An intensive introduction to some key themes, concepts, and arguments in contemporary political philosophy, employing a unifying framework for defining public goods and dimensions of social justice (what I call the ‘Endowment Model’). These dimensions include

I. Inherent entitlements deriving from the nature of moral agency or human psychology, and from basic relations of individuals to society as well as to the natural world (e.g. inalienable rights, if any);

II. Justice in transfer (non-coercion/voluntariness in contracts and gifts, full information);

III. Justice as reward according to merits of multiple kinds (e.g. choices, efforts, excellences);

IV. Justice as solidarity against the arbitrary swings of fortune, including the natural lottery
   – which includes starting position fairness as a mutual protection scheme based in human culture;

V. Threshold utility in outcomes, especially as concerns providing sufficient well-being for most or all.

One of the main goals of this course is to provide students an overview of how several major topics relate to each other and the ‘lay of the land’ in mainstream debates about them. While I may tailor readings a bit to student interests, major themes include:

• major contractarian and consequentialist theories of justice;
• collective action problems, market failures, public goods and ‘common goods’ (including objective goods not adequately deliverable through market systems);
• other problems for libertarian conceptions of legitimate government (including equal opportunity, reward according to merit, and initial acquisition);
• three main contemporary approaches to universal human rights, including basic capabilities;
• issues in global justice including globalizing democracy, and the status of democratic rights.

We will also look at a few case-studies that illustrate the problems at the center of each debate. For example, we will collectively select at least three-to-four of the following, with the idea that you might teach related topics yourself in future electives.

1. tax burdens, public debt, and economic inequalities (mainly in the US)
2. educational opportunities and problems in public education;
3. corruption in political systems and structural problems with the US federal government
4. conceptions of property rights, initial acquisition, and use of natural resources;
5. immigration rights, rights to health care, or other rights to a ‘basic material minimum;’
6. the 2005 Responsibility to Protect doctrine, humanitarian military intervention, mass atrocity crimes and their effects (e.g. 500,000+ killed in Syria so far), and problems in the UN system;
7. global environmental problems beyond climate change, e.g. secure and sufficient food supply (and how to understand such issue in terms of game theory as collective action problems).

The course is conceived not to duplicate or overlap too much with the focus of other graduate seminars on continental political theory, Habermas’s discourse ethics, or environmental values. But, depending on student interest, additional units are possible on topics such as (a) postmodern critiques of human rights and universalist replies; (b) deliberative theories of democracy and their implications, e.g. for free speech rights and/or religion in the public sphere; (c) American constitutional reform; (d) other ways of structuring the global order, such as a league of democracies.