

Ethical Issues in Public Policy

**GOVT 696.001, PUAD 619.001 & GOVT 396.004
Fall 2010**

Professor Thomas W. Merrill
Department of Government
Ward 210
x6246
merrill@american.edu
Mon 10-12, 3:30-5 & Th 9:30-11
and by appointment

Policy makers inescapably confront tensions between ethics and expediency as well as tensions between divergent notions of what ethics entails. This course attempts to think through these persisting questions by examining both the theoretical roots of the most prominent contemporary stances toward public policy and some important specific policy disputes. We begin by examining disputes over pressing issues such as health care and poverty. We will then consider the theoretical roots of the social democratic and libertarian approaches to these issues in the work of recent political theorists. We will also consider issues that complicate the political division between right and left such as abortion, stem cell research, and cloning. Our methodological approach will be ecumenical and attentive to both ethicists and social scientists. We expect lively debates on many of the issues we discuss, but our goal will be to understand the competing positions underlying longstanding policy disagreements rather than advocacy of any particular position.

Texts Available in the Bookstore:

Crisis of Abundance: Rethinking How We Pay For Health Care, by Arnold Kling (Cato)

A Theory of Justice: Original Edition, by John Rawls (Harvard University Press)

Anarchy, State, and Utopia, by Robert Nozick (Basic Books)

The Great Risk Shift: The New Economic Insecurity and the Decline of the American Dream, by Jacob Hacker (Oxford University Press)

What It Means To Be a Libertarian, by Charles Murray (Broadway Books)

Bearing Right: How Conservatives Won the Abortion War, by William Saletan (University of California Press)

There will also be a number of other required readings posted on Blackboard.

Grading:

Graduate Students only:

- 20% -- Midterm exam
- 50% -- Term paper: 15-20 pages long.
- 25% -- Participation (includes attendance and participation)
- 5% -- Pop Quizzes

Undergraduates:

- 20% -- Midterm exam
- 20% -- Final exam
- 30% -- Paper: 8-10 pages long.
- 25% -- Participation (includes attendance and participation)
- 5% -- Pop Quizzes

Pop Quizzes:

I will give **6** pop quizzes over the course of the term. The quizzes are designed to be easy if you have done the reading for that day. I will drop the lowest quiz and count only your best 5.

Participation:

Because this class is a seminar, attendance and participation in class discussion are both essential. You should be prepared to contribute to discussion in every class. Attendance will be taken every class. If you miss more than 2 classes, your grade may be lowered. If you miss 4 or more classes, you will fail the course. Exceptions will be made for family emergencies, sickness, and religious holidays, but must be documented in writing, preferably in advance.

Term Paper:

Graduate students will write a research paper of 15-20 pages, double spaced, and with reasonable fonts and margins. It should analyze a key issue or problem raised in the course. You will submit a 2-3 page proposal and outline no later than **November 8**. I will return your proposal within a week after you submit it. The proposal/outline will be graded and that grade will count for one tenth of the grade on the final paper. The term paper should include a substantial number of secondary sources and will be due on **December 6**.

Undergraduates will write a paper of 8-10 pages, double spaced, and with reasonable fonts and margins. It should analyze a key issue or problem raised in the course. You will submit a 2-3 page proposal and outline no later than **October 29**. I will return your proposal within a week after you submit it. The proposal/outline will be graded and that grade will count for one tenth of the grade on the final paper. The term paper should include a substantial number of secondary sources and will be due on **November 19**.

Late Policy:

No late papers will be accepted without prior arrangement. You must be in class to turn them in. Term papers will be penalized 1/3 of a letter grade for each day late.

Midterm and Final Examinations:

The examinations will include short answer and essay questions. You will be expected to both explain and evaluate the readings.

Academic Integrity:

Students are expected to read and abide by AU's Academic Integrity Code. Copies of the Code are available from the Registrar's Office or can be downloaded at <http://www.american.edu/american/registrar/AcademicReg/New/reg80.html>. The Code provides AU's policies about academic dishonesty and plagiarism. These include, but are not limited to, plagiarism, cheating on exams, multiple submissions, and unauthorized collaboration.

Class and Reading Schedule:

BB = reading on Blackboard

8/23: Introduction

8/30: **Health Care I:**

Paul Krugman and Robin Wells, "The Health Care Crisis and What to Do About It."
New York Review of Books, March 23, 2006. **BB**

Michael Cannon and Michael D. Tanner, *Healthy Competition*.
Introduction, Chapters 1-3. **BB**

9/6: **NO CLASS**

9/13: **Health Care II:**

Jacob Hacker, "The Case for Public Plan Choice in National Health Reform" **BB**
Arnold Kling, *Crisis of Abundance*, especially chapters 4-8

9/20: **Poverty:**

Charles Murray, Selections from *Losing Ground*: Chapters 10, 12-14, 16-17 (p. 132-42, 154-91, 205-36) **BB**

William Julius Wilson, Selections from *The Truly Disadvantaged*: Chapters 1, 3, 7 (p. 3-19, 63-92, 140-64) **BB**

9/27: **Social Justice I:**

John Rawls: *A Theory of Justice*: Sections 1-4, 11-17, 20-26 (p. 3-19, 52-93, 102-139)

10/4: **Social Justice II:**

John Rawls: *A Theory of Justice*: Sections 41-44, 60, 65-67 (p. 228-59, 347-50, 372-92)

10/11: **MIDTERM EXAM**

10/18: **Libertarianism I:**

Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*: Preface, chapter 7 (p. ix-iv, 149-231)

10/25: **Libertarianism II:**

Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*: chapter 1-5 (p. 3-119)

10/29: UNDERGRADUATE PAPER PROPOSALS DUE (FRIDAY)

11/1: **Social Justice and Libertarianism Revisited:**

Charles Murray, *What It Means To Be a Libertarian*: Chapters 1 and 2 through the end of “Removing Government from Economic Life” (p. 1-78)

Jacob Hacker, *The Great Risk Shift*: Chapters 1, 2, and Conclusion (p. 1-60, 165-94)

Irving Kristol, “When virtue loses all her loveliness—some reflections on capitalism and the ‘Good Society’.” **BB**

11/8: GRADUATE STUDENTS PAPER PROPOSALS DUE

Abortion I

Judith Jarvis Thomson, “A Defense of Abortion.” **BB**

Robert George, selections from *Embryo*, chapters 1-2 (p. 1-56) **BB**

11/15: **Abortion II**

William Saletan, *Bearing Right: How Conservatives Won the Abortion War*, Preface, Introduction, Chapters 1-4, 9-10 (p. xi-xvi, 1-107, 218-78)

11/19: UNDERGRADUATE PAPERS DUE (FRIDAY)

11/22: **Stem Cells and Cloning:**

Leon Kass, "The Meaning of Life—in the Laboratory," (p. 81-117) **BB**
The President's Council on Bioethics, selections from *Human Cloning and Human Dignity*: Chapters 5 and 6 (p. 75-171) **BB**

11/29: **Recap and Conclusion**

12/6: Graduate Students Papers Due

FINAL EXAM: **TO BE ANNOUNCED**