Justice is often understood as a concept that structures political life, by indicating who should be enfranchised, how to rule fairly, who should be punished and how. Even more broadly, “justice” indicates what constitutes a common good as well as who should benefit (and how) from collective actions. But how is the definition of justice established and implemented? Does justice denote a transcendent standard we access by philosophy or by revelation and then "apply" to and in political life? Or is any definition of justice necessarily shaped by political struggles by actors with contrasting interests and points of views? Must we escape politics to determine justice rightly, or is that an impossible and ultimately tyrannical idea? But if we define justice through politics, is what we call justice necessarily going to be the rule of the strong? This course will consider four attempts to define justice that also explore its relationship to politics: Plato's Republic, Kant's Groundwork for a Metaphysics of Morals, Hegel's Philosophy of Right.

Required Readings*


*Note: All texts have been ordered at the New York University bookstore. Students should use the editions cited above.

Course Requirements:
1) Attendance: Attendance is mandatory.
2) Papers: Your written work should be a genuine attempt to fulfill the paper topics. If I find your paper not to be a genuine attempt I will tell you. All papers must be handed in. No late papers are accepted. There are no extensions for papers. Papers must be typed and double-spaced. See paper requirement options below.
3) Class Participation: This class is a seminar so regular participation is required. A seminar class won’t work if you don’t participate in discussions. Each day of class students will come prepared to discuss the text assigned to be read by that day.
4) Being prepared to discuss the text entails bringing questions about the text to class. Students are required to bring two questions to class every day. These questions are to be written down and handed in at the beginning of class.
Paper Requirement
There are two options that fulfill the paper requirement. You can choose either one.

Paper requirement option A: one term paper
Requirement A is a 3000- to 4000-word term paper on a topic of your choice relevant to the course. All papers must be handed in by 6pm on Monday, December 19th. Papers are due by email. A 300-word description of your topic is due no later than Friday, November 18th. Please send your topic descriptions to my email address.

Paper requirement option B: three papers
Requirement B is three papers each 1200- to 1800-words in length. Paper 1 is due on Friday, October 28th. Papers are due in class. Paper 2 is due on Friday, November 18th. Papers are due in class. Paper 3 is due on Monday, December 19th. Papers are due by email.

Topics for paper 1 requirement B
Select one:
1. Discuss Plato's conception of Justice. Argue why or why not it is a political conception of justice.
2. Discuss the specialization thesis in the Republic and its place within Plato's argument about justice. Argue for or against the specialization thesis use in political philosophy.
3. Discuss the notion of gender equality in the Republic. Can one argue that Plato is for or against gender equality?
4. Discuss the possibility of democracy in the Republic. Can one agree with Plato's conclusions regarding justice and still be an advocate of democracy?
5. Discuss Plato's critique of art. What is the relationship between Plato's critique of art and his conception of justice?

Topics for paper 2 requirement B
Select one:
1. Discuss the different notions of justice and/or history in Plato’s Republic and Kant’s writings. Argue why one of their positions concerning justice is superior or inferior to the other.
2. Discuss the capacity for democratic political arrangements in Plato’s Republic and Kant’s writings. Is it possible to derive a theory of democracy from either of their writings?
3. Discuss the notion of autonomy and fairness in Kant's moral philosophy. Argue for or against the possibility of fairness, that is, an unbiased position in moral philosophy.
4. Discuss the kingdom of ends and Plato's specialization thesis. Argue why one is superior or inferior to the other as an assumption regarding decision making.

Topics for paper 3 requirement B
Select one:
1. Compare Hegel’s theory of the state with Plato’s and/or Kant’s political systems. Argue which, if any, is superior and why.
2. Discuss Hegel’s critique of Kant’s moral system. Is Hegel's critique correct?
3. Compare Hegel’s and Plato’s theories of the family. Which theory provides a better conception of family justice?
4. Discuss Hegel’s regulation of economic life. Argue why regulation of economic life is a matter of moral and political philosophy.
5. Discuss Plato's specialization thesis in contrast to the political role of the bureaucracy in Hegel's state theory. Is the bureaucracy substantially similar to Plato's specialization thesis?
Note on plagiarism:
All instances of plagiarism will be reported to the dean. If you have any questions regarding what is considered plagiarism please ask me.

Schedule of Readings:

9/9: First day of class, Plato Republic Book 1
9/16: Plato Republic Books 2 and 3
9/23: Plato Republic Books 4 and 5
9/30: Plato Republic Books 6 and 7
10/7: Plato Republic Books 8, 9 and 10
10/14: Plato
10/21: Kant Grounding pages 1-67
10/28: Kant
11/4: Hegel Elements pages 9-64
11/11: Hegel Elements pages 67-132
11/18: Hegel Elements pages 135-186
11/25: No class
12/2: Hegel Elements pages 189-274
12/9: Hegel Elements pages 275-380
12/16: Hegel Elements pages 275-380