

Subfield: Political Theory
Field: America

Subfield courses:

Gov 94le: "Liberalism and Empire"

(to be replaced with Gov 1061: "History of Modern Political Philosophy" if I can't get into 94le)

ER 11: "Human Rights: A Philosophical Introduction"

I am interested in the ways that Americans have developed, articulated, understood, deployed, and contested key concepts in political theory. These concepts include freedom, equality, republicanism, democracy, sovereignty, nationhood, and rights ("natural," civil, human). For my subfield, I propose to explore these concepts through two courses in connection with my other coursework in the America field in History and Literature.

In my coursework in the America field, I am considering how the political thought of the American founding (Gov 1074)—and its blind spots—figured into later black freedom struggles (HL 90l: "Stories of Slavery and Freedom") and how its supposed universalism both justified and came into tension with the American imperialism (USW 28: "Slavery/Capitalism/Imperialism"; HL 90ak: "The Vietnam War in American Culture"). I am especially interested in what John Stuart Mill and others observed to be a tension between liberalism at home and despotism abroad even as they defended imperialism in terms of the spread of liberal ideas and values. This is the central theme of Professor Welch's seminar (Gov 94le: "Liberalism and Empire"); if I can't get into that seminar, I'll replace it with Professor Rosenblum's "History of Modern Political Philosophy" (Gov 1061).

I also hope to explore the relationships between negative and positive freedom and between formal and participatory democracy by taking one course in my field (Hist 1330: "Social Thought in Modern America") and adding ER 11, "Human Rights: A Philosophical Introduction" for my subfield. Along these lines, we did a unit in my junior tutorial last semester on neoliberalism and its critics. For my senior thesis, I am thinking about a project on U.S. interventions in Latin America in the 1980s, possibly with a focus on Joan Didion's 1983 book and Oliver Stone's 1986 film about El Salvador.