PSCI 104: INTRO TO POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

Instructor: Nathan Feldman (Office: Harkness: 323)
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Class meeting time: Monday, Wednesday, Friday, 10:25-11:15 AM
Class location: Hylan Building Room 202
Course format: Lecture
Office hours: Tuesday 10 AM-12 PM; 2-4 PM. (Book using this link: https://calendly.com/nhf2109/office-hours)
Credit hours: 4.0

COURSE DESCRIPTION, OBJECTIVES, AND OUTCOMES

Political philosophy asks questions about the meaning, stakes, and practices of political life and action. How do we organize our lives together as humans, and why? Could we live differently, and should we? What does a good society look like, and how can we build it? The course considers these questions—and others— as expressed through debates about freedom. Freedom is often thought of as one value among many, sometimes counterposed to other political virtues like equality or justice. But freedom itself has meant different things to different authors, whose works we will read. To some, freedom is a right of individuals to be defended against encroachment by the state; to others, freedom is something which can only be realized collectively, in relationships to other people. Investigating freedom asks crucial questions: how we, as individuals, live and act in community, and towards what ends; what coercion consists of and when (if ever) it is justified; and how conflicts between free persons might be resolved.

This course, which has no pre-requisites, will introduce you to canonical texts in political philosophy, and encourage you to comprehend and appraise them.

GRADES

This course will be examined on three in class midterms, a take-home final, and three short responses. Your grade will be made up of assignments as follows:

Short responses (3x 10% each) 30%:

These posts should be about 500 words each. They should be submitted via Blackboard the night before the session whose readings they concern.

A post should engage an argument, claim, or passage in a reading. This could involve (i) evaluating the internal consistency of the argument or claim, (ii) discussing what the argument or claim assumes and implies, or (iii) discussing how the argument or claim may relate to other arguments or claims in the text or other ideas we have encountered in the course. A post could also, very simply, (iv) seek clarification: "What does this passage actually mean?" But such a post should also try to propose one or two candidate interpretations and consider the implications of those interpretations: "This passage confused me. I think the author is saying X. If they are, then A, B, and C should follow. And that is important or interesting because... Then again, the author may also be saying Y. If they are, then A, B, C should follow. And that is interesting because..."

First midterm: 10%.

This will take place on October 1. This will be an open book exam. You will be asked to answer a series of prompts that will test your understanding of the assigned texts.

Second midterm: 15%.

This will take place on October 29. This will be an open book exam. You will be asked to answer a series of prompts that will test your understanding of the assigned texts.

Third midterm: 15%

This will take place on November 19. This, too, will be an open book exam. You will be asked to answer a series of prompts that will test your understanding of the assigned texts.

Take home final: 30%

This assignment (c. 2,000 words) poses a question and prompts you to develop your own argument in response, drawing on textual evidence for support. I will distribute the prompts on **December 9**. The final will be due **December 15 at 10PM**.

REQUIRED MATERIALS

Just so that we are all (literally) on the same page, let's please work from the same editions of the assigned texts.

Plato, *Republic* (Hackett, ed. Grube)
Plato, *Last Days of Socrates - New Translation* (Penguin, ed. Rowe)
Aristotle, *Politics* (Hackett, ed. Reeve)
Hobbes, *Leviathan* (Norton, Johnston)
Locke, *Second Treatise* (Hackett, ed. Wooton)
Rousseau, *Basic Political Writings* (Hackett, ed. Cress)
Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (Oxford, ed. Todd)
Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom* (Norton)
The Marx-Engels Reader (Norton, ed. Tucker)
Mill, *On Liberty, Utilitarianism and Other Essays* (Oxford, ed. Philp and Rosen)

COURSE POLICIES

Attendance

Attendance is mandatory; however, needless to say, you may have an excused absence for reasons of illness, religious obligation, and/or emergency.

Four (4) unexcused absences will result in the student's failing the semester.

Class Etiquette

Political Philosophy tackles some of the most intractable, enduring, and provocative questions of the human condition. I encourage you to "try on" new ideas and new arguments. Come prepared to think complex, challenging thoughts. Please be kind and respectful in class discussions. Speak on the basis of your own experience and let others do the same. Expect your peers to disagree. Do as Justice Ginsburg counselled: Disagree without being disagreeable. Assume that your peers are well-intentioned, but if classroom dynamics don't feel right, let me know. I will do my level best to foster an inclusive classroom, and I count on your cooperation in achieving this goal.

Writing Assignments

Intro to Political Philosophy is a class about learning how to think critically, and clear thought is demonstrated by clear prose.

For each essay you will have several prompts/topics to choose from. The purpose of these essays is to allow you to delve deeper into the texts than you are able to in class. In doing so, you are expected to demonstrate a sustained written argument. Do not waste space with unnecessary quotations or summaries of the texts. Instead, you should use every word to respond directly to the prompt and present a clear and forceful argument. Essays should be proofread for errors and edited for clarity, succinctness, and a demonstrated grasp complex social and political problems. Essays should generally not incorporate any research beyond the assigned readings.

In general, essays will be graded for whether they (a) respond adequately to the prompt; (b) fairly engage with the text and do not grossly (or intentionally) misinterpret; (c) provide a clear and lucid argument; (d) are well-written and -organized.

Electronics

It's OK to use laptops/iPads in class to either take notes or use an electronic copy of the reading.

Seek my help when you need it

In addition to the support resources available to you through the university, I am also here to help. You are always welcome to contact me with questions about our coursework, as well as to express your concerns about our learning environment. I welcome suggestions about how to meet your learning needs and to improve the classroom experience. You can always email me or visit my office hours. Please allow up to 2 days for email responses, although you will usually get a quicker response.

Generative AI

I strongly encourage you not to use generative AI to either summarize readings or write your papers. It's a way of ensuring you learn nothing. More stringently, you are responsible for the accuracy of everything you write. You are required to disclose if your work was created, whole or in part (and, if so, what part), with a GenAI tool. Failure to disclose this constitutes a violation of academic honesty.

ACADEMIC HONESTY

Academic honesty means acting with truthfulness and sincerity in carrying out all aspects of our individual and collaborative work, maintaining ownership over our work and acknowledging our debt to the work of others.

Students can best meet their obligation to academic honesty by adhering to the Academic Honesty Policy in all academic matters. This includes completing their work through their own honest efforts and expecting and encouraging honesty among their peers.

The text above is an excerpt taken from https://www.rochester.edu/college/honesty/, where students may – and should! – also find the full policy.

STUDENT RESOURCES AND SERVICES

Please feel comfortable speaking with me about challenges you are experiencing within and outside of the classroom so that I may submit a CARE Referral on your behalf. A CARE Referral is submitted when the level of concern for a student necessitates inclusive, multi-layered support from the campus community. The CARE network administrator only shares information with staff who need to know it to help you. I care about your success and am committed to my role in helping you get connected to appropriate campus resources.

If there are accommodations of any sort that would make the class work better for you, please come talk to me about it.

If you think you may need to seek accommodations due to a disability, the Office of Disability Resources (http://www.rochester.edu/college/disability/index.html) can help you figure out your options. Speaking with faculty about disability-related accommodations is strictly confidential; I encourage you to come see me with concerns or requests. Other resources that may prove helpful during your time at the University of Rochester:

-**CARE** (https://www.rochester.edu/care/about.html

-**The Writing & Speaking Center** (http://writing.rochester.edu/index.html)

-**Tutoring** (http://www.rochester.edu/college/cetl/undergraduate/tutoring.html)

-**University Counseling Center** (http://www.rochester.edu/uhs/ucc/)

-**David T. Kearns Center** (https://www.rochester.edu/college/kearnscenter/)

-**Office of Minority Student Affairs** (http://www.rochester.edu/College/OMSA/)

Beginnings

- Monday, August 25, 2025—Introductions
- Wednesday, August 27, 2025—Du Bois, "On the Ruling of Men" (on Blackboard)
- Friday, August 29, 2025—Weber, "Politics as a Vocation" (on Blackboard)
- Monday, September 1, 2025—No Class

Freedom and Hierarchy

- Wednesday, September 3, 2025—Plato, *Republic* Books 4-6; Josiah Ober, "Public Speech and the Power of the People in Democratic Athens," *PS: Political Science and Politics*, Vol. 26, No. 3 (1993), pp. 481-486
- Friday, September 5, 2025— Plato, *Republic* Books 7-8
- Monday, September 8, 2025—Plato, *Apology* (entire)
- Wednesday, September 10, 2025—Plato, *Crito* (entire)
- Friday, September 12, 2025—Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics* (excerpts on Blackboard)
- Monday, September 15, 2025—Aristotle, *Politics* Book I
- Wednesday, September 17, 2025—Aristotle, *Politics* Books II (1-5), III (1-13), Politics IV (1-5)
- Friday, September 19, 2025— Thomas Aquinas, *Law, Morality and Politics* (excerpts on Blackboard)
- Monday, September 22, 2025—No Class
- Wednesday, September 24, 2025—No Class
- Friday, September 26, 2025—Christine de Pizan, *Book of the Body Politic* (excerpts on Blackboard)
- Monday, September 29, 2025—*El Reuirmento*; Vitoria, *On the American Indians* (excerpts on Blackboard)
- Wednesday, October 1, 2025—In-Class Midterm.

Freedom and Contract

- Friday, October 3, 2025— Exodus 1-25; Naomi Tadmor, "People of the Covenant and the English Bible," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, Vol. 22, No. 12 (2012), pp. 95-110
- Monday, October 6, 2025—Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 'To My Most Honor'd Friend', 'Introduction,' Chapters 1-9
- Wednesday, October 8, 2025— Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Chapters 10-19
- Friday, October 10, 2025—Thomas Hobbes *Leviathan*, Chapters 21, 29-33, 43, 46-47; and the Review and Conclusion
- Monday, October 13, 2025—No Class
- Wednesday, October 15, 2025—John Locke, *Second Treatise*, Chapters 1-9
- Friday, October 17, 2025—John Locke, *Second Treatise*, Chapters 10-19
- Monday, October 20, 2025— Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discourse on Inequality*
- Wednesday, October 22— Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, Book 1
- Friday, October 24, 2025, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, Book 2
- Monday, October 27, 2025, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, Book 3 1-4, 15; Book 4 1-2, 8.
- Wednesday, October 29, 2025—In-Class Midterm

Freedom in an Age of Revolutions

- Friday, October 31, 2025—Second Continental Congress, "Declaration of Independence"; National Assembly of France, "Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen"; Olympe de Gouges, "The Declaration of the Rights of Woman and of the Female Citizen"; Jean-Jacques Dessalines & Louis Boisrond-Tonnerre, "Declaration of Independence of the Republic of Haiti" (all on Backboard).
- Monday, November 3, 2025—Jeremy Bentham, "Anarchical Fallacies," Edmund Burke, "Reflections on the Revolution in France" (both on Blackboard).
- Wednesday, November 5, 2025—Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, Chapters 1-2

- Friday, November 7, 2025—Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, Chapter 3; Seneca Falls Convention, "The Declaration of Sentiments" (1848); Emma Goldman, "The Tragedy of Women's Emancipation" (1911) (all but Wollstonecraft on Blackboard).
- Monday, November 10, 2025—Frederick Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, Chapters 5-6, 15-17
- Wednesday, November 12, 2025—Frederick Douglass, "The Nature of Slavery," "The Inhumanity of Slavery," "What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?," "I Denounce the So-Called Emancipation as a Stupendous Fraud," W.E.B. DuBois, "Of the Dawn of Freedom" (on Blackboard)
- Friday, November 14, 2025— Karl Marx, "On the Jewish Question" (pp. 26-46) and "The German Ideology"
- Monday, November 17, 2025—Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* and "Critique of the Gotha Program"
- Wednesday, November 19, 2025—In Class Midterm

Freedom, Non-Interference, and Liberation

- Friday, November 21, 2025—John Stewart Mill, *On Liberty*, Chapter 1-2
- Monday, November 24, 2025— John Stewart Mill, *On Liberty*, Chapter 3-4
- Wednesday, November 26, 2025—No Class
- Friday, November 28, 2025—No Class
- Monday, December 1, 2025—Mahondas Gandhi, "Hind Swaraj or Indian Home Rule" (on Blackboard, sections 1, 3-4, 6-7, 13-14, 17)
- Wednesday, December 3, 2025—Isaiah Berlin, "Two Concepts of Liberty" (on Blackboard); Gerald MacCallum, 'Negative and Positive Freedom', *Philosophical Review*, 76, pp. 312–34
- Friday, December 5, 2025—Judith Shklar, "The Liberalism of Fear" (on Blackboard)
- Monday, December 8, 2025—W.E.B. DuBois, "Of the Ruling of Men," *Darkwater* (1920); Martin Luther King, Jr., (essays on Blackboard).