (30 Oct)
*Plato’s Republic*, ch. VIII

**NOTE: THERE WILL BE NO CLASS MEETING NOV. 6. THIS MEETING TO BE RESCHEDULED.**

11th Meeting (13 Nov)

12th Meeting (20 Nov)
**Part III: Civic Virtue & Liberal Neutrality**

**13th Meeting (TBD)**

**14th Meeting (TBD)**

**15th Meeting (TBD)**