

Democratic Freedom and Its Enemies

Winter Semester 2025

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Democratic Freedom and Its Enemies

The course introduces students to the foundational thinkers of democratic theory, and also to democracy's most penetrating enemies. Class-room work will focus on close reading and discussion of some exciting and difficult texts: for example, Locke's *Letter on Toleration*, Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*, Marx *On the Jewish Question*. Students will learn to situate these texts in their historical context and to see their relevance to contemporary dilemmas and debates. The overall aim is to show that what democracy is and what it should be are never settled questions. The controversies that divide democracies today can be illuminated by returning to the great thinkers of the past. The key themes will be how democratic theorists have thought about toleration, inequality, exclusion and inclusion. Students will be expected to think for themselves on these questions, and to learn how to explain texts to their fellow students, demonstrating their historical context and contemporary relevance.

All readings are on Moodle. The pages to be read are in the syllabus.

Biography

Michael Ignatieff is Rector Emeritus and professor of historical studies at CEU.

Ignatieff came to CEU after serving as Edward R. Murrow Professor of Press, Politics, and Public Policy at Harvard University's Kennedy School.

He served in the Canadian Parliament and was Leader of the Liberal Party. His books include *The Needs of Strangers* (1984) *Blood and Belonging* (1993), *The Warrior's Honour* (1997), *Isaiah Berlin* (1998), *The Rights Revolution* (2000), *Human Rights as Politics and Idolatry* (2001), *The Lesser Evil: Political Ethics in an Age of Terror* (2004), *Fire and Ashes: Success and Failure in Politics* (2013), and *The Ordinary Virtues: Moral Order in a Divided World* (2017). His latest book is *On Consolation: Finding Solace in Dark Times* (2021)

Course Assignments, Requirements and Grading

Students are required to do all the reading. Class attendance in person is mandatory. Please inform the instructor if you must miss class for any reason. Students missing more than a third of the classes, whether excused or not, risk failing the course.

60% of the grade will be awarded to written work, in the form of **3** analyses of the key issue raised by a text, together with an evaluation of the relevance of the historical context to the solution proposed by the text's author. Two of the analyses should be no longer than 750 words. The third one can be up to 1000 words and asks students to identify a single key take-away from the course, using the texts to back up their argument.

First assignment due: February 5

Second Assignment due: March 5

Third Assignment due: March 26

30% of the grade is awarded for participation in group presentation of material. These presentations will occur in the Wednesday class. Students should form into self-selected groups of up to 4 persons, pick a theme, discuss it with the professor or TA and then present for no more than 15 minutes. Each student should speak.

10% of the grade is awarded for participation in class discussions.

Students are reminded of CEU's policies on **plagiarism**. The policy is available on Moodle. It is a serious offense and can lead to being given a failing grade, or in a serious case, being referred to the disciplinary committee. Students must submit their own work in their own words. Allowance is always made for those who are working in a second language.

Class Schedule

January 8-March 27

Monday: 1150 am-1250 pm

Wednesday: 1040am -11:40am

Office Hours: B205

After Class, Both Days, First Come, First Serve

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TA

Mathew Haji-Michael

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Course Syllabus

Week 1: January 8. What is Democratic Freedom?

Thucydides Pericles "Funeral Oration" (450BC) excerpt
Aristotle *Politics*, Book IV, Ch. 4, excerpt

Week 2: January 13-15. Democratic Freedom and Tolerance.

Why is toleration the core democratic value?

Locke, John, *A letter concerning toleration*. London: 1690, ps. 6-10, 33-38

Week 3: January 20-22. Democratic Freedom and Checks and Balances

In democracies, why are checks and balances essential to freedom?

Montesquieu *Spirit of the laws* (1748), Book 2, chs. 1-6, ps. 154-166

Jean Jacques Rousseau *The Social Contract*, (1762), excerpts

Week 4: January 27-29. Democracy, Exclusion and Inclusion

If democracy is rule by the people, who counts as the people?

Mary Wollstonecraft *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, (1792)
Ch. 9 "Of the Pernicious Effects Which Arise from the Unnatural Distinctions
Established in Society"

John Stuart Mill & Harriet Taylor Mill "The Enfranchisement of Women" (1852)

Week 5: February 3-5 Democratic Freedom and Partisanship

If democracy is a battle for power, can it survive political partisanship?

Madison, James. Federalist No. 10: " *The Union as a Safeguard Against Domestic
Faction and Insurrection.*" (1787)

George Washington "Farewell Address" (1796) excerpts

1st Assignment Due, February 5, 5pm.

Week 6: February 10-12. Tyranny of the Majority and Freedom of Opinion

When does majority rule threaten freedom of thought and opinion?

Tocqueville, Alexis de, *Democracy in America* (1835-1840) Ch. 7, ps. 403-426

Mill, John Stuart. *On Liberty* (1859) ps. 5-13

Week 7: February 17-19. Democratic Freedom versus Revolutionary Freedom

If democratic freedom is only the freedom to vote and elect representatives, is full human emancipation possible?

Marx, Karl. "On the Jewish Question." (1844), ps. 1-20

Nietzsche, Friedrich. "The Greek State" in *The Genealogy of Morals* (1871) pp. 164-173

Week 8: February 24-26. Responsibility versus Conviction

What values should guide democratic leaders: their own convictions or their responsibility to their electorate?

Max Weber, "Politics as a Vocation" (1919), ps. 23-30

Week 9: March 3-5. Democracy and Fascism

What makes fascism a danger to democracy?

Benito Mussolini The Doctrine of Fascism

[https://www.gutenberg.org/files/14058/14058-h/14058-h.htm#THE DOCTRINE OF FASCISM](https://www.gutenberg.org/files/14058/14058-h/14058-h.htm#THE_DOCTRINE_OF_FASCISM)

Schmitt, Carl. *The Concept of the Political*, (1932) pp. 26-37

Second Assignment Due March 5, 5pm

Week 10: March 10-12: Democracy and Disobedience

When does democracy demand that you disobey?

B.R. Ambedkar "Speech at Mohad", (1927)

Martin Luther King Jr. "Letter from Birmingham Jail" (1963)

Week 11: March 17-19. Democratic Freedom and Justice

How to reconcile justice with democratic freedom?

Rawls, John. *A Theory of Justice*. (1970) "Political Justice and the Constitution", pp. 195-228

Week 12: March 24-26. Democratic Freedom's New Enemies

Why is autocracy on the march and democratic freedom in retreat?

Jingping, Xi. "CCP's 100th Anniversary." Speech, Beijing, 2021. NikkeiAsia;
<https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/Full-text-of-Xi-Jinping-s-speech-on-the-CCP-s-100th-anniversary>

Orban, Viktor. "Address on Illiberal Democracy." Speech, Bálványos Free Summer University and Youth Camp, Băile Tuşnad, Romania, 2014.

Vladimir Putin "Speech to the Munich Security Conference", 2008

Final Assignment Due March 26, 5pm.