Instructor: Ryan Ogilvie  
Email: rogilvie@umd.edu  
Office Hrs.: By appointment

Course Description:

Justice demands the truth, that we punish all and only the guilty. Justice also demands fairness, that we apply the law in the same way across relevantly similar cases. But a growing amount of empirical research suggests that the pursuit of justice is systematically undermined by our prejudices and biases, and that a number of standard investigative methods are fundamentally flawed. This course will critically evaluate some of this evidence (are things as bad as they seem?), and look at its normative implications. The overarching philosophical issues of this course concern the nature of justice and the fragility of human reason within the American criminal justice system.

This course has three learning objectives. The first aim is to develop the conceptual frameworks necessary interpret and critically analyze findings in the social sciences (e.g., psychology, economics, sociology). The second aim is to develop an appreciation of the difference between factual and normative claims. The third is to provide students with the ability to objectively evaluate current social and legal institutions—to rationally defend a position on a particular social or legal practice.

Required Texts:

(All other readings will be posted on ELMS.)

Course Mechanics:

This is an online course. Lectures videos will be posted on UMD’s ELMS site. We will use Facebook as our discussion forum. I will post discussion questions on the readings, and students can discuss and debate questions that arise over the course of the term.

Evaluation:

Précis (x2): 20%  
Group project: 20%  
Paper: 30%  
Midterm: 20%  
Participation: 10%