

## POL321HS. Modern Political Thought

Winter 2026



**Professor:** Rebecca Kingston

**Lectures:** Wednesdays 5 to 7 pm in Lassond Mining Building, 170 College Street, Room 128

**Office and Office Hours:** Sidney Smith 3022 (to the right inside the main office of the Department of Political Science), Tuesday 3-5, or by appointment.

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### **Land Acknowledgement:**

We acknowledge this land on which the University of Toronto operates. For thousands of years, it has been the traditional land of the Huron-Wendat, the Seneca, and the Mississauga's of the Credit. Today, this meeting place is still the home to many Indigenous people from across Turtle Island and we are grateful to have the opportunity to work and study on this land.

### **Description:**

This course offers an introduction to key thinkers and themes in nineteenth century political thought in Europe and the Americas. In our readings and assignments, we explore deeper exploration and contestation of Enlightenment conceptions of freedom and equality, alongside calls for more radical political reform and revolution. The broader premiss of the course is that liberal modernity has developed hand in hand with imminent and often radical critique of its basic commitments to reason, science and growth, as well as a rethinking of how it might best realize its commitments to equality and freedom, including what these commitments mean and how they are related.

### **Learning Objectives:**

In conjunction with the central themes noted above, this course has been designed with several learning objectives in mind. Through the critical analysis of texts, and a close reading of select passages in both class and tutorials, you will be trained to become more attuned to competing understandings and uses of key political concepts, partly through a study of their use in writing, and partly through comparison with other passages and other thinkers.

You will also develop writing skills, analytical skills and speaking skills, all in the service of a critical analysis of texts on the implications of the ideas put forward. The course material and its

framing offer an invitation to probe more deeply into the meaning of various political stances, and the assignments will help you develop a practice of critically parsing ideas and arguments.

Consider yourself lucky to having the opportunity to probe and engage with texts that are the product of deep analysis and profound political commitment. In a world where AI technologies are expanding their horizons, the texts assigned in this course do not draw on algorithmic calculations of the frequency of words, calculations where the underlying assumption that frequency of iteration and word correlation is the measure of truth; rather these texts demonstrate a meaningful engagement with the realities of social and political life. These texts are expressions of how these authors perceived the political challenges of their time and sought to create a vision that would engage and motivate their fellow citizens. We probe within and among these texts with an eye to both continuities and differences in arguments and terms to understand what the authors were doing in their own context, as well as to find resources that can help to captivate our own political imaginations in facing the challenges of our current world.

The analysis and comparison of terms and concepts in their various uses will also help you develop and articulate a more sophisticated understanding of your own political stances and the priorities and meanings that you give to the concepts which animate and justify contemporary democracy.

In view of this, use of generative technologies is prohibited in this course and the assignments have been (re)designed to mitigate AI use.

### **Required Texts:**

Many course readings are available as e-books or e-readings through links on the course site on Quercus (see the Course Materials tab where the readings are arranged on a weekly basis).

The texts listed below are in two categories. The first are required texts that you must purchase as they are not available in e-format. The second list is of texts that are required but for which an e-version exists with a link available on the Quercus site. They are listed here because some of you will want to continue taking courses in political theory and it will be helpful for you to keep a physical copy of the book and for some of you it will be easier to read the physical copy of the book than to read the material online (besides, they do look good on a bookshelf!). I will be calling on students in class to both read and analyse chosen sections of the text assigned, so students must be prepared bringing the relevant texts to class.

- I. Texts that are now available for purchase at the University of Toronto Bookstore and that are NOT available in e-format. Please stick to the editions noted here as other editions may cause certain confusion given differences in pagination, version used, and translation.

**A blank notebook of 50 -100 pages (any brand or format).** This will be used as your commonplace book (see class requirements) for writing out by hand significant or curious passages from the primary texts of the course. The material will be used as a basis for discussion

in tutorials and can be used for your in-class handwritten essay assignment later in the course. You will hand in this notebook to your TA at the end of the course for grading.

Mary Shelley. **Frankenstein**, 3rd ed, ed. D.L. MacDonald. Toronto: Broadview Press, 2012.

Friedrich Schiller. **On the Aesthetic Education of Man**. London: Penguin, 2016. (There may be some difficulties getting this text. The bookstore said that it is being reprinted and won't be available until March. I have included a link to a digital version through the library for the week this reading is required which you can consult. If you can find a text through sources other than the UT bookstore that is fine.)

Georg Wilhelm Fredrich Hegel. **Elements of the Philosophy of Right**, ed. Allen Wood. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991.

Nietzsche. **On the Genealogy of Morality**, ed. Keith Ansell-Pearson. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017.

II. Texts that are available in e-format through links on Quercus, but for the in class handwritten essay towards the end of term you will only be allowed to bring in print primary sources so you may wish to purchase them through the bookstore or second-hand.. Please use only these editions, again, because other editions can cause confusion with pagination as well as translation.

John Stuart Mill. **On Liberty, Utilitarianism and Other Essays**, ed. Mark Philp and Frederick Rosen. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015.

Karl Marx. **Selected Writings**, ed. Lawrence Simon. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1994.

Frederick Douglass. **Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave**. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020.

**Course Requirements (further discussion of each of these components of the final grade are listed below):**

<b>Mid-term test February 4<sup>th</sup></b> (details below)	10%
<b>Commonplace book</b>	10%
<b>In class essay</b> - topic to be determined	15%
<b>Tutorial</b> (attendance 10% and quality of participation, with consideration for input into Hypothesis quotes online 5%)	15%
<b>Final Exam</b> (in final examination period)	50%
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	100%

### **Mid-term test. In class. February 4<sup>th</sup>**

This test will involve a textual analysis. You will be given a choice between two quotes taken from the primary texts studied. You will be asked to choose one of the quotes and then briefly comment on the meaning of the quote and then for the larger part of the answer discuss the significance of the quote for the relevant work and thinker. The test will be an hour long.

### **Commonplace book**

I have asked you to purchase a blank (can be lined) notebook of 50-100 pages. In this notebook you will be taking notes by hand from your reading, writing down word for word selected passages (long or short) from the readings and from the editions noted on the syllabus (we will be checking to make sure at the end of the course as they will be handed in to your TA). These can be passages that resonate with you personally, passages that help you map the key arguments of the relevant text, or passages that you don't understand fully and want more clarification on. Please remember to note the page number or chapter and section number of the passages you write down. You may wish to leave some blank space beside the quote so that you can write down your reflections on the passage at the time or in later review or discussion in tutorial.

These books should be brought to tutorial each week and at least ten minutes in tutorial should be devoted to the identification and discussion and analysis of these quotes. You will also be allowed to bring this book to class for the writing or your in class essay, so you have an incentive to do this well. No other aids will be allowed for the essay.

These books will be handed into your TA's at the end of the class for grading, and will be returned for your own reference as a record of your learning in the course.

**In class handwritten essay:** The focus on your in class handwritten essay will not be revealed until you come to class but will involve some comparison between two thinkers studied in the semester. This is why you want to keep a good record of your reading with a strategic choice of key passages in the commonplace book. You can also bring the primary sources in print. No other aids will be allowed.

Your essay will be graded for its structure (introduction stating the main theme as well as the argument you will be developing through the paper and what the structure of the body of your essay will be, structured argument in the body of the essay that builds on textual evidence to make a case for your position and rebutting possible objections to your position, a conclusion which sums up your position gesturing to possible ramifications of your argument), the clarity of its prose, the good use of textual evidence, and basic spelling and grammar.

**Tutorials:** Students should attend tutorials starting the second week of this class with ten sessions throughout the term. Work in tutorials will be focused on the themes raised in the lectures and on discussing and analysing select passages from the works studied.

**Discussion:** In discussion in class and in tutorial please be considerate. The University of Toronto is committed to equity, human rights and respect for diversity. All members of the learning environment in this course should strive to create an atmosphere of mutual respect where all members of our community can express themselves, engage with each other, and respect one another's differences. U of T does not condone discrimination or harassment against any persons or communities.

At times I will be posting passages from the primary texts we are studying to Quercus for the relevant week for the author. My hope is to use the tool Hypothesis to have students contribute independently to the annotation of a particular passage to probe its meaning. This will be a way for students to enhance their skills at analysing texts and passages. Participation through this online collaborative annotation tool will contribute to your general participation grade. This practice will help you in the passage analysis you will need to undertake for your in class essay as well as for the final exam.

**Accessibility:** The University of Toronto is committed to accessibility. If you require accommodations for a disability, or have any accessibility concerns about the course, the classroom or course materials, please contact Accessibility Services as soon as possible: [accessibility.services@utoronto.ca](mailto:accessibility.services@utoronto.ca) or <http://www.accessibility.utoronto.ca/> .

**Mental health support for all U of T students:** There is a new service for UT students called Telus Health Student Support Services. You can call 1-844-451-9700 or download the app. It also can be found at [uoft.me/thss](http://uoft.me/thss) . Through this app help can be provided in 146 languages. There is also the office of UT Health and Wellness where you can set up an appointment with an individual counsellor <https://studentlife.utoronto.ca/department/health-wellness/> . If in crisis dial 911 or consult this page: <https://studentlife.utoronto.ca/task/support-when-you-feel-distressed/> .

**Absence and illness declaration:** If you become ill and it affects your ability to do your academic work, consult me or your TA right away. Normally, I will ask you for documentation in support of your specific medical circumstances. This documentation can be an Absence Declaration (via ACORN) or the University's Verification of Student Illness or Injury (VOI) form. The VOI indicates the impact and severity of the illness, while protecting your privacy about the details of the nature of the illness. If you cannot submit a VOI due to limits on terms of use, you can submit a different form (like a letter from a doctor), as long as it is an original document, and it contains the same information as the VOI (including dates, academic impact, practitioner's signature, phone and registration number). For more information on the VOI, please see <http://www.illnessverification.utoronto.ca> . For information on Absence Declaration Tool for A&S students, please see <https://www.artsci.utoronto.ca/absence> . If you get a concussion, break your hand, or suffer some other acute injury, you should register with Accessibility Services as soon as possible.

**Academic Integrity:**

All suspected cases of academic dishonesty will be investigated following procedures outlined in the Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters. If you have questions or concerns about what constitutes appropriate academic behaviour or appropriate research and citation methods, please reach out to me. Note that you are expected to seek out additional information on academic integrity from me or from other institutional resources (for example, the University of Toronto website on Academic Integrity)

### **Course Schedule and Weekly Readings:**

- Week 1, January 7:** Introduction to the course, and introduction to the first reading in the second hour of the first class.
- Week 2, January 14:** **Mary Shelley**  
**Read:** Frankenstein, vol. 1 chapters 1-4 and vol. 2 chapters 1-4 and 7-9 (You are encouraged to read the whole story, but I highlight here the sections that will be raised in the lecture.) This text is available for purchase at the UT Bookstore.
- Week 3, January 21:** **Friedrich Schiller**  
**Read:** On the Aesthetic Education of Man, Letters 5, 6, 8-11, 13-15, 20-24, 26-27. Link is here:  
[https://librarysearch.library.utoronto.ca/nde/fulldisplay?query=on%20the%20aesthetic%20education%20of%20man%20&tab=Everything&search\\_scope=UTL\\_AND\\_CI&searchInFulltext=false&vid=01UTORONTO\\_INST:UTORONTO\\_NDE&lang=en&docid=alma991106874364106196&adaptor=Local%20Search%20Engine&context=L&isFrbr=false&isHighlightedRecord=false&state=#nui.getit.service\\_viewit](https://librarysearch.library.utoronto.ca/nde/fulldisplay?query=on%20the%20aesthetic%20education%20of%20man%20&tab=Everything&search_scope=UTL_AND_CI&searchInFulltext=false&vid=01UTORONTO_INST:UTORONTO_NDE&lang=en&docid=alma991106874364106196&adaptor=Local%20Search%20Engine&context=L&isFrbr=false&isHighlightedRecord=false&state=#nui.getit.service_viewit)
- Week 4, January 28:** **Hegel 1. Thinking through History**  
**Read:** Hegel, Elements of the Philosophy of Right, Introduction, I ss. 41-50, 57-66 and III, 341-360. This text is available for purchase at the UT Bookstore. Please also read Hegel's famous passage on "Lordship and Bondage" from the Phenomenology of Spirit. See the following link:  
[https://www.humanities.uci.edu/sites/default/files/document/Welk\\_Readings\\_Hegel\\_Lordship.pdf](https://www.humanities.uci.edu/sites/default/files/document/Welk_Readings_Hegel_Lordship.pdf)
- Week 5, February 4:** **Mid-term test for the first hour.** See instructions in Course Requirements. This will involve the analysis of a passage from one of the texts studied so far in the course.  
**Hegel 2. Property, the Family and Civil Society**

**Read:** Elements of the Philosophy of Right, I, ss. 72-75; II, 142-169; III, 181-188, 209-218, 239-249.

**Week 6, February 11:** **Hegel 3. The State**

**Read:** Elements of the Philosophy of Right, III, ss. 255, 257-270, 273-286.

**Week 7, February 18:** READING WEEK, NO CLASS

**Week 8, February 25:** **John Stuart Mill**

**Read:** “On Liberty,” In On Liberty, Utilitarianism and Other Essays, pp. 5-43, 62-78 and 83-91. This text is available for purchase at the UT Bookstore as well as through the following link through the library and on Quercus: <https://oxfordworldsclassics-com.myaccess.library.utoronto.ca/display/10.1093/owc/9780199670802.001.0001/isbn-9780199670802>

**Week 9, March 4:** **Marx 1**

**Read:** Marx, “Introduction to A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy,” “Introduction to the Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right”, “Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844” In Selected Writings

**Week 10, March 11:** **Marx 2**

**Read:** Marx and Engels, “The Communist Manifesto” and Marx, “The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte” In Selected Writings

**Week 11, March 18:** **Douglass**

**Read:** Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave.

**Week 12, March 25:** **In class handwritten essay.** See above for more details. Only aids allowed are your commonplace book and the primary texts in book form (no digital versions allowed).

**Week 13, April 1:** **Nietzsche**

**Read:** On the Genealogy of Morality, first essay

Final Exam in the April examination period.