

# INTRODUCTION TO SOCIAL AND POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY/PHIL 255

## RUTGERS UNIVERSITY FALL 2021

### INSTRUCTOR

Dr. Wes Skolits (Wes.Skolits@Rutgers.edu)

### OFFICE HOURS

Zoom by appointment.

### COURSE TEXTS

To be provided on Canvas.

### COURSE DESCRIPTION:

In this course we will critically examine prominent classical and contemporary positions in political philosophy. Towards this end, we will concentrate on the following questions: Are there any good reasons to have a government? What is the purpose of the State? What are the conditions under which the State possesses legitimate authority? What makes a society equal and just? In particular, we will examine responses to these questions articulated by prominent figures such as Plato, Aristotle, Hobbes, Mill, Rawls, Nozick, Marx, and others.

### COURSE OBJECTIVES

1. To understand some of the most prominent positions in political philosophy
2. To evaluate the arguments for prominent positions in political philosophy
3. To write an argumentative paper on a topic within political philosophy
4. To assess students vis-à-vis their critical examination of major political philosophy constructs, theories, and debates

### EVALUATION:

Homework Notes - 5 total = 10%

You must submit four homework notes throughout the semester. To receive credit for this assignment, you must upload (on Canvas) at least two pages of (double spaced) notes on the readings for that week. The deadline for these submissions will alternate with the weeks that discussion board assignments are due. This assignment will be

graded on the basis of completion. The dates for homework notes will be specified on Canvas.

Discussion Boards - 5 total = 10%

You must write four discussion board posts. To complete this assignment each time, you must comment on another student's post after crafting your own. The dates for this assignment will be specified on Canvas.

Midterm - 30%

The midterm will cover the material from Units 1-3 and the date will be specified on Canvas.

Presentation - 15%

Towards the end of the semester, you will upload a 5-7 minute presentation of your paper. Further you must include an outline of your paper when you upload the presentation on Canvas.

Peer Feedback - 10%

You must provide written feedback on a student presentation. I will randomly assign commentators on Canvas later in the semester.

Paper - 25%

Towards the end of the semester you will write a 3-4 page argumentative paper defending a position (or making critical remarks of a position) discussed in this course. The details of this assignment, and the date, will be made available on Canvas.

> 90.00 A

88.00 - 89.99 B+

83.00 - 87.99 B

80.00 - 82.99 C+

70.00 - 79.99 C

60.00 - 69.99 D

<= 59.99 F

## DEADLINES

Midterm: Nov 12

Presentation: Dec 3

Peer Feedback: Dec 8

Paper: Dec 13

## **COURSE SCHEDULE<sup>1</sup>**

### **UNIT 1: INTRO AND HISTORICAL APPROACHES**

Week 1: Introduction and Critical Thinking Review

Week 2: Plato (HW 1)

Week 3: Aristotle (DB 1)

Week 4: Hobbes (DB 2)

Week 5: Locke/Rousseau (HW 2)

### **UNIT 2: CENTRAL CONCEPTS**

Week 6: Freedom (HW 3)

Week 7: Equality (DB 3)

### **UNIT 3: NORMATIVE THEORIES**

Week 8: Utilitarianism

Week 9: Rawls (DB 4)

Week 10: Communitarianism (HW 4)

### **UNIT 4: CONTEMPORARY DEBATES**

Week 11: Marx/Socialism (DB 5)

Week 12: Libertarianism/Free Market

Week 13: Multiculturalism/Feminism (HW 5)

Week 14: Presentations

### **STUDENT WELLNESS**

#### **Just In Case Web App**

<http://codu.co/cee05e> Access helpful mental health information and resources for yourself or a friend in a mental health crisis on your smartphone or tablet and easily contact CAPS or RUPD.

#### **Counseling, ADAP & Psychiatric Services (CAPS)**

(848) 932-7884 / 17 Senior Street, New Brunswick, NJ 08901/  
[www.rhscaps.rutgers.edu/](http://www.rhscaps.rutgers.edu/) CAPS is a University mental health support service that includes counseling, alcohol and other drug assistance, and psychiatric services staffed by a team of professional within Rutgers Health services to support students efforts to succeed at Rutgers University. CAPS offers a variety of services that

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<sup>1</sup> This syllabus is not a contract, and the schedule is subject to change per the instructor's discretion.

include: individual therapy, group therapy and workshops, crisis intervention, referral to specialists in the community and consultation and collaboration with campus partners.

#### Violence Prevention & Victim Assistance (VPVA)

(848) 932-1181 / 3 Bartlett Street, New Brunswick, NJ 08901 / [www.vpva.rutgers.edu/](http://www.vpva.rutgers.edu/) The Office for Violence Prevention and Victim Assistance provides confidential crisis intervention, counseling and advocacy for victims of sexual and relationship violence and stalking to students, staff and faculty. To reach staff during office hours when the university is open or to reach an advocate after hours, call 848-932-1181. Disability Services

(848) 445-6800 / Lucy Stone Hall, Suite A145, Livingston Campus, 54 Joyce Kilmer Avenue, Piscataway, NJ 08854 / <https://ods.rutgers.edu/> The Office of Disability Services works with students with a documented disability to determine the eligibility of reasonable accommodations, facilitates and coordinates those accommodations when applicable, and lastly engages with the Rutgers community at large to provide and connect students to appropriate resources.

#### Scarlet Listeners

(732) 247-5555 / <http://www.scarletlisteners.com/> Free and confidential peer counseling and referral hotline, providing a comforting and supportive safe space.