# Political Philosophy: Phil 217 001: Rawls and Racial Justice

3:10 PM - 6:00 PM W Social Science & Humanities 2275

Fall Quarter ’23: Monday, September 25th – Friday, December 8th

UC Davis

Professor Elvira Basevich, Ph.D.

Office Hours: Monday 3:00 – 4:00 pm

Course Description:

This graduate seminar will explore the topic of John Rawls and racial justice. Rawls is perhaps the most influential political philosophy of the last 50 years. Long after his death, his students cemented his foothold in mainstream analytic philosophy, building careers defending his project. However, his dominance appears to be buckling in part due to the influential challenge waged by the late Africana philosopher Charles Mills. Mills argues that Rawls’s “ideal theory” approach is ill suited for theorizing racial justice, proposing instead a “non-ideal theory” approach. Others, such as Tommie Shelby, defend the value of the Rawlsian framework for theorizing racial justice and reject Mills’s challenge as shortsighted. We will examine Rawls’s original text, as well as the ideal/nonideal theory debate, to determine what role—if any—Rawls and ideal theory should play in a theory of racial justice.

1. Recommended Books

John Rawls. *Political Liberalism. Expanded Edition*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2005.

John Rawls. *Justice as Fairness: A Restatement*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001.

Charles Mills. *The Racial Contract*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999.

1. Schedule

**September 27**

Introduction

**October 4**

**Week 1**

Required:

John Rawls, *Justice as Fairness: A Restatement*, Pt. 1

John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, §§1-4

Charles Mills, *The Racial Contract*, Chp. 1. pp. 1-40.

Suggested:

* George Yancy’s interview with Charles Mills, “Lost in Rawlsland”

<https://archive.nytimes.com/opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2014/11/16/lost-in-rawlsland/>

**October 11**

**Week 2. The Idea of Public Reason**

Required:

John Rawls, “Justice, Political, Not Metaphysical”

Charles Mills, *Racial Contract,* ch. 3, pp. 91-134

Suggested:

Charles Mills, *Racial Contract,* ch. 2

**October 18**

**Week 3.**

Required:

John Rawls, “Preface,” to *Political Liberalism*

John Rawls, “The Idea of Public Reason Revisited,” in *Political Liberalism* (Skip §3!)

Suggested:

* T.M. Scanlon, “Rawls on Justification”
* John Rawls, *Justice as Fairness: A Restatement*, Pt. 2

**October 25**

**Week 4:**

**The Circumstances of (In)justice**

Required:

Charles Mills, “Rawls on Race/Race in Rawls,” *Southern Journal of Philosophy*

Tommie Shelby, “Race and Social Justice: Rawlsian Considerations,” *Fordham Law Review* 72 (2004): 1697-1714

Suggested

* Kelly Erin, “The Circumstances of Justice”
* John Rawls, *Justice as Fairness: A Restatement*, Pt. 3

**Nov 1**

**Week 5:** No Class

**Nov 8**

**Week 6**: **The Idea of Public Reason: Conservative or Progressive?**

Required:

Brandon Terry, “Conscription, Race, and the Color Line,” *Modern Intellectual History*

Alasia Nuti & Gabriele Badano, “Under Pressure: Political Liberalism, the Rise of Unreasonableness, and the Complexity of Containment,” *Journal of Political Philosophy*

Suggested

* Frank I. Michelman, “A Realistic Utopia?”
* Jens Meierhenrich, Chps 1, 5, & 6, *The Remnants of the Rechtsstaat: An Ethnography of Nazi Law*
* Rainer Forst, “The Method of Insulation”

**Nov 15**

**Week 7**

**The Mills/Shelby Debate Heats up!**

Required:

Charles Mills, “Retrieving Rawls for Racial Justice? A Critique of Tommie Shelby,” *Critical Philosophy of Race* 1.1 (2013): 1–27”

Tommie Shelby, “Racial Realities and Corrective Justice: A Reply to Charles Mills,” *Critical Philosophy of Race* 1.2 (2013): 145-162.

Tommie Shelby, “Racism, Moralism, and Social Criticism,” *Du Bois Review* 11.1 (2014): 57-74.

**Nov 22**

**Week 8**

**Ideal and Non-ideal Theory**

Required:

Charles Mills, “Ideal theory as Ideology”

Laura Valentini, “Ideal and Non-Ideal Theory: A Conceptual Map”

Suggested:

* Dale Matthews, “Ideal Theory,” Critical International Social and Political Philosophy
* Zophia Stemplowska, 2008. “What’s Ideal About Ideal Theory?” *Social Theory and Practice* 34.3 (2008): 319–40.
* Nicholas Southwood and David Wiens, “Devoting Ourselves to the Manifestly Unattanable”

**Nov 29**

**Week 9**

Required:

Serene Khader, ​“How is Feminist Philosophy Nonideal Theory?”

Zophia Stemployska and Adam Swift, “Ideal and Non-Ideal Theory” in *The Oxford Handbook of Political Philosophy*, ed. David Estlund (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 373–89.

Suggested:

* Mills, *Black Rights/White Wrongs,* Conclusion
* Tommie Shelby*,* “Justice, Deviance, and the Dark Ghetto.”
* Elizabeth Anderson’s introduction, *The Imperative of Integration*

**Dec 6**

**Week 10**

John Rawls, “Political Constructivism” in *Political Liberalism*

1. Assessment

Presentation 10%

Students will be asked in advance to give short presentations on the readings to the class. The aim of the presentation is to argue for a philosophical thesis, or at least to try out some philosophical theses. A précis of the readings will not suffice.

Discussion Boards: 40%

Students will submit four reading responses of at least 500 words each (10% each). These should be posted to the weekly discussion board on Canvas by 12 noon on Tuesday (the day before seminar). Your reading responses should engage critically with the reading. In a standard reading response, the first paragraph will explain a claim defended in a reading, the second paragraph will offer an original objection to that claim, and the third paragraph will consider a response to that objection.

Students should also submit comments on at least two of their classmates’ posts by 12 noon on Wednesday (3 hours before class), which will count towards their participation grade. Late posts are not accepted.

Paper Proposal: 10%

Due by noon on November 1st, 2023, uploaded to Canvas as a Word file (Times New Roman size 12, double spaced). Late submissions will be accepted but will be deducted a full letter grade per day they are late, including weekends. Your proposal should include an abstract of approximately 250-500 words, a bibliography of at least ten sources, and the name of a journal you are considering for submitting your final paper. The format of your bibliography should conform to the requirements of that journal.

Final Paper 40%

Due by noon on Monday, December 11, 2023.

**Paper** should be 3000-4000 words long and advance a thesis on the topic of Rawlsian justice. Your paper must engage with the ideal/nonideal distinction. You should write your paper with the goal of submitting it to a journal. You should also include which journal(s) you aim to submit to and use its/their word limit(s) as a word limit for your paper.