

PHIL 466: SOCIAL AND POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

In an oft-debated passage of *Between Past and Future* (1961), the political philosopher Hannah Arendt argued that in politics, “courage is indispensable because in politics not life the world is at stake.” We might add the *study* of politics—and particularly political philosophy, which explores the realm(s) of the political via the lenses of ethics, social justice, and normative visions of the state, among other things—takes intellectual courage given that the stakes are so dauntingly, mesmerizingly high.

This course explores questions that have motivated, and that continue to motivate, generations of social and political philosophers working within diverse intellectual traditions. It also takes a “deep dive” into the answers that many philosophers have developed in response to these challenges. Bearing in the famous claim of Karl Marx—another political philosopher whose work will study in this course—that philosophers should not merely *interpret* the world, but also seek to *change* it, this course also introduces students to conceptual frameworks and other tools with which to assess today’s political challenges from an ethical point of view.

Our readings are divided into four sections. **Section I** introduces students to some of the main areas of what we might call “traditional” political philosophy inquiry, including the nature of justice, defenses of democracy, questions about the rightful role, if any, of the state, and more recent ethical critiques of “traditional” political philosophy’s tendency toward Eurocentrism.

Section II explores how political philosophers have understood, theorized, and sometimes vigorously challenged both authoritarianism and fascism. In **Section III**, we will learn about how many political philosophers have conceived of the notions of “freedom” and “liberty.” We will also study related, conceptual tensions between libertarianism and egalitarianism. Finally, we will study how philosophers have critiqued certain political uses of the ideals of “freedom” and “liberty” on the grounds that these uses are antifeminist, colonialist and imperialist. Finally, in **Section IV** we will study philosophical works on resisting injustice and oppression, emphasizing more recent scholarship on this topic.

This is a reading and writing-intensive course. Students are expected to complete all assigned readings prior to the class meeting for which they are assigned. Short reading quizzes (or “**reading check-ins**”) will be given at the start of each class to further incentivize engagement with the course materials outside of the classroom. Writing assignments will include **short, in-class “free write” assignments**, a **philosophical op-ed assignment** (for which students will prepare by participating in an in-class workshop), and a **final paper** on a topic that students will select and develop with support from the professor.

In developing the final papers, students are required to: (1) **meet with the professor** during office hours to discuss paper topics and/or argument development; (2) **submit three ideas for possible paper topics**/thesis statements for feedback from the instructor (note: thesis statements/topics must be approved by the instructor); (3) **develop a detailed outline** of the paper for an **in-class peer review**; (4) **submit a first draft of the paper** for feedback from the professor; and (5) **submit a final draft** of the paper that successfully responds to feedback from Draft 1. Final papers are due **Sunday, December 7th via Canvas at 8pm.**

There will also be a **final exam for this class**; the date and time will be confirmed during Week 3 of the semester.

GRADES:

- **Grade scale:** A = 94-100, A- = 93-90, B = 84-89, B- = 80-83, C = 74-79, C- 73-70 D = 64-69, D = 60-63, F= 59 and below
- **Reading check-ins** – 20% of final grade
- **In-class “free writes”** – 10% of final grade, graded pass/fail
- **Thesis statement proposal** – 5% of final grade
- **Draft 1 outline for in-class peer review** – 5% of final grade
- **Draft 1 of final paper** – 10% of final grade
- **Draft 2 of final paper** – 10% of final grade
- **Final exam** – 30% of final grade
- **Class participation** – 10% of final grade

COURSE POLICIES

- General UNLV policies can be found [here](#).
- I recognize that students have varying comfort levels in terms of class participation. Some are happy to speak in front of the entire class, while others prefer speaking with partners or in small groups. Still others may not like to talk in class at all, but they nevertheless do an excellent job expressing their views on in-class free-write assignments. All of this is to say that there are many ways to be an excellent participant in our class discussions—and to earn a class participation grade that reflects your efforts!
- Please do not hesitate to meet with me during my office hours if you are experiencing setbacks that interfere with your ability to complete the course materials in a timely manner. I am happy to work with you to develop an alternative completion plan for course assignments.
- Use of AI for course assignments—and all other forms of plagiarism—are *strictly prohibited*. The first offense will result in receiving a “0” on the assignment, and the second will result in an “F” grade for the course and an academic misconduct report. (**A plea to my students:** I do not like “policing” students, or anyone for that matter—so please do not put us both in this situation! If you are interested in learning more about the negative impact of AI on higher education and the humanities in particular, check out “[A Matter of Words](#)” by philosopher Megan Fitts.)
- I will do my very best to respond to student emails within 24 hours, with the exception of weekends and holidays (in those cases, I will reply to you on the next business day).

If you want to send an email to me on a weekend or a holiday, consider setting up a “schedule send” for the following workday. That will keep your email toward the top of my inbox!

- Extra credit opportunities are noted in the syllabus. They include a political philosophy book launch in October at the Writer’s Block independent bookstore in Las Vegas, as well as a number of opportunities to do an extra reading that is noted as “recommended” on the syllabus. In both cases, you should write a one-page reaction paper on the event or reading and then submit it via Canvas within a week of the scheduled assignment. Students can also propose possible “extra credit events” connected to course materials. Please do not wait until the end of the semester to request extra credit. Plan ahead using this syllabus!

BOOKS AND ARTICLES

You are not required to purchase a textbook for this class; all assignments have been made available to you for free, generally via UNLV Libraries or the Canvas site for our course.

You are responsible for doing online library searches to find the various readings that have been listed on the syllabus. If you are having trouble and/or have questions, please feel free to contact the UNLV Philosophy Librarian Priscilla Finley at priscilla.finley@unlv.edu.

You are also required to bring a notebook and (hand) writing utensil to class each day for your in-class writing assignments. You must also bring a blue book to your final exam.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Unit 1: Course Introduction

Tuesday, August 26

- **Intro to Course**
- **Review:** [Stimulation Exercise: John Rawls and The Veil of Ignorance](#)

Thursday, August 28

- **Read:** David Miller, “Why do we need political philosophy?” and “Nations, States, and Global Justice” in *Political Philosophy: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford University Press, 2023), available via UNLV Libraries.

Tuesday, September 2

- **Read:** Charles W. Mills, “Decolonizing Western Political Philosophy,” in *New Political Science* vol. 37, issue 1 (2015), pp. 1-24.

Unit 2: Authoritarianism

Thursday, September 4

- **Read:** Theodore Adorno et al, “Introduction” and “Chapter 1”, *The Authoritarian Personality* (Verso, 2019), accessible via UNLV Libraries.
- **Read:** Verónica Gago, “New Authoritarianism as Counterrevolution,” in *In the Midst* (Blog), June 3, 2025 (translated by Liz Mason-Deese) accessible [here](#).

Tuesday, September 9

- **Read:** Dorothy Thomson, “Who Goes Nazi?” in *Harper’s Magazine* (1941), accessible [here](#).
- **Read:** Benito Mussolini, *The Doctrine of Fascism* (1932).

Thursday, September 11

- **Read:** Andrea Dworkin, “The Promise of the Ultra-Right” and “Antifeminism” in *Right Wing Women* (New York, Perigee Books, 1978), accessible via UNLV Libraries and [here](#).

Tuesday, September 16

- **Read:** Amy Reed-Sandoval, “Children, Borders, and Adulthood,” in *Intimate Borders: Feminist Migration Ethics* (Oxford University Press, 2025; available on Canvas).
- **Recommended:** Gloria Anzaldúa, Chapter 1 of *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (Aunt Lute Books, 1987), accessible via UNLV Libraries and [here](#).

Thursday, September 18

- **Read:** Jacques Rancière, *Hatred of Democracy* (Verso, 2006), all chapters, accessible via UNLV Libraries and [here](#).

Tuesday, September 23

- **No in-person class today—feel free to read ahead!**

Thursday, September 25

- **Read:** Cécile Fabre, “Political Corruption in Unjust Regimes,” in *European Journal of Political Theory* vol. 23, no. 3, 418-424.
- **Recommended (in Spanish):** Nalleli Delgado Herrera and Moisés Vaca, “Cuando nuestros representantes son injustos” (“When our representatives are unjust”), in *Diánoia*, vol. 67, no. 88 (mayo–octubre de 2022), accessible [here](#).

Tuesday, September 30

- **Read:** Hannah Arendt, “Eichmann In Jerusalem-I: Adolf Eichmann and the Banality of Evil,” in *The New Yorker*, February 8th, 1963, accessible [here](#).
- **Recommended:** “Eichmann in Jerusalem—II,” accessible [here](#).
- **In-class watch:** *Hannah Arendt* (Margarethe von Trotta, 2012)

Thursday, October 2

- **No in-person class today**
- Please use time to develop *three* possible thesis statements/topics for your final papers
- Note: these statements should be submitted via Canvas for feedback from professor by **Sunday, October 5th at 8pm**
- Finish watching *Hannah Arendt* (Margarethe von Trotta, 2012).

Tuesday, October 7

- **In-class review of Unit 1**
- **In-class op-ed writing workshop!**
- **Read:** select and read **three** of the following op-eds written by philosophers (available via the links provided and via Canvas): Sukaini Hirji and Serene Khader, “[Stop Scolding Student Protestors](#),” in *Chronicle of Higher Education*, December 6th, 2023; Jennifer Morton, “[Why Viewpoint Diversity Isn’t the Solution to Liberal Bias](#),” in *NY Times*, July 10th, 2025; Carlos Alberto Sánchez, “[Don’t Call Immigrant Farmworkers Heroes: They Are Underappreciated Essential Workers](#),” in *San Francisco Chronicle*, October 27 2020; Adam Hosein, “[Do Outsiders Have Legal Rights?](#)” in *Boston Review*, 2017; Tina Rulli, “[Why Celebrities Have a Moral Duty to Help Promote Lifesaving Vaccines](#),” in *The Conversation*, March 15, 2020; and Amy Reed-Sandoval, [Adults-Only Culture Entails Bad Faith](#),” in *The Nevada Independent*, July 19th, 2023.
- **Op-eds due via Canvas on Friday, October 10th by 8pm.**

Unit 2: Liberty and Freedom

Thursday, October 9

- **Read:** Frederick Douglass, “What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?” Source: *Oration, Delivered in Corinthian Hall, Rochester*, by Frederick Douglass, July 5th, 1852 (Rochester: Lee, Mann & Co., 1852) from the Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History (GLC06829). Accessible [here](#).
- **Read:** Eduardo Mendieta, “The Practice of Freedom,” in *Michel Foucault, Key Concepts*, edited by Dianna Taylor, Acumen Publishing; 2010, pp. 111-124.
- **Reminder:** Op-eds due tomorrow at 8pm via Canvas!
- **Extra credit opportunity:** Book launch today from 7-8pm at The Writer’s Block (Las Vegas) for Dr. Reed-Sandoval’s book *Intimate Borders: Feminist Migration Ethics*.

Tuesday, October 14

- **Read:** Jean Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, excerpts (posted on Canvas)
- **Read:** Christopher Bertram, “Why Rousseau Still Matters,” originally published in *The Philosopher’s Magazine* and accessible [here](#).

Thursday, October 16

- **Read:** Brian Burkhardt, Chapter 1, “Philosophical Colonizing of People and Land,” in Indigenizing *Philosophy through the Land: A Trickster Methodology for Decolonizing Environmental Ethics and Indigenous Futures* (Michigan State University Press, 2019), accessible via UNLV Libraries.

Tuesday, October 21

- **Read:** John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty* (1859), chapters 1, 2, and 4, accessible via UNLV Libraries and also [here](#).

Thursday, October 23

- **Read:** Isaiah Berlin, “Two Concepts of Liberty,” in *Four Essays on Liberty* (Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 118-172, accessible [here](#).

Tuesday, October 28

- **Read:** Nancy Hirschmann, “The Concept of Liberty and the Place of Power: A Feminist Perspective,” in *Rivista Italiana de Filosofia Politica* (2021), pp. 69-86, via UNLV Libraries and [here](#).

Thursday, October 30

- **Read:** G.A. Cohen, 2011, ‘[Freedom and Money](#)’, in G. A. Cohen, *On the Currency of Egalitarian Justice and Other Essays in Political Philosophy*, ed. M. Otsuka, Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, pp. 166–199.
- **Read:** Robert Nozick, Chapter 8, “Equality, Envy, Exploitation, etc.” in *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* (Basic Books, 1974), available via UNLV libraries and [here](#)

Tuesday, November 4

- **Read:** Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (any edition), accessible via UNLV Libraries
- **Recommended:** Vanessa Wills, “Radical Chains (Marx on Freedom and Determinism)” in *Marx’s Ethical Vision* (Oxford University Press, 2024).
- **In-class watch:** *Young Karl Marx* (Raoul Peck, 2017).

Thursday, November 6

- **Read:** “Karl Marx the Moral Philosopher: An Interview with Vanessa Wills,” in *Jacobin*, August 23, 2024, accessible [here](#).
- **In-class watch (finish):** *Young Karl Marx* Raoul Peck, 2017).

Tuesday, November 11

- **Read:** Alia Al-Saji, “Muslim Women and the Rhetoric of Freedom” in Mariana Ortega & Linda Martín Alcoff, *Constructing the Nation: A Race and Nationalism Reader*. (SUNY Press 2009), accessible via UNLV Libraries and [here](#).
- **Read:** Lila Abu-Lughod, “Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving? Anthropological Reflections on Cultural Relativism and Its Others,” in *American Anthropologist*, vol. 104 no. 3 (783-790), accessible [here](#).

Thursday, November 13

- **In-class review of Unit 2**
- **In-class peer review of outlines for your final papers**
- **Reminder:** Draft 1 of final papers are due via Canvas on **Sunday, November 3rd at 8pm.**

Unit 4: Resisting Injustice

Tuesday, November 18

- **Read:** Lindsey Stewart, “Work the Root: Black Feminism, Love Rituals, and Practices of Freedom” in *Hypatia* vol. 32 no. 1 (2017), pp. 103-118.
- **Read:** Lindsey Stewart, “Count It All Joy”: Black Women’s Interventions in the Abolitionist Tradition,” in *British Journal of the History of Philosophy*, vol. 29, issue 2 (2021), pp. 292-307. Accessible via UNLV Libraries.

Thursday, November 20

- **Read:** Martin Luther King, *Letter from Birmingham Jail* (1963), accessible [here](#).
- **Read:** José-Antonio M. Orosco, “Martin Luther King Jr.’s Conception of Freedom and Radical Democracy,” in *Journal of Social Philosophy* vol. 32 no. 2 (pp. 386-401), accessible via UNLV libraries and [here](#).

Tuesday, November 25

- **Read:** Andrea Sullivan-Clarke, “Strategic Ignorance: Is It Appropriate for Indigenous Resistance?” In *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy* 27 (1):78-93 (2024).
- **Read:** Andrea Sullivan-Clarke, “Epistemic Refusal as a Form of Indigenous* Resistance and Respect,” in *Blog of the APA*, April 17, 2024, accessible [here](#).

Thursday, November 27

- **No class** (Thanksgiving break)

Tuesday, December 2

- **Read:** Yingshihan Zhu, "The Moral Obligation to Resist Complacency about One's Own Oppression," in *Journal of the American Philosophical Association* vol. 11 no. 2, pp. 374 - 392 (2025), accessible [here](#).
- **Read:** Carol Hay, "The Obligation to Resist Oppression," in *Journal of Social Philosophy* 42 (1):21-45 (2011).

Thursday, December 4th

- **Review of Unit 4**
- **Final exam review**
- **Questions about feedback on Draft 1 of your papers?**
- **Final papers due Sunday, December 7th via Canvas at 8pm.**