

Philosophical Analysis of Policy Choices

PHIL 2025, 3 credits

Fall 2026

General Information

Course Description:

An introduction to philosophical questions that may arise in public policy debate and decision making and to resources from the philosophical tradition for addressing them.

Disagreement on matters of public policy often turns on philosophical questions regarding the validity of factual claims, values to be pursued or obligations to be met, and the nature and legitimacy of decision-making processes. This course examines case studies in contemporary policy debate and introduces primary and secondary materials from the philosophical tradition as resources for identifying and addressing these philosophical questions.

Course Goals and Learning Outcomes:

Upon successful completion of this course, students will be able to

- distinguish key theories in political philosophy (liberalism, welfarism, egalitarianism, communitarianism),
- use philosophical tools to analyze policy choices,
- design and write papers stating a clear thesis or main idea, and justify it using good arguments,
- conduct small research on philosophical and other literature and present the results to an audience of peers,
- clearly formulate their own points of view regarding public policies, as well as assess the points of view of other students.

Course Materials

Textbook:

The following textbook is required for this course; any other reading materials will be available on Canvas:

- Wolff, Jonathan. (2020). *Ethics and Public Policy. A Philosophical Inquiry (2nd Ed.)*. Routledge.

Course Requirements and Grading

Assignment	Grade Weight	Grading Scale
Exam	15%	A 90 - 100%
Essay 1	15%	B 80 - 89%
Research Project	25%	C 70 - 79%
Final Essay	20%	D 60 - 69%
Quizzes	15%	F below 60%
Participation	10%	

According to policy, grades at Georgia Tech are interpreted as follows:

- A Excellent (4 quality points per credit hour)
- B Good (3 quality points per credit hour)
- C Satisfactory (2 quality points per credit hour)
- D Passing (1 quality point per credit hour)
- F Failure (0 quality points per credit hour)

Description of Graded Components:

- Exam: Exam will be in person and will cover the main political philosophy theories discussed in the course. Exam format will be mostly or exclusively multiple choice
- Essay 1: Argumentative paper analyzing a policy choice using the concepts and theories introduced early in the course.
- Research Project: Group research will be on a selected policy, will focus on the history that led to the policy, alternatives, and philosophical literature around it. There will be a presentation and discussion of findings.
- Final Essay: Tied to the research, each student will write an argumentative paper articulating his/her own reasons defending or rejecting a particular policy.
- Quizzes: There will be quizzes on selected readings. Quiz format will be multiple choice.
- Participation: The point of 'participation' is that you are an active part of the course, that you contribute something to it; as such, there are different ways of contributing. One of them is speaking up during class; other alternatives include sharing relevant content with the class (articles, papers, videos), or proposing a different way in which you can contribute.

Course Expectations and Guidelines

Health and Safety

If you are experiencing symptoms of a respiratory illness, it is a good idea to refrain from coming to campus. Keeping each other safe is a shared responsibility. I encourage you to follow the recommendations issued by the CDC (<https://www.cdc.gov/respiratory-viruses/prevention/precautions-when-sick.html>).

Academic Integrity

Georgia Tech aims to cultivate a community based on trust, academic integrity, and honor. Students are expected to act according to the highest ethical standards. For information on Georgia Tech's Academic Honor Code, please visit <http://www.catalog.gatech.edu/policies/honor-code/> or <http://www.catalog.gatech.edu/rules/18/>.

Any student suspected of cheating or plagiarizing on a quiz, exam, or assignment will be reported to the Office of Student Integrity, who will investigate the incident and identify the appropriate penalty for violations.

Generative AI

AI is changing the world quickly. It is impressive what different Large Language Models (LLMs) can do, and it is very tempting to use them for various daily tasks; these models are faster than us, have access to more information than we can process, and even produce text in a tone that sounds strikingly human.

Given this, it can be tempting to use AI models to complete your coursework. I encourage you to use these models to help you in this course if you feel the need to use them (for example, because you are still unclear about a concept and you want feedback on what you are missing). That being said, using them to *help* you and using them to *complete* your assignments are two very different things. The latter is a form of academic misconduct! You do not need AI to do well in this course, and you will get more out of it if you do not rely on AI too much.

Let me say a bit more about this last point. There are multiple abilities that we, as humans, need in order to relate to each other and to navigate the world in a meaningful way. For example, you are better off when you know how to read and write. Similarly, you are better off having a basic command of math. These abilities require practice. Thinking is just the same. You are better off when you can do your own reasoning, and you get better at it by practicing. This is what this course wants you to do: become better at reasoning.

If you have AI complete your work (summarize readings for you, take notes, answer a quiz, etc.), you are commissioning it to do a basic task that it would be better for you to fully command before giving it up. In fact, what will likely happen in the long run is that you decommission your own thinking. (In debates about the ethics of artificial intelligence, the concern is that you are more vulnerable to *deskilling* over time—the process by which you lose important skills due to lack of experience and practice.) Just as you probably would not be OK saying “I actually do not want to learn to read, since AI can do it for me,” you should be troubled by the idea of having AI doing your own thinking tasks.

This course is an opportunity to slow down and consciously use your thinking abilities, your reflective powers. We do not have that opportunity very often in this fast-paced world. Use AI wisely, as an aid when needed, and use this course as a space to work on your own critical abilities.

** Most of this statement on Generative AI (the parts I largely agree with) is taken from a similar statement by Tyler Cook.*

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

If you are a student with learning needs that require special accommodation, contact the Office of Disability Services at (404)894-2563 or <http://disabilityservices.gatech.edu/>, as soon as possible, to make an appointment to discuss your special needs and to obtain an accommodations letter. Please also e-mail me as soon as possible in order to set up a time to discuss your learning needs.

Student-Faculty Expectations Agreement

At Georgia Tech we believe that it is important to strive for an atmosphere of mutual respect, acknowledgement, and responsibility between faculty members and the student body. See <http://www.catalog.gatech.edu/rules/22/> for an articulation of some basic expectation that you can have of me and that I have of you. In the end, simple respect for knowledge, hard work, and cordial interactions will help build the environment we seek. Therefore, I encourage you to remain committed to the ideals of Georgia Tech while in this class.

Attendance, Participation, Late Assignments, and Missed Work

You are expected to attend class regularly. Notice that there is a participation grade in the course, and it is impossible to get full participation credit without regularly attending class. It is your responsibility to attend exams, and complete assignments by the established due date. *If you experience or anticipate circumstances*

that affect your ability to complete an assignment, please contact me at least 2 days in advance of the due date so we can work on a solution. Assignments (including exams) will not be accepted past the due date, unless prior arrangements have been made. Please review Georgia Tech's general rules on Attendance and Missed Work [here](#).

No Discrimination

The Ivan Allen College of Liberal Arts supports the Georgia Institute of Technology's commitment to creating a campus free of discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, or veteran status. We further affirm the importance of cultivating an intellectual climate that allows us to better understand the similarities and differences of those who constitute the Georgia Tech community, as well as the necessity of working against inequalities that may also manifest here as they do in the broader society

Student Resources

Here is a great reference list with the wide array of resources that Georgia Tech offers, visit <https://students.gatech.edu/student-resource-guide>.