

Politics and Culture from All Sides

Spring 2026

Dates: Wednesday, 1/28, 2/4, 2/11, 2/18, 2/25, 3/4, 3/11, 3/25, 4/1, 4/15, 4/22

Time: 12:00-1:15 PM

Facilitators: Professor [Eitan Hersh](#), [Arik Burakovsky](#)

Location: Eaton 201

Course Description

Hosted by the [Center for Expanding Viewpoints in Higher Education](#) (CEVIHE), this weekly series explores politics and culture by reading controversial books and articles, engaging with faculty discussants and guest speakers, and discussing sensitive political, economic, and social issues with depth, humility, and courage. Each week, participants will encounter sophisticated arguments associated with a diversity of ideological, religious, and cultural worldviews. Lunch will be provided.

This series is offered as a 1-credit reading group (PS 0008-02: Workshop in Political Science), but all students, faculty, and staff across Tufts University are welcome to attend regardless of their official enrollment in the course. Non-enrolled attendees are encouraged to participate routinely.

Expectations

All participants are expected to treat others with respect. By design, this series will present attendees with a wide range of perspectives, some of which you may find objectionable. Those who do not want to discuss controversial public affairs and policy topics in a civil, rigorous manner should not attend.

Students enrolled in the reading group for credit must review all assigned pre-class readings and other materials and actively participate in the discussion. All other participants are strongly encouraged to do the same. All readings will be made available online via Canvas. Please [contact us](#) if you want to be added to the Canvas site or if you have any questions about the workshop.

Schedule

January 28: Moral Law and Human Nature

Does the universal human sense of right and wrong point to an objective moral law, or can it be fully explained as a social or evolutionary construct?

Reading: C.S. Lewis. [*Mere Christianity*](#). London, UK: Geoffrey Bles, 1952. (Books 1 and 2)

Discussant: Professor [Yonatan Brafman](#), Department of Religion

February 4: Nutrition Policy

Should governments shape our food choices for the public good, or is that a recipe for "nanny state" overreach?

Reading: Dariush Mozaffarian, Emily A. Callahan, and William H. Frist. "[The MAHA Commission Report and Diet-Related Diseases in Youth](#)." *JAMA* 334, no. 6 (2025): 487–488.

The White House. [The MAHA Report](#). *Make Our Children Healthy Again: Assessment*. May 22, 2025.

Discussant: Professor [Dariush Mozaffarian](#), Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy

February 11: Christianity and the American Founding

To what extent did religious ideas influence the political principles of the American founders, and how did they understand the relationship between public life and religion?

Reading: Mark David Hall. [Did America Have a Christian Founding?: Separating Modern Myth from Historical Truth](#). Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2019. (Introduction, Chapter 1)

Discussant: Professor [David Art](#), Department of Political Science

February 18: Ukraine and the Limits of Just War

Is framing the Russia-Ukraine war in moral absolutes analytically clarifying, or does it obscure difficult trade-offs involving escalation, negotiation, and competing ethical obligations?

Reading: Stephen M. Walt. "[The Morality of Ukraine's War Is Very Murky](#)." *Foreign Policy*, September 22, 2023.

Discussant: Professor [Oxana Shevel](#), Department of Political Science

February 25: Human Flourishing

If rising wealth and technological progress do not reliably translate into greater well-being, what would a society built for genuine human flourishing require instead?

Reading: Tyler VanderWeele. [A Theology of Health: Wholeness and Human Flourishing](#). Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2024. (Part I)

Discussant: Professor [Tyler VanderWeele](#), Director of the Human Flourishing Program, Harvard University

March 4: Art as a Mode of Open Inquiry

How can art function as a distinctive mode of open inquiry, separate from conventional political argumentation, by producing ambiguity and sustained reflection?

Reading: Vid Simoniti. "[What does art do?](#)" *Aeon*. October 27, 2022.

Discussant: Professor [Andrew McClellan](#), Department of the History of Art and Architecture

March 11: The Cultural Influence of "Wokeness"

Does contemporary "wokeness" represent a durable shift in cultural influence, or is it a transient rhetorical frame whose influence is already receding?

Reading: Richard Hanania. "[Yes, Sydney Sweeney's Boobs Are Anti-Woke](#)." *Substack*, March 19, 2024.

Discussant: Professor [Eitan Hersh](#), Department of Political Science

March 25: School Choice and Public Education

Should the political left reconsider its opposition to school choice as a means of advancing equity and self-determination, or does school choice ultimately undermine the democratic functions of public education?

Reading: Jorge Elorza. "[It's Time for the Left to Come to the School Choice Table.](#)" Center for Reinventing Public Education, 2025.

Discussant: Professor [Elizabeth Setren](#), Department of Economics

April 1: Free Trade, Protectionism, and Economic Development

How should governments today think about the appropriate mix of trade openness, restrictions, and industrial policy in an increasingly competitive global economy?

Reading: Ha-Joon Chang. [Bad Samaritans: The Myth of Free Trade and the Secret History of Capitalism](#). London, UK: Bloomsbury Press, 2007. (Chapters 1 and 2)

Discussant: Professor [Daniel Drezner](#), The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy

April 15: The Environmental Impact of Fast Fashion

How should moral responsibility for the environmental costs of fast fashion be distributed among consumers, firms, and governments?

Reading: Xiaoyang Long. "[How does fast fashion affect the environment?](#)" Economics Observatory. March 26, 2025.

Discussant: Professor [Silke Forbes](#), Department of Economics

April 22: The Boundaries of Campus Speech

When, if ever, should speech be understood as a form of violence, and what are the ethical, educational, and political consequences of adopting such a framework?

Reading: Jonathan Haidt and Greg Lukianoff. "[Why It's a Bad Idea to Tell Students Words Are Violence.](#)" *The Atlantic*. July 18, 2017.

Discussant: Professor [Jonathan Tirrell](#), Jonathan M. Tisch College of Civic Life