Name of the course: Political Philosophy from the 17th to 19th century
Lecturer: Miklós Zala
No. of credits and ECTS credits: 2 (4 ECTS)
Term: Winter
Course status: Mandatory
Office hours: Wednesdays 14:00-16:40; Office: A422 or A425

The content of this syllabus is subject to change

Course description

This course provides an introduction to the history of political philosophy from the 17th to the 19th century and also examines some early 20th-century texts. Throughout the course, we will review some of the major figures and topics in modern political thought, such as the social contract tradition (Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau), and also address often neglected viewpoints in the history of political philosophy, such as women’s and Blacks’. We will do so in the belief that these ideas, perspectives, and thinkers have great significance for contemporary controversies in political philosophy and provide insights into how we should live together and organize our societies here and now.

Learning outcomes:

At the end of the course, the student shall be able to:

- Understand the main arguments of modern political thought.
- Understand the key positions within the history of political philosophy.
- Produce critical and well-structured arguments in political philosophy.
- Balance and contrast the weakness and strengths of different positions in contemporary debates in liberal egalitarian thought.
- Summarise arguments clearly and succinctly.

Course Requirements:

Regular attendance, careful completion of the assigned readings before class, and active participation in discussions is a general requirement.

Students are additionally required to complete the following assignments:

1) Participation (10% of final grade)

Students will receive a letter grade of their participation that takes up 10% of the final grade. Their participation is assessed as follows: attendance, preparation, attention to others, and quality of contributions in class.

2) Knowledge quizzes (20% of final grade)

At the beginning of each class, there will be a straightforward, multiple-choice knowledge quiz based on the assigned required readings. There will be 10 knowledge quizzes during the term, starting in week 2. Students will get 0% in any week in which unexcused absence or...
lateness results in their missing the quiz. Students will need to bring a device to class (laptop, tablet, or smartphone) to complete the knowledge quiz, but otherwise, using electronic devices in class is strongly discouraged. During the 10 weeks, there will be 60 quiz questions altogether, and students will receive a letter grade for their overall performance according to the following scale:

- less than 26 points: F
- 26-30 points: C+
- 31-36 points: B-
- 37-43 points: B
- 44-48 points: B+
- 49-54 points: A-
- 55-60 points: A

3) A 1-page draft outline plan for the final paper (20% of final grade)
   Due date: Week 11

The final paper should be on a philosophical idea, debate or argument of your choice related to at least one of the topics and authors discussed in class. This assignment is intended to help you work out, logically organize, and concisely communicate the central points you intend to make in your final paper and to provide an opportunity to discuss and think through potential objections and amendments. The outline should clearly state the intended thesis of the paper and concisely present the main steps of your argument for it (bullet points are recommended). They will be assessed according to clarity, organization, and evidence of independent thinking.

4) Peer review of the 1-page draft outline plan (10% of final grade)
   Due date: 5 days after submitting the draft outline plan

After students submit their 1-page final paper draft outline plan, one of their classmates will be assigned as their peer reviewer, whose task will be to critically examine the draft outline plan. Commenting on our peers’ work is a basic academic skill, and this task aims to help students acquire and practice it. Also, peer reviews will assist students in writing better final papers. A good peer review identifies weaknesses in the assumptions or arguments put forward in the draft outline plan. It also intends to be constructive, i.e., to help improve the given work it critically examines. Accordingly, peer reviews will be evaluated based on their ability to lay bare questionable assumptions and erroneous arguments or logic in the draft outline plans and to provide suggestions that could lead to a better argued and overall convincing final paper. A good peer review makes at least 5-6 relevant points regarding the draft outline plan. Students will receive a letter grade for their peer review that takes up 10% of their final grade.

5) A final paper of between 2,000-2,500 words excluding bibliography (max 2700 words) (40% of final grade)
   Due date: 14th of April
Students should submit a final paper on their chosen author or topic discussed during the course. The final essay must represent a significant piece of independent research; it can be a positive argument of your own or a critical argument, and it should contain at least 5 cited sources. They should provide concise, clear statements of your positions and arguments. Don’t make unargued claims! When you criticize an argument, use the best counter-argument you find, don’t waste your time with straw men! Also, literary or emotive, or heavily jargon-laden style is often unhelpful. Do not write a one-sided essay: be sure to evaluate the strongest arguments on both sides!

You are encouraged to discuss and refine your ideas and drafts of your work with the instructor, writing center staff, and other students in the class. However, your assessed work must be the result of your own writing, thinking, and research for this class. Any assistance received should be acknowledged, and any reproduction of text or of ideas of others must be clearly attributed to its original source. Finally, an offense of plagiarism need not be intentional for it to be punishable under the CEU regulations.

**Grading criteria for final papers**

**Quantity:**

Keep your term paper within the required length limit.

**Quality:**

A (outstanding): Papers that earn an A are nearly flawless in writing style, organization, exposition and soundness of arguments. While remaining entirely relevant to the question, such a paper will be relatively ambitious in scope and will demonstrate an exceptional degree of understanding of the topic.

A- (excellent): The assignment must demonstrate all the virtues of a B+ paper plus evidence of genuine progress as a result of the author’s own independent thinking, such as their own substantive evaluation and critique of the validity and soundness of arguments, or introduction of significant new examples that shed light on the topic. If there are any problems with the exposition or arguments in the paper, these will be minor. Any obvious objections to the paper’s argument will have been anticipated and answered.

B+ (very good): In addition to demonstrating the virtues of grade B, the paper must show a higher degree of originality and independent work. That is, in the paper the author has analyzed and independently organized the material themselves in response to the question, rather than simply following the organization of in-class presentations or parts of the literature. The paper will also display good analytical skills.

B (good): To earn this grade, the paper must clearly and concisely address the question and must be written in good academic English. The paper must demonstrate a solid understanding of the arguments from readings in the course as well as in-class presentations and discussions. Important principles and concepts should be clearly explained. The views of others should, where necessary, be accurately, charitably, clearly and succinctly reconstructed, and properly cited with a bibliography.
B- (satisfactory): The author of a B- paper struggles to organize the main ideas of their work. While the author has a general sense of the arguments their paper discusses, the paper’s argument is confused and/or poorly written.

C+ (minimum pass): The paper displays significant confusions and/or its author is unaware of crucial arguments for the discussed topic. In addition, the paper is poorly written.

F (fail): The paper does not even possess the rather moderate qualities of a C+ term paper.

Final grade

Your final grade will be the weighted average of the letter grades of the various assignments.

Accessibility/Accommodations

This course has been specifically designed to foster a diverse learning environment. Please kindly inform me about any unseen hurdles that may present a barrier to your learning. Feel free to speak to me at any time about concerns or questions you may have about assignments, activities, or assessments.

Any student who feels they may need an accommodation for any type of disability should contact the CEU Disability Services Officer at nyikesn@ceu.edu.

Weekly Program:

Week 1: ‘Introduction’
Week 3: ‘The Social Contract Tradition II – Locke’
Week 5: ‘The Liberal Critique of Rousseau – Constant’
Week 7: ‘Feminist thought in modern political philosophy – Mary Wollstonecraft’
Week 8: ‘Freedom of Expression – John Stuart Mill’
Week 9: ‘Socialism and Communism – Marx and Engels’
Week 10: ‘Racial Justice – Frederick Douglass’
Week 11: ‘Colonialism – Mahatma Gandhi’
Week 12 ‘Conclusions’

Recommended General Readings

The following sources will be useful references for a range of topics and authors covered during the course:


This is single-handedly the most useful philosophy resource on the internet providing free encyclopedia entries on most philosophical topics. Entries on several authors we will discuss throughout the course are also available on SEP.
Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy: https://iep.utm.edu/

Similar to the previous one, but less extensive


This edited volume provides a useful guide to the methodological questions of the history of political philosophy as well as to its important chronological periods and central topics.


A great introduction to the central topics of political philosophy, such as the state of nature, political authority, and liberty.

Excellent edited volumes with key topics in contemporary political philosophy

- The CEU Library also has many volumes in the *Cambridge Companion* series, e.g., Tom Sorell (ed.) *The Cambridge companion to Hobbes*. You can use these as well for further information on the authors and topics we discuss.

**Week 1: Introduction**

**Mandatory reading:**


**Recommended readings:**


**Week 2: The Social Contract Tradition I – Hobbes**

**Mandatory reading:**


**Recommended readings:**


**Week 3: The Social Contract Tradition II – Locke**

**Mandatory reading:**


**Recommended readings:**


**Week 4: The Social Contract Tradition III – Rousseau**

**Mandatory readings:**


**Recommended readings:**


**Week 5: The Liberal Critique of Rousseau – Constant**

**Mandatory reading:**

**Recommended readings:**


**Week 6: The Birth of Distributive Justice – Thomas Paine**

**Mandatory reading:**


**Recommended readings:**


**Week 7: Feminist thought in modern political philosophy – Mary Wollstonecraft**

**Mandatory reading:**


**Recommended readings:**

• W. Thompson, *Appeal of One Half of the Human Race, Women, Against the Pretensions of the Other, Men* (1825), Available at: https://digital.library.lse.ac.uk/objects/lse:cik442nul


**Week 8: Freedom of Expression** John Stuart Mill

**Mandatory reading:**


**Recommended readings:**


**Week 9: Socialism and Communism: Marx and Engels**

**Mandatory reading:**


**Recommended readings:**


• K. Marx, *Critique of the Gotha Programme*. Available at: https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1875/gotha/


**Week 10: Racial Justice – Frederick Douglass**
Mandatory reading:


Recommended readings:


**Week 11: Colonialism – Mahatma Gandhi**

Mandatory reading:


Recommended readings:


**Week 12: Conclusions**