Course Description
There is no denying that luck affects us in many ways. This course will investigate what luck is, and what anyone, but particularly the government, is supposed to do about it. Imagine that you happen to be much better looking than I am, and because of this all sorts of opportunities in life present themselves to you, and not to me. It does not seem plausible to suggest that the government should give me some sort of break to compensate for my bad looks. But imagine that you happen to have been born in a much more affluent family than I did; in fact, I was born into an extremely poor and dysfunctional family. While you were visiting museums in Europe, I was trying to avoid being harmed by gangs in my neighborhood. Is it equally implausible to suggest that the state should compensate my bad luck in this case? We will try to discuss which things seem like sensible candidates for governmental intervention and which do not. In light of the recent boom in the field of “global justice”, we will pay special attention to the significance of our place of birth and the way in which it contributes to what I would like to call (for reasons you will understand in due course) the “geographic lottery”.

Required Texts


The books will eventually be available in the College’s bookstore. As you can see in the attached in the schedule of readings below, we will only get to read portions of the books later in the term. Moreover, we will read only small portions of them. Thus, you may choose to make copies of the book rather than buying them. But these are excellent and important books – the sorts of books that you may want to keep. So, I recommend you buy them – even though this is entirely up to you.

Recommended Texts
I may recommend additional books in class; and I will distribute a course packet with the other texts which we will discuss in class.

Grading
1) Class Presentation: 25%
2) Mid-term Paper, ca. 5-6 pages (due May 6 2010): 25%
3) Participation in Class: 10%
4) Final Paper, 8-10 pages (due March 12 2010): 40%

I will assign the paper topics in class.
Grading Policy:
Receiving a grade of ‘A’ entails that the student has shown exceptional grasp of the material, and that he or she has excellent writing skills. The ‘B’ range suggests very good command of the material in the course and above-average writing skills. The ‘C’ range indicates that the student’s grasp of the material and writing abilities are average. The ‘D’ range suggests that the student’s grasp of the material and writing skills are poor.

Attendance and Class Participation

Attendance is mandatory. Make sure you do not miss class, and that you arrive promptly; many discussions that we will have in class you will not find in the books. And philosophy can best be learned in live group discussions; some of the assigned readings will be excruciatingly difficult unless you come to class and participate in the discussions. More than something you will just study, philosophy is something you will do. After a student misses two classes, each additional absence will entail a deduction of a letter grade, i.e., from A to A-, from A- to B+, and so on, unless, of course, real and convincing justification is provided. More than five absences will automatically result in a failing grade for the course.

Active class participation can only help you; students are strongly encouraged to participate as much as they wish in class discussions. There will be, however, no penalty for those students that decide not to participate; some people might be shy, nervous, or insecure, and I will not penalize them for that. But I cannot emphasize enough how important it is for you to participate in our discussions. Active participation will help you get a better grasp of the material, and therefore, it will contribute to your overall success in the course. Although there will be no reward for merely attending classes and no penalty for merely being silent in class, you will soon realize how important attendance and participation are.

NOTE: If you miss class, please do not write e-mails asking me to tell you about what we did that day in the classroom. I will ignore such requests. It is your responsibility to come to class, and if you wish to find out what you missed you might come to my office during office hours. My e-mail and my voice mail should only be used for emergencies; I will ignore frivolous e-mails and voice mails. My office door is virtually always open, and you are virtually always welcome.

Conduct in the Classroom

I will treat everyone with respect and cordiality: I expect the same in return. For example, though I have a cell phone, I do not have it on while in the classroom, so please turn yours off. The classroom is not meant to be checking your cell phones or pagers. The same policy holds for all class-related activities, including the talks and dinners for our speaker series, and other talks sponsored by the department. If I see a student using a cell phone (pager, radio, etc.) in class, I will ask the student to leave, and this will entail a deduction of a letter in the student’s final grade. If I have see the student doing this a second time, this will entail a failing grade in the class.

If you want to bring a laptop computer to class, that is acceptable, though not recommended; I cannot always monitor what you are doing with the computer, but I request that you do not use the computer for anything other than taking notes. Rather than taking notes on your computer, I recommend that you make sure that you pay as much attention as possible, and that you participate as much as possible in our discussions. Please do not disturb class in any other ways, such as carrying out conversations with your classmates; these sorts of conversations, of course, are bad for you, since you can hardly pay attention to our discussions, but they also disturb other students. Do not be disrespectful to anyone in the classroom. I welcome discussion: if you disagree with someone (including myself, or any of our authors), feel free to argue as vehemently as you wish for your position, but do it in a kind and considerate manner.

Academic Integrity

Students are expected to abide by Union College’s Statement on Academic Integrity (please take a look at http://www.union.edu/library/refroom/statement.htm). Plagiarism will entail, at the very least, an automatic
failing grade in the course, and the same will hold for other affronts to academic integrity (such as cheating on exams, etc.)

Papers

The following are a few guidelines for your papers that you must observe.
a) The papers (particularly the final paper) must have three sections, the first being an introduction in which you clearly state what it is that you are going to show in the paper, and the last containing a summary of your conclusions. Read your paper before you hand it in, and make sure that someone else (let alone yourself) will be able to understand your written views. Having an introduction and a conclusion are useful means toward that end.
b) Internet references are absolutely prohibited. Papers with such references will be penalized severely. All references must be to printed books or articles. The author of the book, the publisher, the date of publication, and the page number from which you are quoting must be clearly indicated.
c) Papers should be printed on white paper.
d) The pages should be numbered, and numbered consecutively.
e) Do not include a cover page; on the first page put the title of the paper and your name and then start writing. Avoid extremely large (or small) fonts or margins, the paper should be double-spaced throughout (including footnotes), and it must be free from typos (spelling will be graded). The lengths listed above are a general guideline, do not worry if your papers are a bit longer.
f) Clearly indicate, by using quotation marks, which words are not yours, and give appropriate references. Do not paraphrase.
g) Please remember that spelling and syntax will be graded.
Schedule and Class Topics


Seventh Week (May 11 – May 13): Michael Walzer, Spheres of Justice (op. cit.): 3-63.

Eighth Week (May 18 – May 20): Will Kymlicka, Multicultural Citizenship (op. cit.): 10-33, 49-74.

Ninth Week (May 25 – May 27): Draft from Leo Zaibert

Tenth Week (June 1 – June 3): Draft from Leo Zaibert

The most important aspect of this schedule is the order in which the topics are presented, not the correlation of dates with topics. I expect, and for reasons that will become clear as we move along, hope, that some readings will take much longer than the schedule indicates. Moreover, it is likely that I will assign additional readings, or that I would eliminate some of the items in the list above, all of which I will announce in class. I am not interested in racing our way through the texts; I want us to really think hard, to philosophize about our texts, and to learn as much as possible from each of the topics that we do discuss. The schedule above is just a guideline, and deviations from it are a real possibility.