

Modules: PW-MA-2a,3a,4a;  
PT-MA-2,5a,5c,7; PW-BA-SP;  
SOZ-MA-5,8; SOZ-BA-SP;  
SOZ10-BA-SP

Goethe-Universität Frankfurt  
Wintersemester 2020/21  
(Updated 28 October 2020)

## Frontiers of Socioeconomic Justice

online asynchronous, with non-mandatory Zoom  
meetings Thursdays 14:00 c.t.

instructor: Brian Milstein, Ph.D.  
email: brian.m.milstein@gmail.com  
office hours: by appointment

### The Main Idea

This seminar will survey contemporary normative theories of justice in economic relationships and organization. The years since the 2008 crisis have brought a flurry of creative thinking about socioeconomic justice, opening up a variety of new and exciting domains in normative theorizing. After reviewing core statements by John Rawls, Robert Nozick, GA Cohen, Iris Young, Thomas Piketty, and others, we will look at innovations that push beyond conventional paradigms of distributive justice, such as the idea of a universal basic income, the ethics of debt, central banking as a problem for justice, corporations as “political” entities, and the right to strike.

### Progress and Assessment

**Format of the course:** This is an online course, and all readings, lectures, discussion spaces, assignments, and other learning materials will be available on **Moodle**: <https://moodle.studiumdigitale.uni-frankfurt.de/moodle/course/view.php?1091>.

- All required texts (“primary readings”) for the course will be available at the start of the semester, as well a number of additional readings (“secondary readings”) that you may find useful.
- In addition to the readings, you will find variety of learning materials to guide you through them. These will typically include some form of recorded lecture, and may also include webpages, handouts, or links. These will be made available near the beginning of each week.
- Our primary medium for discussing the materials will be via the chat forums. Each week will have a dedicated discussion thread, and one or more students will act as “discussion leaders” for that week’s primary readings.
- We will also have a weekly online meeting on Zoom to discuss the readings and answer questions. *These are not mandatory.* If you are taking the course

for a *Leistungsschein*, it is recommended that you take part due to the difficulty of some of the material; however, there will be no penalty for not doing so. These sessions will be held **every Thursday at 14:15** (details will be made available on Moodle).

**Overview of requirements:**

	<i>Teilnahmeschein</i>	<i>Leistungsschein</i>
<b>Weekly primary readings</b>	required	required
<b>Act as forum “discussion leader” for one week</b>	required	required
<b>Participation in online forum (via Moodle)</b>	required	required
<b>Participation in weekly discussions (via Zoom)</b>	not required	recommended
<b><i>Hausarbeit</i></b>	not required	required

Both students pursuing a *Teilnahmeschein* and students pursuing a *Leistungsschein* are expected to:

- Keep pace with the weekly primary readings;
- Participate regularly in online forum discussions;
- Play role of “discussion leader” (in collaboration with me and others) in the online forum for at least one week’s primary reading.
- As a *Hausarbeit*, students pursuing a *Leistungsschein* will write a research paper of 5000-7500 words (about 15–20 pages), which will be due **Monday, 29 March, 2021**. Those pursuing a *Teilnahmeschein* are not required to submit a final paper.

**Weekly Readings:** As you look over the syllabus, you will notice a list of readings for each week. Don’t get nervous—you will not be asked to read all of them! The readings for each week are divided into several categories:

- *Primary readings:* The “primary reading” will be the main focus of that week’s lecture and discussion. Each week’s primary reading will typically be 25-40 pages long in total, though not always. It is expected that everyone will have read and be ready to discuss the primary reading at the beginning of each week.
- *Supplementary readings:* For those of you who find a particular week’s reading compelling, most weeks will also include recommendations for further reading. These may include other works by the author of the primary reading, in-depth interpretations of the author’s work, philosophical works by others that are often studied alongside the author, or contemporary attempts to grapple with issues related to the ones the author raises. Again, these lists will cover but a snippet of what is really out there, but these should help you begin your

journey. Some of these (but not all) will also be made available on the course website.

**Forum Discussions and Discussion Leaders:** Because we will be conducting the course online, our primary medium for discussing the weekly readings will be via the online forums on Moodle.

- Each week, a new discussion thread will be opened on the coming week's reading.
- *Discussion Leaders:* One or more students will act as "discussion leader" for that week. Everyone in the class must act as a discussion leader *at least once* to receive credit. As a discussion leader, your job will be to initiate the discussion, pose questions to the rest of the class, keep the discussion going, and serve as moderators for the week.
- *Forum Participation:* Regardless of whether you are a discussion leader for a given week, all students are expected to participate regularly in the forums. You should substantively contribute at least 8 of the 12 weeks for which we have assigned readings.
  - Quality contributions should demonstrate that you have done the week's reading and are trying to think about the issues they raise. They can involve asking questions about the reading or answering questions posed by others; they can involve raising points of agreement or (respectful!) disagreement with points made by me or others.
  - Quality contributions are not about being "right." They are about figuring things out, realizing what you might have missed, correcting mistakes and misinterpretations, and being confronted with perspectives you may not have previously considered.
  - Above all, quality contributions should be on topic, and they should be polite and respectful of other students' views and backgrounds.
  - Though participation is required, your primary goal should not be to "impress" me or your fellow classmates. On the contrary, you should see the forums as an opportunity to think about the texts, experiment with ideas and arguments, and ask for clarifications.

**Hausarbeit:** At the conclusion of the semester, students pursuing a *Leistungsschein* will write a research paper of 5000-7500 words (about 15–20 pages), which will be due **no later than Monday, 29 March, 2021**. Those pursuing a *Teilnahmeschein* are not required to submit a final paper.

- You are free to write the paper on any topic you wish, so long as your topic is based on the central themes of the course. *You are strongly encouraged to discuss your paper with me ahead of time.* When writing, you should approach your final paper as a serious piece of scholarly research, complete with citations and bibliography: you should develop a clear central thesis; you should demonstrate knowledge of your topic; you should engage the material in a critical and thoughtful manner; you should be able to back up your arguments with reasons, evidence, and examples; and you should strive to show readers what conclusions they can draw from your efforts.

••• IMPORTANT •••

All papers must be double-spaced, in 12-point type, with one-inch margins, and must be submitted to me via email as either a Microsoft Word (.doc or .docx) or Adobe PDF (.pdf) file at [brian.m.milstein@gmail.com](mailto:brian.m.milstein@gmail.com).

Unfortunately, I will not be able to accept papers not written in English.

For all papers, you will be expected to adhere to proper conventions of scholarly attribution. Any work quoted or otherwise referenced must be appropriately and fully cited. Any idea, argument, information, or quotation that you might employ from an external source must likewise be accompanied by full citation. You are free to use any standard bibliographic citation style you wish, but you should apply it consistently. **Plagiarism, cheating, and other forms of academic dishonesty will not be tolerated and may result in automatic failure of the course.**

### Weekly Readings

All required readings for the course will be made available online, as well as at least some of the suggested supplementary readings (which will be indicated with an [online](#) icon).

••• **PLEASE NOTE:** The readings listed may be subject to change, and additional supplementary readings may be added or made available over the course of the term.  
*Check periodically for updated versions of this syllabus.* •••

### Week 1 (2–8 November) / Introduction

*There is no required reading for this session, though we will be talking a bit about the 2008 Financial Crisis. It was, after all, this event and its aftermath that has inspired much of recent efforts to expand the “frontiers” of thinking about socioeconomic justice. Most of you know something about the root causes and consequences of the crisis, but for those of you who would like a primer, here are two movies (☺) I would recommend. Viewing one of them is sufficient to get an idea, but both are excellent:*

- *Inside Job* (2010) dir. Charles Ferguson. Sony Pictures Classics, New York.
  - This highly praised documentary explores various aspects of the US financial industry and the forms of (mostly legal) corruption that led to the crisis.
- *The Big Short* (2015) dir. Adam McKay. Paramount Pictures, Hollywood.
  - This film dramatizes the stories of several real people who foresaw the collapse of the US housing market—and sought to profit off it—which also offers explanations of the systemic causes of the crisis. It is based on the (also *highly* recommended) book by Michael Lewis, *The Big Short: Inside the Doomsday Machine*. (Film contains profanity and brief nudity)

**Week 2 (9–15 November) / Distributive Justice I**

Primary reading:

- John Rawls (2015 [1971, 1999]) *A Theory of Justice* (excerpts), in *Political Philosophy: The Essential Texts*, ed. Steven M. Cahn (New York: Oxford University Press). Pp917–32. [online](#)
- John Rawls (2001) *Justice as Fairness: A Restatement*, ed. Erin Kelly (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press). Pp135–62, 176–9 [§§41.1–49.5, 51.8–53.2]. [online](#)

Supplementary reading:

- Martin O'Neill and Thad Williamson, eds. (2012) *Property-Owning Democracy: Rawls and Beyond* (Chichester: Blackwell).
- Famous libertarian critique of Rawls's theory:
  - Robert Nozick (1974) *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* (Oxford: Blackwell). Pp149–231 ["Distributive Justice"]. [online](#)
  - Rawls's response:
    - John Rawls (2005 [1997]) *Political Liberalism*, expanded ed. (New York: Columbia University Press). Pp257–88 [Lecture VII].

**Week 3 (16–22 November) / Distributive Justice II**

Primary reading:

- G.A. Cohen (1997) "Where the Action Is: On the Site of Distributive Justice," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 26(1): 3–30. [online](#)

Supplementary reading:

- G.A. Cohen (2009) *Why Not Socialism?* (Princeton: Princeton University Press). [online](#)

**Week 4 (23–29 November) / Distributive Justice III**

Primary reading:

- Amartya Sen (2006) "What Do We Want from a Theory of Justice?" *Journal of Philosophy* 103(5): 215–38. [online](#)

Supplementary reading:

- Amartya Sen (2009) *The Idea of Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press).

**Week 5 (30 November–6 December) / Distributive Justice IV**

Primary reading:

- Frank Lovett (2009) "Domination and Distributive Justice," *Journal of Politics* 71(3): 817–30. [online](#)
- Philippe van Parijs and Yannick Vanderborght (2017) *Basic Income: A Radical Proposal for a Free Society and a Sane Economy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press). Pp4–28. [online](#)

## Supplementary reading:

- Philip Pettit (2006) "Freedom in the Market," *Politics, Philosophy, and Economics* 5(2): 131–49. [online](#)
- Richard Dagger (2006) "Neo-Republicanism and the Civic Economy," *Politics, Philosophy, and Economics* 5(2): 151–73. [online](#)
- For a "pro-market" reading of republican freedom:
  - Robert S. Taylor (2013) "Market Freedom as Antipower," *American Political Science Review* 107(3): 593–602. [online](#)
- For a "market-skeptical" reading of republican freedom:
  - Steven Klein (2017) "Fictitious Freedom: A Polanyian Critique of the Republican Revival," *American Journal of Political Science* 61(4): 852–63. [online](#)
- "Left" readings of the (neo)republican tradition:
  - Alex Gourevitch (2015) *From Slavery to the Cooperative Commonwealth: Labor and Republican Liberty in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Cambridge University Press).
  - William Clare Roberts (2017) *Marx's Inferno: The Political Theory of Capital* (Princeton: Princeton University Press).
- Critique of neo-republicanism:
  - Thomas W. Simpson (2017) "The Impossibility of Republican Freedom," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 45(1): 27–53.
  - Frank Lovett and Philip Pettit (2019) "Preserving Republican Freedom: A Reply to Simpson," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 46(4): 363–83. [OLAT](#)

**Week 6 (7–13 December) / Distributive Justice V**

## Primary reading:

- Iris Marion Young (2011) *Responsibility for Justice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press). Pp43–74 ["Structure as the Subject of Justice"]. [online](#)

**Week 7 (14–20 December) / Inequality I: The Structure of Inequality**

## Primary reading:

- Thomas Piketty (2014) *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press). Pp1–35, 237–70. [online](#)

## Supplementary reading:

- Martin O'Neill (2017) "Philosophy and Public Policy after Piketty," *Journal of Political Philosophy* 25(3) 343–75. [online](#)

**WINTER BREAK**

**Week 8 (11–17 January) / Inequality II: Regulating Capital**

## Primary reading:

- Thomas Piketty (2014) *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press). Pp471–92, 515–39. [online](#)

## Supplementary reading:

- Karl Widerquist (2015) “The Piketty Observation Against the Institutional Background: How Natural Is this Natural Tendency and What Can We Do about It?” *Basic Income Studies* 10(1): 83–90. [online](#)

**Week 9 (18–24 January) / Inequality III: Poverty and Debt on the World Stage**

## Primary reading:

- Sanjay G. Reddy and Rahul Lahoti (2016) “\$1.90 a Day: What Does It Say?” *New Left Review* 97(Jan/Feb): 106–27. [online](#)
- Sanjay G. Reddy (2007) “International Debt: The Constructive Implications of Some Moral Mathematics,” *Ethics & International Affairs* 21(1): 33–48. [online](#)

## Supplementary reading:

- Anahí Wiedenbrüg (2018) “What Citizens Owe: Two Grounds for Challenging Debt Repayment,” *Journal of Political Philosophy* 26(3): 368–87. [online](#)
- Gabriel Wollner (2018) “Morally Bankrupt: International Financial Governance and the Ethics of Sovereign Debt,” *Journal of Political Philosophy* 26(3): 344–67. [online](#)
- Juri Viehoff (2018) “Eurozone Justice,” *Journal of Political Philosophy* 26(3): 388–414. [online](#)

**Week 10 (25 January–1 February) / Finance I: Debt**

## Primary reading:

- Lisa Herzog (2017) “What Could Be Wrong with a Mortgage? Private Debt Markets from a Perspective of Structural Injustice,” *Journal of Political Philosophy* 25(4): 411–34. [online](#)

## Supplementary reading:

- Ivan Ascher (2016) “‘Moneybags Must Be So Lucky’: Inside the Hidden Abode of Prediction,” *Political Theory* 44(1): 4–25. [online](#)
- Marco Meyer (2018) “The Right to Credit,” *Journal of Political Philosophy* 26(3): 304–26. [online](#)
- Govind Persad (2018) “Distributive Justice and the Relief of Household Debt,” *Journal of Political Philosophy* 26(3): 327–43. [online](#)
- Lisa Herzog, ed. (2017) *Just Financial Markets? Finance in a Just Society*, ed. Lisa Herzog (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

- Ivan Ascher (2016) *Portfolio Society: On the Capitalist Mode of Prediction* (New York: Zone Books).

### **Week 11 (2–8 February) / Finance II: Central Banking**

Primary reading:

- Clément Fontan, François Claveau, and Peter Dietsch (2016) “Central Banking and Inequalities: Taking Off the Blinders,” *Politics, Philosophy, and Economics* 15(4): 319–57. [online](#)

Supplementary reading:

- Jens van 't Klooster (2019) “Central Banking in Rawls’s Property-Ownning Democracy,” *Political Theory* <doi: 10.1177/0090591718810377>. [online](#)

### **Week 12 (9–15 February) / Employment I: The Firm**

Primary reading:

- David Ciepley (2013) “Beyond Public and Private: Toward a Political Theory of the Corporation,” *American Political Science Review* 107(1): 139–58. [online](#)

Supplementary reading:

- Hélène Landemore and Isabelle Ferreras (2016) “In Defense of Workplace Democracy: Towards a Justification of the Firm–State Analogy,” *Political Theory* 44(1): 53–81. [online](#)
- Elizabeth Anderson et al (2017) *Private Government: How Employers Rule Our Lives (and Why We Don’t Talk About It)*, ed. Stephen Macedo (Princeton: Princeton University Press).
- Isabelle Ferreras (2018) *Firms as Political Entities: Saving Democracy through Economic Bicameralism* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press).
- Abraham Singer (2018) *The Form of the Firm: A Normative Political Theory of the Corporation* (New York: Oxford University Press).
- Lisa Herzog (2018) *Reclaiming the System: Moral Responsibility, Divided Labor, and the Role of Organizations in Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

### **Week 13 (16–22 February) / Employment II: Labor**

Primary reading:

- Alex Gourevitch (2016) “Quitting Work but Not the Job: Liberty and the Right to Strike,” *Perspectives on Politics* 14(2): 307–23. [online](#)

Supplementary reading:

- Alex Gourevitch (2013) “Labor Republicanism and the Transformation of Work,” *Political Theory* 41(4): 591–617. [online](#)
- Alex Gourevitch (2018) “The Right to Strike: A Radical View,” *American Political Science Review* 112(4): 905–17. [online](#)

**••• Final paper due Monday, 29 March, 2021 •••**