

# The Free & Just Society

PHL264: An Introduction to Political Philosophy  
Cleveland State University

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Office: RT 1333  
Office Hours: [xx]

3 credit hours  
Fall 2023  
M,W 4:30-5:45pm  
BH 0444

## Course Overview

Everyone wants to live in a free and just society. Yet there is substantial disagreement about what a free and just society looks like. In this course, we will investigate these and other core political concepts with the aim of understanding them in their complexity as well as coming to more justified beliefs about what they mean and require. While our focus will be philosophical, we will regularly bring out theorizing to bear on political questions: We will investigate the fundamental nature of political freedom while seeking to answer whether COVID-19 lockdown policies were a violation of freedom.

This course is designed around the *Interpret, Elaborate, Evaluate* framework for philosophical investigation. Our time will be spent working to *interpret and understand* the ideas of others, *elaborating* on those ideas by extending the reasoning and applying them to real world situations, and then *evaluating* the ideas and arguments to determine how well justified they are. In the process, you will be working to develop your own understanding of the core concepts and questions of political philosophy.

## Course Learning Outcomes

By the end of this course, you should be able to:

1. Interpret and explain key texts and arguments in political philosophy
2. Charitably develop and apply philosophical positions and arguments
3. Evaluate key arguments and positions in political philosophy
4. Present original philosophical ideas and arguments clearly in written and oral form
5. Analyze and evaluate political debates using political philosophical concepts and theories

## Required Course Materials

There are no required texts for this course. All material will be delivered via Blackboard and associated tools. You will be expected to participate in *democratic reading* through the social annotation platform, Perusall. There is no charge for this service, and you will be able to access it from Blackboard. You will also be able to download the readings to print and read offline.

## Learning Activities & Assessments

### *Democratic Reading: Social Annotation*

Develops critical reading skills and helps you prepare to fully participate in class. Using [Perusall](#), you will read and annotate the text right along with your classmates. Your score is a function of a number of good reading and engagement behaviors, and there are many more points available than necessary for full credit. Focus on asking insightful questions, engaging with the ideas, and responding to others, and you will be fine.

You will earn credit for this assessment category by earning at least an 80% average across the semester.

### *Political Party Quizzes & Activities*

Develops critical reading, communication, and philosophical skills. For any class period with assigned reading (typically the Monday) we will begin the class session with a 5-question multiple-choice quiz. You will complete the quiz individually and then again with your Political Party. Your score is the total of your individual and party scores. The real value here comes from the team quiz, where you will discuss your interpretation of texts and understanding of ideas with your fellow party members, thereby correcting misunderstandings and developing your philosophical reasoning skills.

You will also complete other activities with your political party, but those will typically be ungraded or used just as a 'top-off' for the quiz grade.

You will earn credit for this assessment category by earning at least an 80% average across the semester.

### *Writing Development Activities*

Develops writing and philosophical thinking skills. Throughout the semester we will spend some class time discussing various aspects of writing such as how to charitably summarize positions and arguments, how to analyze and evaluate arguments, and how to cater your writing to a specific audience. You will then be tasked with completing a short development activity related to that skill. We will also often share and workshop your activities in class to further enhance the development.

These assignments will be evaluated based on a demonstration of a good faith effort to complete the activity and participate in any in-class work related to it. There will be some flexibility built-in relating to missing a class or assignment as needed.

You will earn credit for this assessment category by successfully completing at least 80% of the assignments.

### *Take-home Philosophical Skill Exams*

Develops and assesses philosophical skills. You will be assigned two take-home philosophical skill exams. These exams will consist of three parts, corresponding to our philosophical framework: Interpretation, Elaboration, and Evaluation. You will be given choices for which prompts to engage with for each section and your answers will be expected to be between one and two paragraphs in length.

Each section will be evaluated separately with one of the following designations: “Cannot assess”, “Developing, needs revision”, “Successful demonstration”, and “Exemplary demonstration”.

You will need at least three “successful demonstrations” or better, with at least one on each exam, to earn credit for this category. If you do not attempt or complete the writing activities, then the number of successful and exemplary demonstrations will be used to calculate your final course grade.

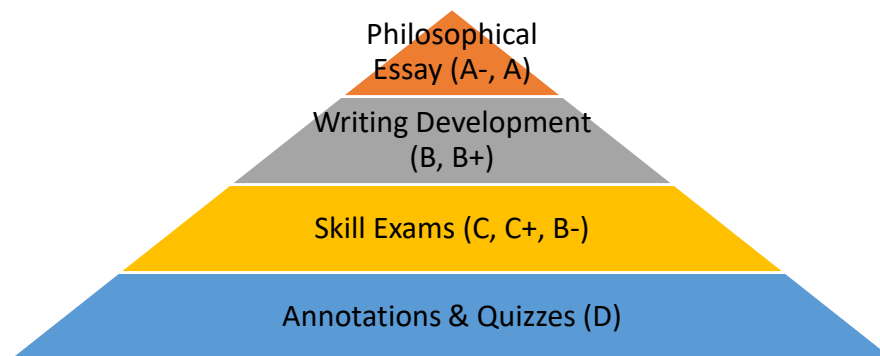
### *Philosophical Essay*

Develops and assesses your overall writing and philosophical abilities. Toward the end of the semester, you will be provided with an opportunity to conduct original philosophical research and complete an original philosophical essay. This is an opportunity to put together the various philosophical and writing skills you have developed through the other assignments and activities. This assignment will be broken down into multiple stages, and each one must be completed.

Each stage, other than the final essay, will be evaluated on whether it represents a good faith effort and, as needed, is revised in light of feedback. The final essay will be evaluated “pass” or “not yet” according to pre-provided criteria. To “pass”, it must meet all criteria. A paper receiving a “not yet” may be revised following provided comments and re-submitted for review (assuming time permitting before final grades are due).

### **Course Grades**

Learning is a multi-level process and your course grade should reflect that. In this course, we will do that by having you “build up” your final grade through the completion of progressively more complex tasks assessing progressively higher-level skills. The diagram below represents how the various assignment categories contribute to your course grade:



The letter grades in each area represent the grades possible if you do not complete the higher-level assignments. Thus, if you do not attempt or successfully complete the Writing Development Activities, then your course grade will be based on the number of successful and exemplary demonstrations from the skill exams. Three successful demonstrations will result in a ‘C’, while the other grades are available for more successful and/or exemplary demonstrations. But if you do successfully complete the ‘Writing Development’ category, then so long as you have at least three successful demonstrations on the skill exams, you will earn a ‘B’ or ‘B+’ based on your writing development work.

### **Late Submissions and Extensions**

I try to be flexible with assignments, knowing that things happen and that you all have lives outside of this class. However, you should also respect my time and life and recognize that I set due dates to ensure I can manage all my tasks and return assignments to you in a reasonable timeframe while also having a life outside of the University.

Some assignments, such as the Democratic Reading and Quizzes, cannot be made up since they are part of a larger learning process. For each of those, I have built flexibility into the grading system so that if you happen to miss an assignment here or there, it won't matter.

For other assignments, there can be more room for extensions as needed, although you may miss out on enhanced learning for writing development activities if you do not bring your work to class on the relevant day.

If you will miss a deadline for an assignment and would like to request an extension, you should fill out the following form:

<https://forms.office.com/r/cxSmw4beJb> (note, you will need to login with your CSU ID)

### **General Education & Writing Across the Curriculum**

This is a General Education course in the Arts & Humanities, with a focus on developing your *writing* and *critical thinking* skills. Additionally, this is a Writing Across the Curriculum course which emphasizes significant writing training in the discipline of philosophy.

This means the focus of this course is on developing your philosophical and writing abilities, rather than on memorizing information. Full policy information for these designations is provided at the end of the syllabus.

## Course Schedule

This schedule is subject to change, but I will endeavor not to change it. Any changes will be announced in class and a new, standalone schedule will be posted to Blackboard.

DR = “Democratic Reading”. Reading and social annotation assignment to be completed via Perusall. Any day with a DR Pre-class preparation will begin with an in-class quiz.

WD = “Writing Development Activity”. Should be submitted on Blackboard prior to class and brought to class in a shareable format (preferably paper).

PE = “Philosophical Essay”. Should be submitted on Blackboard prior to class and brought to class in a shareable format (preferably paper), except for PE4 which is only submitted online.

Date	Topic	Pre-Class Preparation/Assignment
Aug 28	What is a Free & Just Society?	
Aug 30	What is life without the State?	DR1: Hobbes & Locke on the State of Nature
Sep 06	What is life without the State?	WD1: Argument Reconstruction 1
Sep 11	Are humans naturally selfish?	DR2: Rousseau & Kropotkin on Human Nature
Sep 13	Are humans naturally selfish?	WD2: Argument Reconstruction 2
Sep 18	Have we consented to government?	DR3: Hobbes, Locke, & Kant on the Social Contract
Sep 20	Have we consented to government?	WD3: Summarizing Arguments 1
Sep 25	Is consent necessary for political authority?	DR4: Wolff, Hume, Bentham, & Hart on Political Authority
Sep 27	Is consent necessary for political authority?	WD4: Summarizing Arguments 2
Oct 02	How can we be free in society?	DR5: Mill on liberty of expression and action
Oct 04	How can we be free in society?	WD5: Evaluating Arguments 1
Oct 09	Can a lucky slave be free?	DR6: Pettit on Republican freedom
Oct 11	Can a lucky slave be free?	WD6: Evaluating Arguments 2 [Philosophical Skills Exam 1 made available online]
Oct 16	How does oppression limit freedom?	DR7: Krause on freedom beyond nondomination
Oct 18	How does oppression limit freedom?	WD7: ‘They say, I say’ 1 [Philosophical Skills Exam 1 due online by 11:59pm]
Oct 23	Is private property ever just?	DR8: Locke & Paine on justice, equality, and private property
Oct 25	Is private property ever just?	PE1: Topic & Annotated Bibliography
Oct 30	Is redistribution ever just?	DR9: Nozick on natural rights and justice
Nov 01	Is redistribution ever just?	WD8: ‘They say, I say’ 2
Nov 06	Is justice a matter of basic fairness?	DR10: Rawls on egalitarian justice
Nov 08	Is justice a matter of basic fairness?	PE2: Mapping the Argument
Nov 13	How should diverse peoples live together?	DR11: Young on justice, diversity, and pluralism [Philosophical Skills Exam 2 made available online]
Nov 15	How should diverse peoples live together?	
Nov 20		PE3: Essay Draft Workshop [Skills Exam 2 due online 11/22 by 11:59pm]
Nov 27	Should we hope for justice?	DR12: Stockdale on hope, solidarity, and justice
Nov 29	Should we hope for justice?	PE4: Final Paper
Dec 04		
Dec 06		

## Course and University Policies

### *Disability & Accommodation Statement*

Educational access is the provision of classroom accommodations, auxiliary aids and services to ensure equal educational opportunities for all students regardless of their disability. Any student who feels he or she may need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability should contact the Office of Disability Services at (216)687-2015. The Office is located in Rhodes West 210. Accommodations need to be requested in advance and will not be granted retroactively.

### *Academic Integrity*

The official University Academic Honesty Policy reads: “‘Cheating’ means intentionally misrepresenting the source, nature, or other conditions of academic work to receive undeserved credit. Cleveland State University affirms that acts of cheating debase the academic degree awarded, have no place in the University, and are severe offenses to academic goals, objectives and the rights of fellow students. CSU does not tolerate any type of cheating and will take disciplinary action up to and including expulsion.”

In our course, different types of assignments allow for the use of different types of resources and forms of collaboration. I will endeavor to make clear what is acceptable and what is not for each type of assignment, but as a general rule of thumb: If the idea(s) behind the work or the actual work itself is not of your own creation, you should indicate that in the work. This will protect you from any concerns about academic dishonesty, but if it suggests that the final product is not sufficiently original to you for me to be able to appropriately assess it, then I may ask you to revise or retry the assignment.

### *University Closure Policy*

In the event the University cancels class sessions (due, for instance, to inclement weather) we will *not* conduct a remote synchronous class session. If a reading or assignment is due on the canceled class day, you will still be expected to complete that work unless stated otherwise. I may also contact the class with updated plans or individual activities to complete.

### *Arts & Humanities General Education*

1. Courses must be offered at the 100/200 level in an arts and humanities discipline including but not limited to English, History, Philosophy, Art History, Music History, Religious Studies, or Modern Languages. Courses offered in other disciplines may be approved if they meet the other conditions indicated below.

2. Courses must provide students with background knowledge and analytical skills that will allow them to:

- a. Demonstrate understanding of how human beings interpret, translate, and represent diverse experiences of the world through language, literature, the historical record, philosophical systems, images, sounds, and performances
- b. Apply that understanding to the study of the human condition, cultural heritage, cultural artifacts, creativity, and history

### *Writing Skill Area*

1. Designate that at least 15% of the student’s grade in the course is based on an evaluation of writing

2. Include writing assignments that directly relate to the course goals

3. Include instruction in writing-to-learn and/or writing-to-communicate. While writing-to-learn emphasizes the student’s experience, writing-to-communicate highlights the reader’s experience. Both are necessary to produce a thoughtful text that observes academic writing’s conventions.

4. Require that students write a total of 2,000 words (8 pages, double-spaced, in 12-point font, with 1” margins) in multiple assignments
5. Assign writing throughout the semester

*Critical Thinking Skill Area*

1. Designate that at least 15% of the student’s grade in the course is based on an evaluation of critical thinking.
2. Require students to attain skills beyond lower-level knowledge, thereby requiring:
  - a. higher-order thinking (analysis, synthesis, evaluation); OR
  - b. skills that involve the use of content knowledge (e.g., finding information to solve a problem); OR
  - c. the recognition of the importance and usefulness of knowledge and skills gained in the course (e.g., recognize the ability to and importance of working with others to solve intellectual problems)

*Writing Across the Curriculum*

This course also meets the CSU requirements to be designated a *Writing Across the Curriculum* course. To receive this designation, the course is designated to meet the following requirements:

1. Assign writing throughout the semester.
2. Require students to write between 3,000 and 5,000 words (10-20 pages, double-spaced, in 12-point font, with 1” margins) in writing assignments (which may include drafts).<sup>1</sup>
3. Teach students writing-to-learn strategies that foster students’ experiences in learning and writing-to-communicate strategies that foster students’ respect of readers’ experiences.<sup>3</sup> Whenever possible, planning assignments (e.g. reading logs, pre-writing strategies) and peer reviews should be included.
4. Provide instruction in discipline-appropriate forms of texts, arguments, evidence, style, audience, and citation.
5. Engage students in writing as a process and provide opportunities for students to improve their writing over the course of the semester. This can take different forms including scaffolded assignments, drafts and revisions, and multiple iterations of the same type of assignment (such as a lab report).
6. Provide students with extensive feedback on their writing and expect students to use that feedback to improve their writing in subsequent assignments. Doing so should be part of the assessment (grading) of the assignments.
7. Teach information literacy in a discipline appropriate context. This includes instruction and assignments that support student development in accessing and evaluating discipline-appropriate research materials and integrating them into their own work. Instructors are encouraged to collaborate with librarians on this aspect of their courses and to consult the Association of College & Research Libraries’ Framework for Information Literacy in Higher Education
8. Assign writing in English unless the course is specifically geared to improving writing at the 300-level in another language.
9. In order to receive a C or better in the course, students must write at a satisfactory skill level (C or better). If the student’s writing is weak, but shows understanding of the course material, the student may be assigned a D, in which case WAC credit will not be received for the course.
10. Maximum enrollment for this course is 35 or 45 with a graduate assistant.