

Political Philosophy: Authority, Control, and Self-Determination

Lecturer: Daniel Brinkerhoff Young

Class Number: Phil-UA 45, Spring 2023

Email: daniel.brinkerhoff.young@nyu.edu

Class Time: Tues/Thurs 11:00-12:15

TAs: Jorge Ferreira (jvf241@nyu.edu)
Ariel Melamedoff (aam982@nyu.edu)

Class Location: Silver Center, Room 405

I. Content Overview

This course focuses on a few interconnected topics in political philosophy, rather than aiming at a comprehensive survey of the field. These topics will center on whether and to what extent human beings can be free under the various forms of authority and control that exist in modern societies. The themes of the course are as follows.

Human beings don't live in isolation from one another; we form complex associations through which we pursue activities and goals together—associations like families, nation-states, economic markets, and social movements. A distinctive feature of these associations is that within them, people often *govern* others: they hold power or authority to direct or control the actions of other people. In this course, we will focus on the following questions. If freedom is a highly precious value for human beings, what could *justify* these relations of power or authority? Does the goodness or badness of an exercise of power over others depend on *who* exercises that power, *how* they do it, and *why*? What exactly does freedom consist of? Is one necessarily free within a relation of power to another if one has consented to it? What is the relationship between democracy, community with others, and freedom?

This course will unfold over three interconnected parts. First, we'll explore some highly influential accounts of political authority and freedom from the early modern period in Europe. Second, we'll look at the philosophical literature on what exactly freedom is. Lastly, we'll consider accounts of how specific phenomena in modern societies might threaten freedom—phenomena like wage labor, colonial relations, and gender relations—and consider a few accounts focused on the potential for some form of democracy to overcome these threats.

II. Format Overview & Learning Objectives

This course takes the format typical to those given in philosophy departments, which means that we will focus on reading selected texts very carefully in order to examine 1) the particular claims and viewpoints presented within each excerpt of text we read, and 2) the arguments given in support of these viewpoints. You may find that compared to some courses given in other disciplines, we cover somewhat less an amount of reading; however, we will read the texts we do more closely and carefully than sometimes happens in the courses for other disciplines.

Some texts will be denser and more difficult than others—sometimes because they come from a very different philosophical context than our own. You will need to read each text

more than once in order to begin to understand it. If you do, you will find that these texts are immensely rich and rewarding, revealing new things to you each time you look at them.

You will not understand everything said—even those of us who study these texts for years do not understand everything, and I have many questions about these texts I hope we can explore together. If you attempt to chew on this dense material, you will find that the philosophical activity itself *is* the chewing and the difficulty—the activity of philosophy is having new questions and ideas raised for you that you can't immediately make sense of.

It is crucial that you read each text *before* class, and you will also find it helpful to reread the texts after class in order to incorporate new understandings we develop during the class. When you read, you should write notes in the margins or on a separate document, trying to write down what you think the key ideas and arguments are, as well as what terms or arguments you don't understand. The focus is to get a sense of how the philosophers we read make the case for the viewpoints—not to merely get a summary of some of their key ideas, but rather to enter into their argumentative stance and see *why* they make they claims that they do.

By the end of the course students will:

1. Have a *working familiarity* with some key concepts of modern political philosophy including *authority, legitimacy, freedom* (in its different versions), *democracy, domination*, and others, and with some key traditions in modern political thought, including *social contract theory, liberalism, Marxism, feminism*, and *national liberation*.
2. Have gained *significant practice* reading and interpreting difficult philosophical texts in order to analyze and evaluate their claims and arguments.
3. Have gained *significant practice* in formulating criticism of normative claims about society and politics, and in offering arguments in defense of normative claims about society and politics.

III. Assignments and Grading

Attendance and Participation: Students will be expected to attend every lecture and recitation. 10 percent of your final grade will be based on your attendance and participation; if you miss a very large number of classes (in the ballpark of a quarter to a third of classes total), then your final grade may be penalized beyond this 10 percent.

Recitation: Recitation attendance is mandatory for this course. Recitation sections are as follows:

Section 002 - Friday 12:30 PM - 1:45 PM at 19 West 4th C-19 – TA: Ariel Melamedoff

Section 003 - Friday 9:30 AM - 10:45 AM at TISC LC5 – TA: Jorge Ferreira

Section 004 - Friday 11:00 AM - 12:15 PM at TISC LC3 – TA: Jorge Ferreira

Section 005 - Friday 2:00 PM - 3:15 PM at 19 West 4th C-19 – TA: Ariel Melamedoff

Papers and Exam: There will be two papers and a final exam.

Paper 1 will be due at **11:59pm on Tuesday, March 7.**

Paper 2 will be due at **11:59pm on Tuesday, April 25.**

The final exam period for the Spring 2023 semester is **Wednesday, May 10 through Tuesday, May 16**. They have not yet released the dates for each class's exam.
Grade Breakdown: The final grade will be a weighted average of the following:

10% Attendance and Participation
25% Paper 1
35% Paper 2
30% Final Exam

IV. **Discussion Norms**

We will be discussing some contentious topics. You and others may feel strongly about these, and also think that those who disagree with you are making quite serious moral mistakes. You and others may also have been personally affected by some of the issues we are discussing. To make sure that everyone gets the most out of the discussion, it is important that the discussion is governed by some ground rules. The point of these is to encourage an atmosphere in which everyone feels comfortable, and that fosters debates everyone learns from. (I borrow these, with some revisions, from this very helpful website: <http://crlt.umich.edu/publinks/generalguidelines>):

- Listen respectfully, without interrupting.
- Listen actively and with an ear to understanding others' views. (Don't just think about what you are going to say while someone else is talking.)
- Criticize ideas, not individuals.
- Commit to learning, not debating. Avoid blame, speculation, and inflammatory language.
- Allow everyone the chance to speak.
- Avoid assumptions about any member of the class or generalizations about social groups. Do not ask individuals to speak for their (perceived) social group.

To be clear, you should feel free to disagree with what the readings, the professor, the TAs, or your fellow students are saying. But when you disagree with the readings or one of your peers, try to back up your response with reasons, rather than just state your opinion. And when you advance your view, ask yourself why others (perhaps especially those who have personal experience with a phenomenon) may disagree with you. Our aim in philosophical discussion is not to win an argument, but to better understand the issue we are discussing - including why there may be important disagreement about it.

Because the topics we are discussing are important and contentious, your professor and TAs will likely have views on them. But our purpose in the class is not to convince you of our views. It is to explore with you the arguments for and against different views, and to assess their force and plausibility. We will not, for instance, grade you based on whether your views are the right ones (as we see the matter). An essay that thoughtfully defends what I think is a mistaken view will get a better grade than one that asserts, without good argument, the position I myself think is correct.

V. **Course Policies and Accommodations**

Accommodations for students with disabilities: Academic accommodations are available to any students with a chronic, psychological, visual, mobility, learning disability, or is deaf or hard of hearing. Students should register with NYU's Henry and Lucy Moses Center for students with Disabilities, 726 Broadway, 2nd Floor, New York NY 10003-6675. Tel. 212-998-4980. Website: www.nyu.edu/csd

Laptops & Smart Devices: I will allow laptops and smart devices in class for the purpose of accessing the readings—it's good to have these in front of you in class. And I will allow you to take notes on one of these devices if you choose to.

However, I strongly discourage you from doing so, and instead encourage you to take notes by hand. Research has shown that laptop use is detrimental to learning for the user (<https://doi.org/10.1177/095679761667731>), for those sitting nearby (<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.compedu.2012.10.003>), and that taking notes by hand helps many people learn better (<https://doi.org/10.1177/0956797614524581>).

Instead, I encourage you to take notes by hand, and refer to your device just for the readings, or print the readings out if you prefer.

If someone in class is using their laptop in a manner that is distracting to you, I encourage you to first ask them if they could keep to just the reading and/or their notes, and then to talk me or one of your TAs if it keeps happening.

VI. **Office Hours**

I will hold regular office hours in my office, room 204 on the 2nd floor of the Philosophy department, 5 Washington Place, from 11:30am to 1pm on Wednesdays, as well as by appointment, if you are unable to make the regular office hours.

Ariel Melamedoff's scheduled office hours will take place 4pm to 5pm on Wednesdays, over zoom. Please contact him for more information.

Jorge Ferreira's scheduled office hours will take place from 2pm to 3pm on Thursdays. Please contact him for more information.

VII. **Texts**

All readings for the course will be posted as PDFs on Brightspace. I have not ordered books to the bookstore, as students in the past have told me you can almost always get them cheaper elsewhere. If you would like to get your own copy of any of the books we're reading longer sections from, here are the editions we'll be using:

Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Hackett, ed. Edwin Curley
John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, Cambridge, ed. Peter Laslett

Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract and Other Later Political Writings*, Cambridge, trans. Victor Gourevitch
The Marx-Engels Reader, 2nd Edition, Norton, ed. Robert Tucker
The Liberty Reader, 1st Edition, Routledge, ed. David Miller

VIII. **Schedule**

Below is a schedule for the course describing what we will cover each day and week. It is subject to change, and if I make changes, I will update the syllabus on Brightspace.

The required reading that is listed below a day must be read *before* that day's class, to be discussed in class on that date. All readings are posted as PDFs on Brightspace.

Again, you will need to read each text more than once in order to begin to understand it. It is crucial that you read each text *before* class, and you will also find it helpful to reread the texts after class in order to incorporate new understandings we develop during the class. When you read, you should write notes in the margins or on a separate document, trying to write down what you think the key ideas and arguments are, as well as what terms or arguments you don't understand.

Part 1: Classical Theories of Political Authority and Freedom

Tuesday, January 24 – Introduction to the class

Required reading:
None

Thursday, January 26 – Authority and legitimacy

Required reading:
David Miller, "Political Authority," from *Political Philosophy: A Very Short Introduction*

Tuesday, January 31 – Hobbes, part 1

Required reading:
Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Chapters XIII (all), XIV (all), XV (only Sections [1]-[3]), and XVII (all)

Thursday, February 2 – Hobbes, part 2

Required reading:
Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Chapters XVIII (all), XX (only Sections [1]-[14]), XXI (only Sections [1]-[8]), XXIX (only Sections [1]-[15])

Tuesday, February 7 – Locke, part 1

Required reading:
Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, §§1-7, 13, 16-19, 22-32, 43-44, 85-91

Thursday, February 9 – Locke, part 2

Required reading:
Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, §§95-99, 119-131, 134-142, 221-229, 240, 243

Tuesday, February 14 – Rousseau, part 1

Required reading:

Rousseau, *Of the Social Contract*, Book I (all)

Thursday, February 16 – Rousseau, part 2

Required reading:

Rousseau, *Of the Social Contract*, Book II (all)

Tuesday, February 21 – Rousseau, part 3

Required reading:

Rousseau, *Of the Social Contract*, Book III (only Chapters 12-18), Book IV (only Chapters 1-2)

Thursday, February 23 – Rousseau, part 4

Required reading:

No new reading

Part 2: The Concept of Freedom

Tuesday, February 28 – Negative freedom

Required reading:

Isaiah Berlin, “Two Concepts of Liberty” (excerpt)

Thursday, March 2 – Positive freedom

Required reading:

Charles Taylor, “What’s Wrong with Negative Liberty”

Tuesday, March 7 – Neo-republican freedom

Required reading:

Philip Pettit, “The Republican Ideal of Freedom”

PAPER 1 DUE at 11:59pm on Tuesday, March 7

Thursday, March 9 – Comparing negative, republican, and positive conceptions of freedom

Required reading:

No new reading

NYU Spring Break, March 13-17, No Classes

Tuesday, March 21 – Social-relational autonomy

Required reading:

Marina Oshana, “Personal Autonomy and Society”

Thursday, March 23 – A feminist critique of neo-republicanism

Required reading:

Lida Maxwell, “Democratic Dependency”

Part 3: Domination and Self-Determination in the Modern World

Tuesday, March 28 – Freedom of exchange and coercion

Required reading:

Onora O’Neill, “Which Are the Offers You Can’t Refuse?”

Thursday, March 30 – The labor republican analysis of market domination

Required reading:

Alex Gourevitch, “Labor Republicanism and the Transformation of Work”

Tuesday, April 4 – Marx, part 1

Required reading:

Marx, “Wage Labor and Capital,” excerpts

Marx and Engels, “The Manifesto of the Communist Party,” excerpts

Thursday, April 6 – Marx, part 2

Required reading:

Marx, “Critique of the Gotha Program”

Tuesday, April 11 – Domination through contracts, part 1

Required reading:

G. A. Cohen, “Capitalism, Freedom, and the Proletariat”

Thursday, April 13 – Domination through contracts, part 2

Required reading:

No new reading

Tuesday, April 18 – Domination through contracts, part 3

Required reading:

Carole Pateman, *The Sexual Contract*, excerpt

Thursday, April 20 – Domination through contracts, part 4

Required reading:

Carole Pateman, *The Sexual Contract*, excerpt

Tuesday, April 25 – Democratic participation, part 1

Required reading:

W. E. B. Du Bois, “Of the Ruling of Men,” from *Darkwater*

PAPER 2 DUE at 11:59pm on Tuesday, April 25

Thursday, April 27 – Democratic participation, part 2

Required reading:

W. E. B. Du Bois, “Of the Ruling of Men,” from *Darkwater*

Tuesday, May 2 – Anti-colonial national liberation, part 1

Required reading:

Adom Getachew, *Worldmaking After Empire*, excerpt

Thursday, May 4 – Anti-colonial national liberation, part 2

Required reading:

Adom Getachew, *Worldmaking After Empire*, excerpt

Spring 2023 Final Exams will be Wednesday, May 10 through Tuesday, May 16—the date of each final exam has not been released yet by the university—I will update the syllabus when they do.

IX. Further Resources

Moses Center: Academic accommodations are available to any students with a chronic, psychological, visual, mobility, learning disability, or is deaf or hard of hearing. Students should register with NYU's Henry and Lucy Moses Center for students with Disabilities, 726 Broadway, 2nd Floor, New York NY 10003-6675. Tel. 212-998-4980.

Website: www.nyu.edu/csd

University Learning Center: The University Learning Center's mission is to assist students in developing the knowledge base, skills, and strategies that will help them to become confident, independent, and active learners. Its various academic support services are intended to help students meet the challenge of NYU's rigorous academic standards.

Website: <https://www.nyu.edu/students/academic-services/university-learning-centers.html>

Writing Center: The Writing Center is a place where any NYU student can get help with his or her writing. It is a place where one-on-one teaching and learning occur, as students work closely with faculty and experienced peer tutors at every stage of the writing process and on any piece of. Website: <https://cas.nyu.edu/content/nyu-as/cas/ewp/writing-center.html>

Wellness Exchange: The Wellness Exchange is your greatest mental health resource at NYU. Call the 24-hour hotline at (212) 443-9999, chat via the Wellness Exchange app anytime, speak with a certified counselor about any day-to-day challenges or health concerns, including medical issues, stress, depression, sexual assault, anxiety, etc. No concern is too big or too small. Website: <https://www.nyu.edu/students/health-and-wellness/wellness-exchange.html>

NYU Immigrant Defense Initiative: The NYU Immigrant Defense Initiative (IDI) offers free and confidential legal services to NYU students and employees, and their immediate family members, on their immigration cases. Contact IDI at immigrant.defense@law.nyu.edu or (212) 998-6435.