

GRADUATE SEMINAR

Slavery and the History of Philosophy

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Course Description

This course explores various debates in the history of philosophy on the legitimacy of slavery. Through a study of the dominant forms of moral philosophy of the modern period, we will approach the questions of (a) why and how most moral philosophers of the modern period failed to embrace the abolition of slavery, and (b) on what grounds (moral and political) a small minority of thinkers rejected slavery, specifically in the historical context of the growth of the Atlantic slave trade from the sixteenth through the nineteenth centuries. We will also ask how philosophers' definitions of human nature, race, punishment, freedom, the constitution of a good society, and the rights of free enterprise either grounded or combated justifications for slavery. The forms of moral philosophy we will study include Aristotelianism, Stoicism, scholastic philosophy, Roman law, various forms of the natural law tradition, and early forms of utilitarianism. In addition to examining established canonical philosophers, we will be looking at alternative philosophical models that challenged the legitimacy of slavery, in thinkers such as Las Casas, Moirans, Wallace, Mary Astell, and Phillis Wheatley. In the final portion of the course, we will explore the debates around slavery in the United States, with an emphasis on pro-slavery apologists such as Thomas Dew, William Harper, and George Fitzhugh, and conclude the course with Black responses to slavery, including David Walker, Robert Wedderburn, Maria Stewart, and Frederick Douglass.

Assignment Requirements and Descriptions

Reading Responses | A short paper consisting of **five hundred words (eight hundred max)** will be due at the end of each topic-section (see due date schedule at the end of syllabus). There will be three total during the course of the semester. Ideally, your reading responses should provide talking points for classroom discussions and analyses on which to build your term paper. The reading responses must engage with the text—either in the form of a standard summary, a passage interpretation, critical interpretation, or comparative analysis—and be proofread and formatted according to Chicago Style. The reading responses are an avenue to maintain a regular writing schedule and an opportunity to engage with the text on a deeper level. Each response must be written **on at least one or more** readings from a previous or current topic-section (note: there will be 3–6 different authors in each section). No late submissions.

Guided Discussions | Students will be required to lead one class discussion on an author or topic chosen from the syllabus. Only one student can present on a given day. The objective of student presentations is not simply to demonstrate knowledge of the text but to facilitate discussion amongst your classmates on a chosen topic or issue in the text. Guided discussions should be 5–10 minutes. A detailed worksheet that includes a grading rubric and outlines individual and group presentation expectations can be found at the end of the syllabus.

Term Papers | There will be a term paper (15–25 double-spaced pages) due at the end of the semester. Although you will research and respond to a scholarly discussion, the trajectory of the paper’s analysis will be wholly determined and guided by your own questions, philosophical reflections, and line of argumentation. Please format your paper in accordance with Chicago Style. Also, feel free to incorporate the analysis from your reading responses and article reviews (see below) into your term paper.

Article Reviews | Article reviews are assigned to help students become familiar with the secondary literature that relates to the topics and themes treated in the course. An article review is a page-long summary and evaluation of a scholarly article. Students are required to write **two** article reviews of secondary sources during the course of the semester.

Course Reading Schedule

(Subject to Change)

Date	Assigned Reading	Assignments
Early Justifications of Natural Slavery and Voluntary Slavery (Weeks 1–4)		
	Aristotle, <i>Politics</i> , Book One (and extracts)	
	Justinian, <i>Institutes + Digest</i> (extracts)	
	Augustine, <i>On the City of God</i> , Book XIX, ch. 15 Augustine, Letters on the Slave Trade in Northern Africa Aquinas, <i>Commentary of Aristotle’s Politics</i> (extracts) Aquinas, <i>Summa Theologica</i> , Question XCVI Pope Paul III, <i>Sublimis Deus</i> (1537) Francisco Vitoria, “Letter to Bernardino,” “On the Indians Lately Discovered,” and <i>Political Writings</i> (selections)	

The Debate(s) between Las Casas and Sepúlveda (Week 5)		
	Lawrence A. Clayton and David M. Lantigua, eds., <i>Bartholomé de las Casas and the Defense of Amerindian Rights</i>	
	Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda, <i>Democrates Alter</i> (extracts) Bartolomé de Las Casas, <i>Historia de las Indias</i> (extracts)	
Modern Debates on Liberty, the Law of Nations, Voluntary Slavery, and Prisoners of War (Weeks 6-7)		
	Hugo Grotius, <i>The Rights of War and Peace</i> , Book II and Book III Samuel Pufendorf, “On Men’s Natural State” and “On the Duties of Masters and Slaves,” in <i>On the Duty of Man and Citizen According to Natural Law</i>	
	T. Hobbes, <i>On the Citizen</i> and <i>Leviathan</i> (extracts) G. Leibniz, “Reflections on the Common Concept of Justice” Gershom Carmichael, “On the Rights of Masters and Servants,” from “Supplements and Observations upon Samuel Pufendorf’s “On the Duty of Man and Citizen” in <i>Natural Rights on the Threshold of the Scottish Enlightenment</i> Epifanio de Moirans, <i>A Just Defense of the Natural Freedom of Slaves</i> (extracts)	

Real and Metaphorical Slavery (Weeks 8-9)	
	<p>John Locke, <i>Two Treatises of Government, Second Treatise</i>, chapters 1 to 6</p> <p>Laws of Virginia on Slaves, 1705 and <i>The Constitution of the Carolinas</i></p> <p>Mary Astell, <i>Some Reflections on Marriage</i> (1700)</p> <p>Judith Drake, <i>An Essay in Defense of the Female Sex</i> (1696)</p> <p>Phillis Wheatley, <i>Complete Writings</i> (selections)</p> <p>George Wallace, <i>A System of the Principles of the Law of Scotland</i> (1760)</p>
British Abolitionists and Early Voices Against Slavery (Weeks 10-12)	
	<p>William Wilberforce, <i>Papers</i>, 1760s (selections)</p> <p>Thomas Clarkson, <i>An Essay on the Slavery and Commerce of the Human Species</i>, Book II and Book III (selections)</p> <p>Edmund Burke (1780), “Negro Code” and the <i>Reflections on French Revolution</i> (extracts), Burke’s Speech on Fox’s Indian Bill (Parliament, 1783)</p> <p>Olaudah Equiano, <i>The Interesting Narrative and Other Writings</i>, selections.</p>

	<p>Quobna Ottobah Cugoano, <i>Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil of Slavery</i> (whole)</p> <p>Cugoano, Correspondences</p>	
Pro-Slavery and the American South (Week 13)		
	<p>Thomas Dew, TBA George Fitzhugh, TBA William Haper, TBA</p>	
Liberation and Black Voices from the Nineteenth Century (Weeks 14-16)		
	<p>David Walker, <i>The Appeal to the Colored Citizens of the World</i> (selections)</p> <p>Maria W. Stewart, Lecture September 21, 1832</p> <p>Frederick Douglass, “What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?”</p> <p>Francis Wedderburn, <i>The Horrors of Slavery</i> (extracts)</p>	