Seminar in Modern Philosophy (PHIL 491/PHIL 516)
Thursday 11:00 to 2:00 Buchanan D304 Fall Term 2026
Professor Margaret Schabas Buchanan E358, margaret.schabas@ubc.ca
Office Hours: Tuesdays/Thursdays 2:00 to 3:00PM or by appointment

Course Description

This course offers an in-depth study of the major works by John Stuart Mill (1806-1873), one of the leading contributors to modern philosophy. Mill's thought is subtle and highly qualified, rather than dogmatic or doctrinaire. Yet his vision for the future was radical and, in many respects, reads as if he was a century or more ahead of his time. We will start with his epistemology and program for the social sciences, followed by his economic, moral, and political philosophy, and finish up with his contributions to feminism and the philosophy of religion. We will also situate his work in the broader context of modern philosophy to comprehend its significance.

Requirements

There are three written assignments: two short précis, and one research essay. The discussion in the seminar is of paramount importance. You are required to attend the seminar (2.5 hours, ending circa 1:30), and to actively participate, drawing explicitly on the assigned readings. You are allowed to miss one class without justification, but for additional absences, points will be deducted unless you provide a compelling reason. In November, I will set up obligatory ten-minute appointments in my office, to discuss your research essay and overall comprehension of Mill. I will also assign three of you each class to pose a single question based on the reading.

Grading

First précis: 15 (Written in class on October 22)
Second précis: 15 (500 words; Due on Canvas, November 20, 10PM)
Participation: 20
1:1 Meeting: 5 (TBA)
Essay Outline: 5 (Due November 16, 10PM)
Research Essay: 40 (2,500 words; Due December 10, 10PM)
100

Assigned Texts

J.S, Mill, *A System of Logic, Principles of Political Economy* and *Essays on Religion* will be placed on reserve with a 2-hour lending policy; the e-versions will be made available with links on Canvas. There are also multiple copies of Mill's works to be found at the UBC libraries.

J.S. Mill, *On Liberty, Utilitarianism and Other Essays,* edited by Mark Philp and Frederick Rosen (Oxford: Oxford University Press) (The other essays are *On Representative Government* and *The Subjection of Women*). Please purchase this book at the UBC Book Store, so that we are using the same pagination. It is an inexpensive paperback.

Caveats: Late submissions will have 5% deducted per day. Emails must be limited to one short paragraph. **No use of AI for composing either the written assignments or your emails to me.**

Course Schedule

September 10: Preliminaries: Mill's Life and Overview of his Philosophical Contributions (we will read portions of his Autobiography in class; bring a laptop and your CWL)

September 17: No class (I am presenting an invited lecture in Budapest)

September 24: *A System of Logic* (1843): Book I (start page 73 of online resource)

October 1: *A System of Logic* (1843): Book II

October 8: *A System of Logic* (1843): Book III

October 15: *A System of Logic* (1843): Book VI

October 22: *Principles of Political Economy* (1848), Books I-II (selected chapters, TBA); Book IV (Ch. 6 only). **First Précis** (11:00 to 11:45 AM, in D304 using the Lockdown Browser on your laptop; laptops can be borrowed from IBLC).

October 29: *On Liberty* (1859; co-authored with Harriet Taylor)

November 5: *Utilitarianism* (1861)

November 12: No class (Midterm Break)
November 16: Research Essay Outline (due on Canvas 10PM)

November 19: *On Representative Government* (1861)
November 20: **Second Précis** (due on Canvas 10PM)

November 26: *Subjection of Women* (1869)

December 3: "Three Essays on Religion" (1874)

December 10: **Research Essay Due** (2,500 words)

Précis: 500 words. Take a passage or chapter from the assigned work by Mill; pose questions of interpretation and attempt to answer them using the text and only the text. Do **no research**. For the in-class version I will provide you with three quotes from his *System of Logic,* and you are to write on **one** of them. The précis is intended to give you the opportunity to dig more deeply into a specific topic, to practice your writing, and to provide a souvenir of your study of Mill.

Research Essay: 2500 words. Find about five recent (post-1990) journal articles or book chapters that debate a specific question on Mill's philosophical writings. Adjudicate the debate in the secondary literature and develop an argument that establishes one scholar as more compelling than the others. More detailed instructions will be posted on Canvas.

Land Acknowledgment: UBC's Point Grey Campus is located on the ancestral and unceded territory of the xwməθkwəy̓əm (Musqueam) people. The land it is situated on has always been a place of learning for the Musqueam people, who for millennia have passed on their culture, history, and traditions from one generation to the next.

POLICIES AND REGULATIONS

Policy on academic honesty

All violations of UBC's standards for academic integrity will be reported to the office of the Dean of Arts. All violations of academic integrity standards will result in a grade of zero on the relevant assessment (exam, paper, assignment etc.). Students who do not have a previous offence may have the option to enter into a diversionary process with the Dean of Arts to resolve their misconduct (https://academicintegrity.ubc.ca/diversionary-process/). Any student who has a previous academic offence will be referred to the President's Advisory Committee on Student Discipline (PACSD) (https://universitycounsel.ubc.ca/homepage/guides-and-resources/discipline/). PACSD may impose additional penalties including: a transcript notation indicating that the student has committed an academic offence, zero in the course, and/or suspension or expulsion from the University. You are personally responsible for understanding and following the UBC's policies for academic integrity: https://vancouver.calendar.ubc.ca/campus-wide-policies-and-regulations/academic-honesty-and-standards.

Policy on academic concessions

There are only three acceptable grounds for academic concessions at UBC: unexpected changes in personal responsibilities that create a schedule conflict; medical circumstances; and compassionate grounds when the student experiences a traumatic event, sexual assault, or death in the family or of a close friend. Academic concessions for graded work and exams are granted for work that will be missed due to unexpected situations or circumstances. **Situations that are expected (such as time constraints due to workload in other courses) or are predictable (such as being scheduled for paid work) are not grounds for academic concession.** Requests for academic concessions should be made before the due date for that graded work and/or the writing of the exam. UBC policy does not allow for concessions to students who have missed work because they have registered for a course after the due date for that work. You can read more about the rules for academic concessions here: https://students.ubc.ca/enrolment/academic-learning-resources/academic-concessions. Students in the Faculty of Arts who require a concession can apply for concessions using this form here: https://students.air.arts.ubc.ca/academic-concession-form/. Students in other Faculties should consult their faculty website on academic concessions. Please note that the role of the faculty advising office is to review the evidence and to either support or not support concession requests. **The final decision to grant the request always rests with your instructor**.

Student success

UBC provides resources to support student learning and to maintain healthy lifestyles but recognizes that sometimes crises arise and so there are additional resources to access including those for survivors of sexual violence. UBC values respect for the person and ideas of all members of the academic community. Harassment and discrimination are not tolerated nor is suppression of academic freedom. UBC provides appropriate accommodation for students with disabilities and for religious, spiritual and cultural observances. UBC values academic honesty and students are expected to acknowledge the ideas generated by others and to uphold the highest academic standards in all of their actions. Details of the policies and how to access support are available here: https://senate.ubc.ca/policies-resources-support-student-success/.

Plagiarism

Plagiarism, which is intellectual theft, occurs where an individual submits or presents the oral or written work of another person as their own. Scholarship quite properly rests upon examining and referring to the thoughts and writings of others. However, when another person's words (i.e. phrases, sentences, or paragraphs), ideas, or entire works are used, the author must be acknowledged in the text, in footnotes, in endnotes, or in another accepted form of academic citation. Where direct quotations are made, they must be clearly delineated (for example, within quotation marks or separately indented). Failure to provide proper attribution is plagiarism because it represents someone else's work as one's own. Plagiarism should not occur in submitted drafts or final works. A student who seeks assistance from a tutor or other scholastic aids must ensure that the work submitted is the student's own. Students are responsible for ensuring that any work submitted does not constitute plagiarism. Students who are in any doubt as to what constitutes plagiarism should consult their instructor before handing in any assignments.

Policy on the use of AI learning tools

The specific rules for the use of AI tools are at the discretion of the course instructor. Those rules might change over the course of the term as new technologies become available. Changes to those rules might change the content of assessments and the way that your work is evaluated. If no written instructions on the use of AI tools have been provided by the instructor, the use of all AI tools is strictly prohibited in the course. Where the written instructions permit the use of AI tools, that usage must be documented and attributed within your assessment(s). Students are responsible for all factual inaccuracies that are created by the use of AI tools. Please speak to your instructor if you have further questions about the ways in which AI technology use is permitted in this course.
Policy of Professor Schabas: **No AI Tools are permitted to compose your assigned essays or your emails. Clear thinking and clear writing are like two sides of the same coin. Practice writing at every opportunity.**

Policy on sharing course materials

All the materials provided to you as part of this course are protected by copyright. All assignment instructions, quiz questions and answers, discussion questions, announcements, lecture slides, audio/video recordings, Canvas modules, and any other materials provided to you

by your instructor or in the textbook are for use only by students enrolled in this course this term. Sharing any of these materials beyond this course, including by posting on file-sharing websites (e.g., CourseHero, Google Docs) is a violation of copyright law and an academic offence. Copying and pasting sentences from the lecture notes or the textbook (e.g., definitions) into for-profit software (e.g., Quizlet) is likewise a violation of copyright law, and an academic offence. Violations of this policy will be treated according to the provisos of the Code of Student Conduct. For further information, see https://copyright.ubc.ca/students/.