



# KS Empirical and Experimental Political Philosophy

University of Graz | Department of Philosophy | Summer Term 2020

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<b>Time:</b>	Thursdays, 15:15 – 16:45
<b>Venue:</b>	SR 34.K1, Attemsgasse 25/K, 8010 Graz
<b>Lecturer:</b>	Dr. Thomas Pözlner
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<b>Office hours:</b>	By appointment

## Description

Philosophical arguments often involve empirical presuppositions. In recent years these presuppositions have been increasingly put to the test. Many philosophers have appealed to findings that had been obtained for independent scientific purposes (call this “empirical philosophy”). Some have even begun to conduct scientific studies themselves or in collaboration with scientists (call this “experimental philosophy”). This course addresses the application of these approaches to political philosophy. So far, political philosophers have mostly used empirical data to inform claims about distributive justice: Which principle of justice would people choose behind a “veil of ignorance”? Is foreign aid effective in increasing its addressees’ well-being? To what extent do people think desert matters in distributing goods? In addition to these questions, we will also investigate studies about issues such as retributive justice, self-respect and basic needs, as well as general criticisms of empirical and experimental approaches to philosophy.

## Aims

Having completed the course, students should be able to:

- explain empirical and experimental approaches to philosophy;
- analyze the strengths and weaknesses of these approaches;

- critically reflect on the assumptions, methods and results of scientific studies pertaining to political philosophy;
- discuss and assess the normative implications of such studies;
- explain how philosophical claims are relevant to scientific studies pertaining to political philosophy;
- identify and explain connections between different topics in empirical/experimental political philosophy, and between these topics and more general philosophical issues.

## Schedule and Topics

- 03/19/2020, 15:15 – 16:45: Preliminary Discussion
- 03/26/2020, 15:15 – 16:45: Norman Frohlich, Joe Oppenheimer and Cheryl Eavey: Choices of Principles of Distributive Justice in Experimental Groups
- 04/02/2020, 15:15 – 16:45: Gillian Brock: Needs and Global Justice
- 04/23/2020, 15:15 – 16:45: Nicole Hassoun, Emir Malikov and Nathan Lubchenco: How People Think about Distributing Aid
- 04/30/2020, 15:15 – 16:45: Matthew Lindauer: Experimental Philosophy and the Fruitfulness of Normative Concepts
- 05/07/2020, 15:15 – 16:45: Daniela Goya-Tocchetto, Matthew Echols, and Jen Wright: The Lottery of Life and Moral Desert: An Empirical Investigation
- 05/14/2020, 15:15 – 16:45: Discussion of Seminar Paper Proposals
- 05/28/2020, 15:15 – 16:45: David Copp: Experiments, Intuitions, and Methodology in Moral and Political Theory
- 06/04/2020, 15:15 – 18:15: Presentations
- 06/18/2020, 15:15 – 16:45: Thomas Pölzler: What are Basic Needs? An Empirical Investigation of Folk Intuitions
- 06/25/2020, 15:15 – 16:45: Final Discussion

All texts can be downloaded at the course's Moodle page ([moodle.uni-graz.at](https://moodle.uni-graz.at)).

## Assessment

### Seminar Paper

Your seminar paper should address a specific and interesting research question in the area of empirical and experimental political philosophy. For example, you may compare the arguments of two or more authors, criticize the arguments of a particular author, or defend a thesis of your own. You can choose your research question freely. Make sure that your paper involves sound arguments that support your answer to this question.

The language of your seminar paper should be clear, succinct and intelligible. Its structure should be logical and aid understanding. In particular, you should motivate and explicitly state your research question in an introductory section, and summarize your thesis and most important arguments in a concluding section. A first proposal of your seminar paper is to be submitted via Moodle by May 13, 2020.

Your seminar paper should be between 1.500 and 3.000 words (excluding title page, contents, footnotes, bibliography, etc.), and refer to at least three relevant sources. These sources can be texts that we discussed in class, additional texts provided on the course's Moodle page or texts which you researched yourself.

Your seminar paper must be submitted via Moodle by September 30, 2020. The grade will be primarily based on the following criteria: (1) the adequacy and interestingness of your research question, (2) the soundness and relevance of your arguments, (3) your compliance with the rules of academic writing (citation, style, etc.), (4) the clarity, succinctness and intelligibility of your language, and (5) the adequacy of your paper's structure.

Further recommendations for writing a philosophy seminar paper can be found at: <http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/writing.html>.

### **Presentation**

The double session on June 4 will be dedicated to student presentations. You are asked to present one of the papers that are part of the additional literature package on Moodle. Your presentation should explain the paper's context, research question/s, thesis/theses and main arguments. It should also involve a critical evaluation. The papers for the presentation session will not be pre-read by other students. Hence, special care should be taken to present them in clear and simple terms. To facilitate understanding you are also asked to either provide a PowerPoint presentation or a one-page handout. The details of the presentations (individual or group presentation, length, choice of papers, etc.) will be settled at some point during the course.

### **Comments/Questions**

In our course we will discuss seven texts. For at least six of these texts you should formulate a comment or question that we may then consider in class. Your contributions should either address how to understand certain aspects of the text or critically reflect on it. For example, you may ask how an author uses a certain key concept, or whether a particular argument is based on a problematic tacit assumption. Your comments/questions should be less than five sentences. For each session they should be submitted via Moodle by Wednesday, 23:55.

### **Class Participation**

Please do the readings and participate actively in our discussions; for example, ask questions, raise objections or point out interconnections.

## **General Policies**

### **Attendance**

In order to complete the course in a regular way you must not be absent from more than three of our thirteen sessions (one session = 1.5 hrs). In case you miss four or five sessions I ask for an explanation (e.g., doctor's confirmation) and some compensatory task (e.g., a longer seminar paper). In case you miss six or more sessions you cannot successfully complete the course.

### **Deadlines**

Late submissions of seminar papers and comments/questions will not be considered.

**Academic Honesty**

Violations of academic honesty (e.g., using others' ideas without citing them) will automatically lead to a negative assessment of the seminar paper or comment/question in which they occur.

**Discussion Rules**

For our course to succeed it is essential that we treat each other politely and with respect (even when our opinions on some matter diverge).

**Laptops, Smartphones, etc.**

Please limit the use of electronic devices as much as possible (except for note-taking).