

FREEDOM

Colorado College, Block 8, 2021

Course Listing: PH245 History of Social and Political Philosophy: Modern Debates

Class Hours: 9:30-12:30 Mountain Time **Note the afternoon class, as listed on schedule*

Professor: Ella Street

Contact: We will use Canvas for this course, but please email your short paper responses (in Word), essays (in Word), the final exam (in Word), and any other inquiries to me directly at:

estreet@coloradocollege.edu

Office hours: By appointment. My window of availability is 12-2 pm (mountain time) Wed and Fri. Feel free to schedule 15 or 30 minutes (book two 15 min sessions) using the following link:

<https://calendly.com/ellastreet/15min?month=2021-04&date=2021-04-09>

I will also respond to emails within 24 hours Mon-Fri.

THE COURSE:

What does it mean to be free? What does freedom require? What political regime best promotes and protects freedom? If we are naturally free and equal, who should rule? How do capitalism and neoliberalism shape the way we think about freedom, and the possibilities for freedom?

These are some of the questions we will consider together over the course of this class. We will begin with early modern and influential accounts of government by consent and the relationship between the individual and the state (Hobbes, Locke); we will then reflect upon the origins of inequality and the possibility of self-rule in modern society (Rousseau), and consider whether and how capitalism and neoliberalism threaten or support freedom (Marx, Brown, Tolentino). In the final week of the course, we turn to the American case, and examine the competing visions of freedom that inform the American imaginary. In particular, we will study thinkers who attend to the legacies of slavery and to the contradictions at the heart of the American project, and interrogate the role of prophetic language and the idea of redemption in American political thought and practice (MLK, Morrison, Baldwin).

In this course, we will engage in a dialogue with assigned authors and with each other. Political philosophy is conversational: at its best, political philosophy is a collaborative activity through which we might better understand ourselves and our world. To develop our judgment and understanding about the most important human things, including (political) freedom, we should consider what others have said on the topic. Doing so entails actively listening to others, and it requires assuming at least provisionally that they may be right, even if their arguments or perspectives initially strike us as strange or disagreeable. Taking seriously another's argument or position also entails dissecting, raising questions, and challenging— but only after one has endeavored first to understand. By carefully and critically engaging alternative perspectives in this course, students will develop their own understanding of what they think and why they think it.

Participation: This class is therefore discussion-based, and you are expected to come to class each day having carefully read the assigned material and considered the reading questions provided. You should come to class prepared to actively participate, which includes both actively listening to and supporting your peers, and sharing your own ideas and questions to facilitate conversation. Your participation will significantly affect your final grade but also, and most importantly, it will determine whether the course is a success for you and for everyone else. We will agree upon norms for discussion on the first day of class.

REQUIRED TEXTS

Please acquire hard copies of the following required books – available through the CC Bookstore, or online. A few good online options are www.powells.com, www.abebooks.com, www.thriftbooks.com, www.betterworldbooks.com, and of course your local bookstores. Please purchase the correct translation and edition, since we will be referencing page numbers and engaging in close-readings together during class. I will provide selections from the books below marked as “Purchase Not Required”: please feel free to purchase these (great) books if you wish to and can afford to.

Required

Baldwin, James. *The Fire Next Time*. New York: Vintage International, 1993.

Hobbes, Thomas. *On the Citizen*. Edited by Richard Tuck and Michael Silverthorne. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

Locke, John. *Second Treatise of Government*. Edited by C. B. Macpherson. Indianapolis, Ind: Hackett Pub. Co, 1980.

Marx, Karl, and Friedrich Engels. *The Marx-Engels Reader*. Edited by Robert C. Tucker. New York: Norton, 1978.

Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. *A Discourse on Inequality*. Translated by Maurice Cranston. Penguin Classics. New York: Penguin Books, 1984.

———. *The Social Contract*. Translated by Maurice Cranston. London: Penguin, 2003.

Purchase Not Required (Selections will be posted on Canvas)

Wendy Brown, *In the Ruins of Neoliberalism: The Rise of Antidemocratic Politics in the West* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019).

King, Martin Luther. *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.* Edited by James Melvin Washington. San Francisco: Harper, 1991.

The House That Race Built. Edited by Wahneema Lubiano. New York: Vintage Books, 1998.

Pippin, Robert B. *Hollywood Westerns and American Myth*. New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2010.

Tolentino, Jia. *Trick Mirror: Reflections on Self-Delusion*. New York: Random House, 2019.

SCHEDULE

Week 1: Natural Freedom and Government by Consent



Detail from frontispiece of Hobbes’ *Leviathan*, 1651. The sovereign holds a sword in one hand, and a religious staff (*crosier*) in the other. Notice that the people, gathered together, make up the sovereign’s body. For complete frontispiece image, see the last page of this syllabus.

Monday, April 26: Introductory lecture.

We will ask the following questions: What is freedom? What does it mean to be free? What does freedom require? Why should we look to the history of political philosophy as we think through these questions?

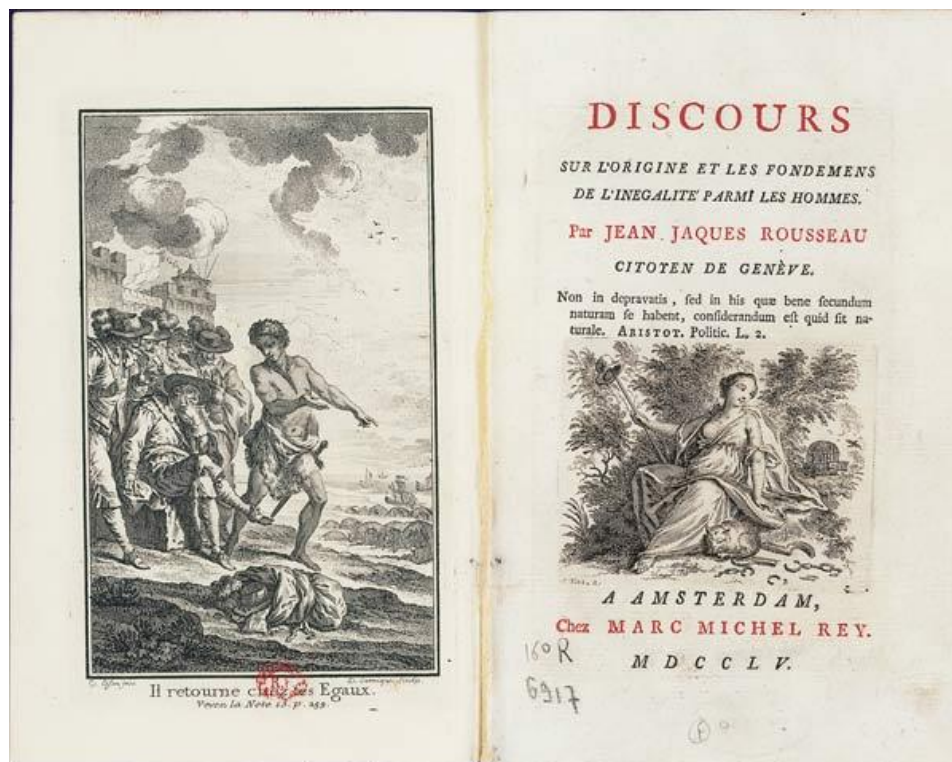
Tuesday, April 27: Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) – *De Cive (On the Citizen)* Read for today: “Key Words,” *Epistle Dedicatory, Preface to Readers*, Chapter 1, 2, 3; from Hobbes’ *Leviathan*, read Chapter VI (pdf on Canvas)

Wednesday, April 28: Hobbes – *De Cive* Chapters 5, 6, 7 (you may skip section 15-17), 10, and *Leviathan* Chapter XXI (pdf on Canvas)

Thursday, April 29: Catch up; John Locke (1632-1704) *Second Treatise on Government* Chapters 1-5 – *Response paper #1 due before class* – Comparing Hobbes and Locke on “the state of nature”

Friday, April 30: Locke – Chapters 6-11, 18-19

Week 2: Inequality, Dependency, and the General Will



Frontispiece of Rousseau’s *Second Discourse*. Left page – “He returns to his equals”; Right page – “What is Natural has to be investigated not in beings that are depraved, but in those that are good according to nature” from Aristotle’s *Politics*, Book II.

Monday, May 3: Writing Day – 1st Paper Due at 5:00 PM

Tuesday, May 4: Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-1788) – *Discourse on the Origin and Foundations of Inequality Among Men (or, The Second Discourse)* Part I and relevant Notes

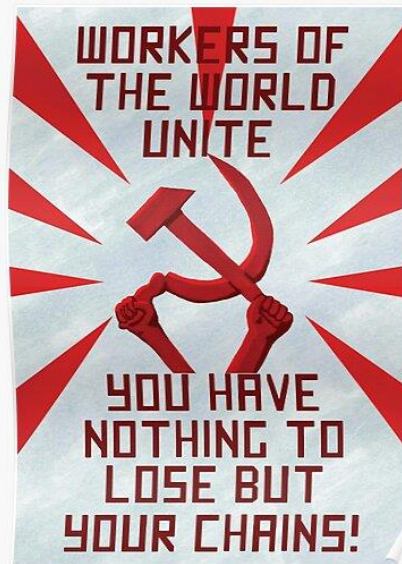
Wednesday, May 5: Rousseau – *Second Discourse* Part II and relevant Notes
-Response paper #2 due before class – On freedom in Rousseau’s “state of nature”
-Essay topic #1 will be distributed at the end of class

Thursday, May 6: Rousseau – *Social Contract* Book I, II

Friday, May 7: Rousseau – *Social Contract* Book III (All), IV (Chapters 1-3, 8)

***** 2nd paper Due Sunday, May 9th at 11:59 PM *** Topic distributed Wednesday, May 5.**

Weeks 3/4: Capitalism, Neoliberalism, and the American Project



Monday, May 10: *AFTERNOON CLASS* (*Spend the morning completing the reading assignment*)
Karl Marx (1818-1883) – All selections from *The Marx-Engels Reader*: Alienation and Social Classes (133-135), The German Ideology (150-163; 186-193), Wage, Labor and Capital (203-217), The Coming Upheaval (218-219), Speech at the Anniversary of the People’s Paper (577-578), The Grundrisse (222-226, 292-293), Capital (319-329) *Possibly selection from Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts (TBD)

Tuesday, May 11: Marx – “On the Jewish Question” (pg. 26-52 in the *Marx-Engels Reader*)
-Response paper #3 due before class

Wednesday, May 12: *Student-Led Class*

9-10 AM Meet with small group to prepare discussion points and questions **for 10:30-12:30 class**
Wendy Brown (b. 1955) – *In the Ruins of Neoliberalism* (Selections, posted on Canvas); Jia Tolentino (b. 1988)— “Always be Optimizing” from *Trick Mirror* (on Canvas)

Case Study: Race, Redemption, and the American Dream



Thursday, May 13: *Class starts at 10:00 AM* Watch John Ford's *The Searchers* (1956) (2 hour film, link below and on Canvas) and read Robert Pippin (b. 1948)- *Hollywood Westerns and American Myth* (Intro, Chapter IV and Conclusion – posted on Canvas); Read the US Declaration of Independence (on Canvas)

-Link for *The Searchers*:

<https://coloradocollege.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://digitalcampus.swankmp.net/coloradocollege371025/watch/424ED420709A58B5?referrer=lms> Note: Swank doesn't support Safari. You will need to update Chrome or Firefox to the latest version in order to watch films.

Friday, May 14: MLK (1929-1969) – Selected MLK speeches from *A Testament of Hope*, and Toni Morrison (1931-2019) “Home” lecture, from *The House that Race Built* (posted on Canvas). The MLK selections are “The Power of Non-Violence” (3-15), “Pilgrimage” (35-40), “A Time to Break Silence” (231-244), “Where Do We Go From Here?” (245-252), “I See the Promised Land” (279-286)



Week 4: Race, Redemption, and the American Dream -continued-

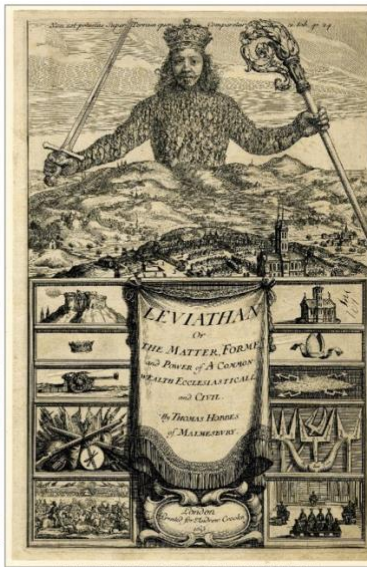
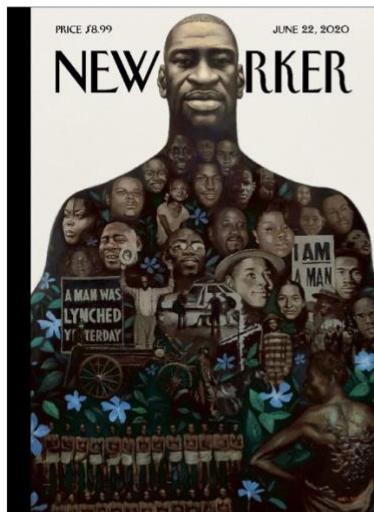
Monday, May 17: James Baldwin (1924-1987) – *The Fire Next Time* (3-47) and review for final exam
Possible additional readings (TBD): “Many Thousands Gone” from Baldwin’s *Notes of a Native Son*; Lawrie Balfour’s “A Most Disagreeable Mirror” (if assigned, these will be posted on Canvas) -- >

Recommended: Watch: *I Am Not Your Negro*

Tuesday, May 18: Baldwin *Fire Next Time* (47-106); NPR conversation with Eddie Glaude Jr. (Professor of African American Studies at Princeton):

<https://www.npr.org/2020/09/14/912769283/james-baldwins-fire>

Wednesday, May 19: Final Exam 9:30 am – 11:30



REQUIREMENTS AND EVALUATION

Grades:

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|---|-----|
| -Three short response papers (1-2 pages, graded credit/no credit) | 10% |
| -First Essay (6-8 pages) | 25% |
| -Second Essay (8 pages minimum) | 25% |
| -Final Exam (two hour “take-home”) | 25% |
| -Participation | 15% |

Overdue assignments: Short response papers **must** be turned in *before* class on the day they are due to receive credit. Overdue essays (First and Second Essay) will be penalized one grade per calendar day (i.e. from a B+ to a B on the first day, from a B to a B- on the second day, etc.) except in cases of a medical or family emergency. Please contact me if such extenuating circumstances arise.

Attendance: Attendance is mandatory. Two missed classes without an appropriate reason will constitute an automatic No Credit for the course.

Short response papers: These assignments will be graded on a pass/fail basis, but in order to pass you must demonstrate that you a) have carefully done the assigned reading and b) taken the time to reflect on the prompt and c) refer back to the texts as you formulate your response. I will provide the prompts for these response papers the day before you write them.

Essays: The two essay assignments make up a substantial part of your final grade and are important to your development as a writer and thinker. I highly encourage students to book an appointment with a writing center tutor for at least one of the assignments, even if you think of yourself as a strong or

competent writer. In your written work, you should avoid sweeping generalizations or mere opinions. Instead, you should engage the text as carefully and concretely as possible. Rather than summarizing an author's view, for example, try to work through their argument step by step, considering the significance or implications of the argument and raising critical questions that push you to examine the author's claims even further.

Needless to say, this should be your own work. You may (and indeed should!) discuss the material with your classmates, but the final written product should be uniquely yours. You are not permitted to consult outside sources (secondary literature, the internet, etc) while writing your essays, or at any other time during the course. Our focus is the primary texts, and we aim to develop our own understanding and critical capacity as we struggle together through these difficult texts.

Final Exam: The final will be a series of short essay questions on week 3 and 4 material (excluding the Wendy Brown and Jia Tolentino readings). It will be closed-note, and you are not to consult any outside sources (internet, other people, etc) during the exam period.

The Honor Code applies to all work done in this class:

<https://www.coloradocollege.edu/other/honorcouncil/documents/Spring2020HonorCode.pdf>

Canvas:

I will upload several reading questions for each day's reading assignment on Canvas. These are intended to help you reflect on important themes, concepts, and arguments as you read – and they will help structure our discussion of the reading during class the following day.

PDFs of all assigned readings that are not required for purchase will also be available on Canvas.

Again, please email all short paper responses (in Word), essays (in Word), the final exam (in Word), and any other inquiries to me directly at: estreet@coloradocollege.edu. I will not check my Canvas inbox regularly, so anything sent there may be missed.