

Political Philosophy  
Writing Intensive  
PHILO 24600/POLSC 20401  
Hunter West 409,  
Wednesdays 11.30am – 2.20pm

**Instructor**

Michael L. J. Greer, she/her

**Email**

[mgreer@gradcenter.cuny.edu](mailto:mgreer@gradcenter.cuny.edu)

**Course Grading**

Office Hours Requirement	5%
Study groups	20%
3-6 papers	50%
Final Exam	25%

**Office hours**

Wednesdays 2.30pm – 3.30pm (in person in **Hunter West 1447**) or by appointment (Zoom).

Click here to book: <https://calendly.com/mljgreer/officehoursgreer>

**Course Description**

We find ourselves immersed in political life: the state and various institutions that make modern life possible also hold power over us and control what we're allowed to do. Institutions are vested with the power to punish (fine, incarcerate, fire, etc.) people for violating their rules. At the same time, institutions can be altered or abolished. There are various means through which we can engage in politics so as to change our political circumstances: we can vote, attend protests, unionize, and spread our political ideas through discussion and argumentation. But which ideas do we stand behind, and which ideas do we disavow? How can we make sense of politics, and our place in it?

This class offers students canonical topics in political philosophy as a way to make sense of their thoughts on political issues. We will think through the following questions, and more: What is the political foundation of society? How much authority should the state have over personal liberty? What, if anything, justifies private property rights? What is equality, and would it be good if our society was more equal? What is justice, and how do we move towards it? Do we live in a free society? What is democracy, and (why) is it good? What is political about feminism? How should we think about sexist oppression and autonomy deficits? What role should "identity" play in our political life?

*This course is required of all Philosophy, Politics, and Society majors, as well as counting toward satisfaction of the Ethics, Politics, and Aesthetics requirement for Philosophy majors. Prerequisite: one course in philosophy*

**Learning Objectives**

This course has two main learning objectives:

- To develop the skills necessary to think well and communicate your ideas and reasons to others
- To learn about different issues in political philosophy so that you may confidently engage with relevant issues outside of the classroom

In particular, students who successfully complete the course will:

- Be able to present the ideas and arguments of others in their own words
- Have practiced their reading comprehension skills
- Be able to identify arguments, specifying premises and conclusions

- Be able to critically examine arguments (test consistency among claims, test limits, or test capacity to address a relevant issue or problem)
- Have practiced working collaboratively with others to develop, refine, and evaluate ideas and arguments
- Have practiced interrogating the weaknesses of their own view and the strengths of alternative views
- Have practiced formulating original arguments and foreseeing (and responding to) strong objections
- Be able to present the ideas and arguments of others in their own words
- Be able to compare different ideas and arguments presented in different texts

## Requirements

### *Attendance and participation*

Philosophy is an activity and it requires practice. One vital opportunity for practicing philosophy takes place in class, and requires an active rather than a passive presence in class. Attendance at all classes and discussion sections is mandatory. Attendance will be taken. Significant unexcused absences can lower your final grade by up to a full letter grade. Participation in class discussions and activities is strongly encouraged. Active, engaged and constructive participation can raise your final grade by up to half a letter grade. Note that there will be a variety of opportunities to participate actively: not all of them will involve speaking up in lecture.

### *Work outside of class in study groups*

Your first assignment will be to organize yourselves into study groups of 4-5 people. Study groups should meet at least once a week for at least an hour to discuss material from the class. Very short weekly assignments will provide guidance for those conversations and require you to report out what your group discussed. Reports will take the form of short on-line “check in” quizzes that will be due each Thursday, and will be distributed using google forms. **These are worth 20% of your grade.**

### *3-6 letters of varying length*

Sustained, careful thought is best expressed in writing, and writing philosophy is a difficult task that requires practice. To help you practice and develop the skills of philosophical writing, you will be asked to write a short paper in the format of a “letter” roughly every other week until you demonstrate a certain mastery of these skills. This progression and these papers will be explained at greater length in a separate handout. **The grade you receive from this body of work will count for 50% of your grade.** To submit these letters, you must upload them on BB.

### *A final exam*

This will be an essay exam. Questions will be handed out ahead of time, and you will be encouraged to think through the answers with your study group. The exam will, among other things, test your ability to think comparatively about ideas from different readings, a task we will practice in class, but which will not be required for the papers. **The exam will be worth 25% of your grade.**

### *Office Hours Requirement.*

This is pass/fail. In order to pass this requirement, you must meet with me in my office hours in **Hunter West 1447**, at least once, before **October 4th 2023**. *Office hour times are on the first page of this syllabus.* You may book with me here: <https://calendly.com/mljgreer/officehoursgreer>. This is **worth 5% of your grade.**

### *Extra credit*

To receive extra credit you must email me a one page, double-spaced response to one of the optional readings. Your reading response must consider *the pedagogical value* of the reading: I want you to reflect on why I assigned this text in conjunction with the other texts I assigned this week. What does it add to the topic or issue that we discussed that week? Extra credit reading responses will not be accepted until after we've finished reading the material for the relevant week. Completing a response will allow me to add one percentage point to your overall grade.

### **Texts**

All of the required reading for the course will be available in electronic form on the class Blackboard site.

### **Learning Pod**

On the first day of class I will assign you to a learning pod (A or B). Your learning pod will affect when your letters are due, and sometimes in-class activities.

### **Class Website and Blackboard**

*We will use Blackboard:*

1. To find and download our readings, assignment instructions, extra resources, and materials we cover in class: *All readings will be made available to you. Please print them out before class or bring them on a laptop or tablet (not a phone). I expect you to bring a copy of the reading to class with you.*
2. To hand in your letters.
3. For important announcements. See "Announcements" tab on BB.

*I will mostly be in touch with you via email, however I will repeat important announcements on BB. Make sure you fill out the intro questionnaire with your preferred email address, as that is how I will usually contact the class. I will take your phone number at the end of our first class but will only use it if I am having trouble getting in touch with you via email.*

### **Course Format and Expectations**

This course will meet on Wednesdays in **Hunter West 409 from 11.30am - 2.20pm**. The course is divided into weekly topics. For full lists of readings, assignments, and due dates, see the Course Schedule which can be found on BB under "Course Information".

Attendance is expected. It will be hard for you to do well if you miss too much class. If you must miss class, I expect you to email me before class begins.

### *Expectations I have of you*

- Read the assigned text(s), watch assigned video, listen to assigned audio
- Attend class with a copy of the texts in tow (either printed out, on your laptop, or on a tablet)
- Check your email regularly for updates (please make sure you have proper access to it, and that you give me the correct email address in the intro questionnaire).
- Due dates are calculated by EST – assignments are due by midnight EST on the date.
- If and when issues arise (be they technical or personal) that interfere with your studies, communicate with me as soon as possible. I am happy to make any necessary accommodations and work with you.

- This is an inclusive space for all students, and absolutely no discrimination in any form will be tolerated. If you ever feel uncomfortable or unsafe throughout the course, please let me know via email or in office hours (see password and zoom information above). I am not a mandated reporter.
- Plagiarism is unacceptable. I would rather grant an extension than receive plagiarized work. If you find that you need more time to complete an assignment, *please talk to me*. If you are wondering whether something counts as plagiarism, see the handout (on Blackboard). If you are still unsure, feel free to ask me!
- Email me a picture of a cat if you've read carefully enough to notice this.
- I have a "two-strike" policy. The first time any work is plagiarized, I will fail the assignment. The second time I will bring the matter to the office of academic integrity and recommend course failure – no exceptions and no questions asked.

### *Expectations you may have of me*

- I aim to get you feedback on your letters within one week of handing it in.
- My office hours are 2.30pm – 3.30pm on Wednesdays after class in person in **Hunter West 1447** or by appointment (Zoom). You can sign up for a slot here: <https://calendly.com/mljgreer/officehoursgreer> *Note: I require that you attend my office hours at least once before **October 4th** so start thinking about when you're going to sign up!*
- If you elect to attend in Zoom office hours, here is the information:
  - o <https://gc-cuny-edu.zoom.us/j/82123077433?pwd=UXVoSXV5SnhWSHIHS3EyeHZnc2hwdz09>
  - o Meeting ID: 821 2307 7433
  - o Passcode: 874843
- The best way to reach me is via email ([mgreer@gradcenter.cuny.edu](mailto:mgreer@gradcenter.cuny.edu)). I generally respond to emails within 24 hours during the week, but I do not check my emails over the weekend. I will respond to emails sent over the weekend on Mondays.

### **Health and well-being**

University life can be challenging, and I understand that your physical and mental health may be impacted. If you feel that you are struggling, please reach out to me and we can work something out.

### **Lateness and absences**

Try to arrive to class on time. This respects other students' time as well as mine. Saying that, I would rather you come late than not at all.

If you cannot make it to class, please email me before class letting me know. If you are having consistent trouble making it to class and want to talk to me about your progress, send me an email or come to my office hours.

If you test positive for COVID-19 or are otherwise ill but want to attend class, I can make our classroom hybrid-accessible. Please email me for details.

### **Technology Support**

If you need help accessing Blackboard or your email, you can get in touch with the Hunter College Help Desk (212.772.4357). More info here: <https://hunter.cuny.edu/information-technology/support/help-desk/>

[CUNY Rules, Regulations, and Services](#)

## **Accessibility**

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities: In compliance with the ADA and with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, Hunter College is committed to ensuring educational access and accommodations for all its registered students. Hunter College's students with disabilities and medical conditions are encouraged to register with the Office of AccessABILITY for assistance and accommodation. For information and appointments, visit the Office of AccessABILITY in Room E1214 or call [212-772-4857](tel:212-772-4857)/or VRS [646-755-3129](tel:646-755-3129). You may also visit this website for more info: <https://hunter.cuny.edu/students/health-wellness/accessibility/>

Note: I assume that all of us learn in different ways and live in very different circumstances. I understand that the organization of any course will accommodate each student differently. For example, you may prefer to process information by speaking and listening, or you might prefer to articulate ideas via email or chat/discussion/comments. While I hope that you will all engage and participate generously, please talk to me as soon as you can about your individual learning needs and how this course can best accommodate them. (Credit to [Jessie Male](#)). **Your access to our class matters to me—matters a lot. While I work hard to make our class accessible, I understand that you may have access needs I have not addressed. Access is an ongoing process. Please meet with me to discuss your access needs.**

## **Plagiarism**

The faculty and administration of Hunter College support an environment free from cheating and plagiarism. Each student is responsible for being aware of what constitutes cheating and plagiarism and for avoiding both.

The complete text of the CUNY Academic Integrity Policy and the Hunter College procedure for policy implementation can be found at <https://hunter.cuny.edu/students/student-affairs/office-of-student-conduct/policies-and-forms/>. If a faculty member suspects a violation of academic integrity and, upon investigation, confirms that violation, or if the student admits the violation, the faculty member **MUST** report the violation. *Students should be aware that faculty may use plagiarism detection software.*

## **Nonattendance because of religious beliefs**

NY State Education Law provides that:

(1) Any student in an institution of higher education who is unable, because of their religious beliefs, to attend classes on a particular day or days shall, because of such absence on the particular day or days, be excused from any examination or any study or work requirements.

(2) It shall be the responsibility of the faculty to make available to each student who is absent from school, because of religious beliefs, an equivalent opportunity to make up any examination, study or work requirements which they may have missed because of such absence on any particular day or days.

Any student who is aggrieved by the alleged failure of any faculty or administrative officials to comply in good faith shall be entitled to maintain action or proceeding in the supreme court of the county in which such institution of higher education is located for the enforcement of their rights.

### **Local and National Mental Health Resources**

- Hunter College offers free and confidential short-term counseling services to all Hunter College students. [Hunter College Personal Counseling Services](#): Room 1119B, East Building 695 Park Ave. New York, NY 10065. 212-772-4931 or email [personalcounseling@hunter.cuny.edu](mailto:personalcounseling@hunter.cuny.edu)
- Suicide Prevention:
  - o CUNY Crisis Text Line: CUNY students can text “CUNY” to 741741 to initiate a free and confidential conversation with a trained volunteer and receive a referral for further help if necessary.
  - o National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 988 (1.800.273.8255)
- Safe Horizon 24/7 Domestic Violence Hotline: 1.800.621.4673
- Safe Horizon 24/7 Rape and Sexual Assault Hotline: 1.212.227.3000
- Samaritans 24-Hour Crisis Hotline: 212.673.3000
- Trans Lifeline: 877.565.8860
- NYC Anti-Violence Project English/Spanish hotline: 212.714.1141 (AVP empowers lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and HIV-affected communities and allies to end all forms of violence through organizing and education and supports survivors through counseling and advocacy.)

Course Reading and Assignment Schedule  
 Political Philosophy, Fall 2023  
 PHILO 24600/POLSC 20401  
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**Important Dates to Keep in Mind**  
 August 24<sup>th</sup> – Last day to **drop** for 100% tuition refund  
 August 31<sup>st</sup> – Last day to **add** a course  
 December 4<sup>th</sup> – Last day for pass/fail  
 December 11<sup>th</sup> – Last to withdraw with W  
 December 14-20<sup>th</sup> – Final exam week  
 December 20<sup>st</sup> – End of Fall Term

Week	Problem	Reading	Skill to practice	Assignment
<b>Week 1</b> 8/25 - 8/31	Why should we care about political philosophy?	<b>Wednesday 8/30</b> Wolff, "Conflict Between Authority and Autonomy" (7 pages) <i>Skills 1 and 2 HO</i>	Distinguishing and understanding claims	Organize study groups. Email prof your study group assignments. Book office hours (by October 4 <sup>th</sup> )
<b>Week 2</b> 9/1 -9/7	The Social Contract	<b>Wednesday 9/6</b> Thomas Hobbes, <i>Leviathan</i> excerpts John Locke, <i>Second Treatise</i> excerpts	Identifying and analyzing claims	W 9/7: Study group check in due
<b>Week 3</b> 9/8 - 9/14	Liberty	<b>Wednesday 9/13</b> John Stuart Mill, <i>On Liberty</i> excerpts Isaiah Berlin, "Two Concepts of Liberty" excerpts <i>Skills 3 HO</i>	Interpreting claims to understand concepts	W 9/13 Group A Letter #1 due Th 9/14 Study group check in due

<p><b>Week 4</b> 9/15 - 9/21</p>	<p>Property</p>	<p><b>Wednesday 9/20</b> John Locke, "Property" excerpts Helga Varden, "Kant on Property"</p>	<p>Interpreting claims to understand concepts</p>	<p>W 9/20 Group B Letter #1 Due  Th 9/21 Study group check in due</p>
<p><b>Week 5</b> 9/22 - 9/28</p>	<p>Equality and Inequality</p>	<p><b>Wednesday 9/27</b> Jean-Jacques Rousseau, <i>Discourse on the Origins of Inequality</i>, excerpts Elizabeth Anderson, "What is the Point of Equality?" <i>Skills 4 HO</i></p>	<p>Describing concepts</p>	<p>W 9/27 Group A Letter #2 due  Th 9/28 Study group check in due</p>
<p><b>Week 6</b> 9/29 - 10/5</p>	<p>Justice</p>	<p><b>Wednesday 10/4</b> John Rawls <i>A Theory of Justice</i> excerpts John Rawls "Justice as Fairness: Political Not Metaphysical" excerpts  <i>Skills 5 HO</i></p>	<p>Evaluating claims</p>	<p>W 10/4 Group B Letter #2 due <i>Must attend office hours by this date to get credit.</i>  Th 10/5 Study group check in due</p>
<p><b>Week 7</b> 10/6 - 10/12</p>	<p>Critiques of Rawls</p>	<p><b>Wednesday 10/11</b> Michael J. Sandel "The Procedural Republic and the Unencumbered Self" excerpts Charles Mills, <i>The Racial Contract</i> excerpts <i>Skills 6 HO</i></p>	<p>Evaluating concepts</p>	<p>W 10/11 Group A Letter # 3 due  Th 10/12 Study group check in due</p>



<p><b>Week 8</b> 10/13 - 10/19</p>	<p>Social Justice</p>	<p><b>Wednesday 10/18</b> Iris Marion Young, "Structural injustice and the politics of difference" (esp. sec. 1, 2, 3) Friedrich Hayek "The Atavism of Social Justice" excerpts <i>Skills 7 HO</i></p>	<p>Extracting and analyzing arguments: starting points and conclusions</p>	<p>W 10/18 Group B Letter # 3 due</p> <p>Th 10/19 Study group check in due</p>
<p><b>Week 9</b> 10/20 - 10/26</p>	<p>Capitalism &amp; Freedom</p>	<p><b>Wednesday 10/25</b> Milton Friedman, <i>Capitalism and Freedom</i>, Ch1 G. A. Cohen, "Freedom and Money"</p> <p><i>Skills 8 HO</i> <b>Optional:</b> Philippe Van Parijs, "A Basic Income for All" excerpts</p>	<p>Extracting and analyzing arguments: types of arguments</p>	<p>W 10/25 Group A Letter #4 due</p> <p>Th 10/26 Study group check in due</p>
<p><b>Week 10</b> 10/27 - 11/2</p>	<p>Critiques of Capitalism</p>	<p><b>Wednesday 11/1</b> Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, <i>The Communist Manifesto</i>, excerpts Silvia Federici, "Wages Against Housework"</p> <p><i>Skills 9 HO</i> <b>Optional:</b> G.A. Cohen, <i>Why Not Socialism</i> bell hooks, "Homeplace, a site of resistance"</p>	<p>Analyzing and evaluating deductive arguments</p>	<p>W 11/1 Group B Letter #4 due</p> <p>Th 11/2 Study group check in due</p>
<p><b>Week 11</b> 11/3 - 11/9</p>	<p>Democracy</p>	<p><b>Wednesday 11/8</b> Amartya Sen, "Democracy as Public Reason" David Copp, "Capitalism versus Democracy" <i>Skills 10 HO</i> <b>Optional:</b> Donald Grinde and Bruce Johansen, "<a href="#">Perceptions of America's Native Democracies</a>"</p>	<p>Shifting conceptual frames, using examples</p>	<p>W 11/8 Group A Letter #5 due</p> <p>Th 11/9 Study group check in due</p>

<b>Week 12</b> 11/10 - 11/16	The Political Aim(s) of Feminism	<b>Wednesday 11/15</b> Alison Jaggar, "Feminism and the Objects of Justice" Annette C. Baier, "The Need for More than Justice" <i>Skills 11 HO</i> <b>Optional:</b> <i>bell hooks, "Feminism: A Movement to End Sexist Oppression"</i>	Drawing links, contrasts, and comparisons	W 11/15 Group B Letter #5 due  Th 11/16 Study group check in due
<b>Week 13</b> 11/17 - 11/23	N/A	<b>Thanksgiving break</b>	N/A	
<b>Week 14</b> 11/24 - 11/30	Feminism & Autonomy	<b>Wednesday 11/29</b> Natalie Stoljar, "Autonomy and the Feminist Intuition" Serene Khader, "Adaptive Preferences and Choice: Are Adaptive Preferences Autonomy Deficits?"	Drawing links, contrasts, and comparisons	W 11/29 Group A Letter #6 due  Th 11/30 Study group check in due
<b>Week 15</b> 12/1 - 12/7	Identity Politics	<b>Wednesday 12/6</b> Olúfẹ̀mi O. Táíwò, <i>Elite Capture</i> excerpt Asad Haider, "Identity Politics"  <b>Optional:</b> <i>The Combahee River Collective, "A Black Feminist Statement"</i>	Drawing links, contrasts, and comparisons	W 12/6 Group B Letter #6 due  Th 12/7 Study group check in due
<b>Week 16</b> 12/8 - 12/14	Identity Politics cont.	<b>Wednesday 12/13</b> Jennifer Nash " <a href="#">A Love Letter from a Critic: or Notes on the Intersectionality Wars</a> " Stuart Hall, "Old and new identities, old and new ethnicities"		
<b>Week 17</b> 12/15 - 12/21	Final Exam	<b>Wednesday 12/20</b> Final Exam		