

POLSCI 252: Modern Political Thought

MEETING SCHEDULE M/W/F, 9:00 – 9:50 a.m. Wheatley Hall, Rm. W01-0064 INSTRUCTOR Brian Palmiter EMAIL Brian.Palmiter@umb.edu OFFICE LOCATION Wheatley Hall, 5th Floor, Rm. 102 OFFICE HOURS TBA	COURSE OVERVIEW This course offers an introduction to the history of Western political ideas from Hobbes to Rawls. Close readings of the canon allow us to discuss enduring questions regarding freedom, equality, legitimacy, political economy, and liberalism. Particular attention is paid to the development of political liberalism by thinkers such as Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, Kant, and Mill, as well as the radical critiques of liberalism advanced by traditionalism, socialism, feminism, and critical race theory. The course concludes with a look at the continuing impact of these canonical thinkers on contemporary political thought. ASSIGNMENTS & GRADING <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Attendance & participation (15%)</i>• <i>Weekly reading responses (15%):</i> 200 – 300 words. Due 9 p.m. Sundays.• <i>1st paper (15%):</i> 1000 – 1200 words. Hard copy due in-class Oct 10 (W).• <i>Midterm exam (15%):</i> Text ID and short answer. In-class Nov 5 (M).• <i>2nd paper (20%):</i> 1200 – 1400 words. Hard copy due in-class Dec 3 (M).• <i>Final exam (20%):</i> Text ID and short answer. Due date TBA. <p>Attendance and active participation are expected. Absences may be excused with a medical note or by prior permission of the instructor. After three absences, excused or unexcused, every subsequent unexcused absence will result in a 1/3-letter-grade drop in your attendance grade. I count two instances of lateness as one absence.</p> <p>Late papers are penalized 1/3 of a letter grade per day late. (1/3 = A → A-)</p> CLASSROOM POLICY No electronics in class. You are expected to bring hard copies of the course texts with you to class. ACADEMIC INTEGRITY POLICY Dishonesty of any kind will not be tolerated in this course. Dishonesty includes, but is not limited to, cheating, plagiarizing, fabricating information or citations, facilitating acts of academic dishonesty by others, etc. The consequence for academic dishonesty is failure of the specific assignment, or (if a repeat offense) the course as a whole. Disciplinary procedures may also be initiated as outlined in the sections on Academic Standards, Cheating, and Plagiarism in the Code of Student Conduct in the University Undergraduate Catalog.
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REQUIRED TEXTS

Hobbes, Thomas. *Leviathan: With Selected Variants from the Latin Edition of 1668*. Edited by Edwin Curley. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 1994. ISBN: 978-0872201774.

Locke, John. *Two Treatises of Government*. Edited by Peter Laslett. Student ed. Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988. ISBN: 978-0521357302.

Mill, John Stuart. *On Liberty, Utilitarianism, and Other Essays*. Edited by Mark Philp and Frederick Rosen. Oxford World's Classics. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015. ISBN: 978-0199670802.

Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. *The Social Contract and Other Later Political Writings*. Edited by Victor Gourevitch. Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997. ISBN: 978-0521424462.

PART 1: The Foundations of Liberalism

Introduction

W Sept 5 Defunct Economists and Academic Scribblers

Key Questions:

1. What is political theory?
2. What is the value of studying the *history* of political thought?
3. How are we supposed to engage with these (often problematic!) texts?

Readings:

- None
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Hobbes's *Leviathan*

F Sept 7 Hobbes: Ancient vs. Modern Political Thought

Key Questions:

1. What is “modern” about modern political thought?
2. What are the circumstances in which Hobbes was writing?
3. What is modern about Hobbes's political thought?

Readings:

- Hobbes, *Leviathan*, intro: pp. 1 – 5.
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M Sept 10 **Hobbes: The Specter of Skepticism**

Key Questions:

1. How should we understand Hobbes's account of sense perceptions and dreams?
2. What role does geometry play in Hobbes's argument in chapter 5?
3. Is Hobbes a skeptic?

Readings:

- Hobbes, *Leviathan*, chs. 1, 2, 5, and 7: pp. 6 – 11, 22 – 27, and 35 – 37.
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W Sept 12 **Hobbes: A True Believer in True Religion?**

Key Questions:

1. Is Hobbes an unorthodox Christian or a closeted atheist? Why is this an important question to answer?
2. How does Hobbes's account of religion take on new significance in light of everything he said in the preceding chapters?
3. What is Hobbes's criticism of Catholicism?

Readings:

- Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ch. 12: pp. 63 – 74.
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F Sept 14 **No Class – Cancelled by Instructor**

M Sept 17 **Hobbes: The State of Nature is a State of War**

Key Questions:

1. Hobbes is one of the first thinkers to root his political theories in an idea of human equality. In what sense does Hobbes mean to say humans are “equal” to one another?
2. What is the state of nature? Is it supposed to be a historical state?
3. What are “laws of nature” and how can they rescue us from the horrors of the state of nature?

Readings:

- Hobbes, *Leviathan*, chs. 13 – 14, skim 15: pp. 74 – 88, skim 89 – 100.
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W Sept 19 **Hobbes: The Birth of the Sovereign**

Key Questions:

1. How does the creation of a sovereign solve the problems of the state of nature?
2. What are the restrictions the creation of the sovereign imposes on subjects?

Readings:

- Hobbes, *Leviathan*, chs. 17 – 18: pp. 106 – 118.
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F Sept 21 **Hobbes: Forms of Sovereignty**

Key Questions:

3. What are the forms sovereignty can take? What is Hobbes's preferred form?
4. Is a coerced contract valid? What is the significance of this consideration?
5. Is Hobbes a proto-feminist?

Readings:

- Hobbes, *Leviathan*, chs. 19 – 20: pp. 118 – 132 (par. 15).
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M Sept 24 **Hobbes: Liberty and Law**

Key Questions:

1. What is Hobbes's conception of freedom? Is it compelling?
2. What are the consequences of Hobbes's conception of freedom?
3. What is the source of the sovereign's legitimacy, according to Hobbes?

Readings:

- Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ch. 21: pp. 136 – 145.
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W Sept 26 **Hobbes: The Legitimacy of Leviathan**

Key Questions:

1. Why is Hobbes convinced the sovereign needs so much power?
2. Is Hobbes a totalitarian or a proto-liberal?
3. Does Hobbes achieve the goals he set for himself?

Readings:

- Hobbes, *Leviathan*, chs. 29 – 30 (selections): pp. 212 – 213, 219 – 230.
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F Sept 28 **Writing Workshop**

Key Questions:

1. What does good writing look like?
2. What does a good *political theory* paper look like?

Readings:

- "Writing a Political Theory Paper" guidelines.
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John Locke's *Second Treatise of Government*

M Oct 1 **Locke: The State of Nature and the State of War**

Key Questions:

1. What were the circumstances in which Locke was writing?
2. How does Locke's account of the state of nature compare to that of Hobbes?

Readings:

- Locke, "Second Treatise," *Two Treatises of Government*, chs. 1 – 3 and 6 (§§54-57, 61, and 63): pp. 267 – 282, 304 – 306, and 308 – 309.
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W Oct 3 **Locke: Property and the “Lockean Proviso”**

Key Questions:

1. How does one come to acquire property in the state of nature?
2. What are the limits on this acquisition?

Readings:

- Locke, “Second Treatise,” *Two Treatises of Government*, ch. 5: pp. 285 – 302.

F Oct 5 **Locke: Legitimacy, Consent, and the Ends of Politics**

Key Questions:

1. What is the role of consent in Locke’s account of the beginning of political society?
2. What is the purpose of political society?
3. What is Locke’s core criticism of Hobbes in chapter 7?

Readings:

- Locke, John. *Two Treatises of Government*, chs. 8 (§§ 95 – 101, 104, 113–116, 119 – 122), 9, and 7 (§§ 87 – 94): pp. 330 – 334, 336, 344 – 353, 323 – 330.

M Oct 8 **No Class – Columbus Day**

W Oct 10 **Locke: Conquest and Slavery**

First paper due!

Key Questions:

1. How does Locke’s account of coerced contracts compare to Hobbes’s?
2. Is slavery compatible with natural rights?

Readings:

- Locke, John. *Two Treatises of Government*, chs. 16, 17, and 4: pp. 384 – 398 and 283 – 285.

F Oct 12 **Locke: The Appeal to Heaven**

Key Questions:

1. When is revolution justified? How does Locke’s answer fit within his broader theory of the social contract?
2. How might the differences between Locke and Hobbes be connected to the different circumstances in which they were writing?
3. In what ways were the Founders following Locke?

Readings:

- Locke, John. *Two Treatises of Government*, chs. 18 (§§199 and 201) and 19: pp. 398 – 400 and 406 – 419.
- U.S. Declaration of Independence

Rousseau's *The Social Contract*

M Oct 15 **Rousseau: Freedom From Our Chains**

Key Questions:

1. What is the project Rousseau is attempting in this work?
2. What is Rousseau's assessment of slavery?
3. What is it that men contract into when they join the ideal society?
4. How does Rousseau's account of property compare to the account we saw in Locke?

Readings:

- Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, Book I: pp. 41 – 56.
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W Oct 17 **Rousseau: The General Will**

Key Questions:

1. What is the general will? How is it recognized?
2. How does the general will attempt to solve the problem of freedom and legitimacy posed at the beginning of Book I?
3. How does the “general” nature of the general will impose limits on the sovereign?

Readings:

- Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, Book II, chs. 1 – 6 and 11: pp. 57 – 68 and 78 – 80.
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F Oct 19 **Rousseau: Private, Corporate, and General Wills**

Key Questions:

1. What is the difference between the government and the sovereign?
2. What does Rousseau think about the desirability of each form of government (i.e. democracy, aristocracy, monarchy)?
3. Does Rousseau think representative government is desirable?

Readings:

- Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, Book III, chs. 1, 2, 10 – 15: pp. 82 – 89, 106 – 116.
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M Oct 22 **Rousseau: Rousseauian Republicanism**

Key Questions:

1. Is Rousseau a popular democrat?
2. What is Rousseau's argument for a “civil religion”? Is it persuasive?

Readings:

- Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, Book IV, chs. 1, 2, and 8: pp. 121 – 125 and 142 – 151.
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J.S. Mill's *On Liberty*

W Oct 24 **Mill: Tyranny of the Majority**

Key Questions:

1. What is “tyranny of the majority” and why is it Mill’s chosen target?
2. What are the political and social implications of the Harm Principle?

Readings:

- Mill, “On Liberty,” *On Liberty, Utilitarianism, and Other Essays*, ch. 1: pp. 5 – 17.
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F Oct 26 **Mill: Freedom to Disagree**

Key Questions:

1. What are the core arguments Mill advances for protecting liberty of conscience and speech?
2. Is the “marketplace of ideas” metaphor sound? Does Mill think it is?
3. In what ways is Mill’s argument based on utilitarian premises?

Readings:

- Mill, “On Liberty,” *On Liberty, Utilitarianism, and Other Essays*, ch. 2: pp. 18 – 44.
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M Oct 29 **Mill: Experiments in Living**

Key Questions:

1. What are “experiments in living”?
2. What does custom have to teach us about the good life?

Readings:

- Mill, “On Liberty,” *On Liberty, Utilitarianism, and Other Essays*, ch. 3: pp. 55 – 68.
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W Oct 31 **Mill: The Limits of Legitimate Coercion**

Key Questions:

1. Is there a principled way to apply the Harm Principle?
2. Again, in what ways is Mill’s argument based on utilitarian premises?

Readings:

3. Mill, “On Liberty,” *On Liberty, Utilitarianism, and Other Essays*, ch. 4: pp. 73 – 82.
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F Nov 2 **Midterm Exam Review**

M Nov 5 *****Midterm Exam*****

PART 2: Challenges to Liberalism

Challenges from the Left

W Nov 7 **Kant: The Idea of Progress**

Key Questions:

1. What is “philosophy of history,” and what is Kant’s philosophy of history?
2. How does Kant’s theory of human nature and the development of society compare to the theories of Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau?

Readings:

- Kant, “Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Intent.”
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F Nov 9 **Marx: Historical Materialism**

Key Questions:

1. What is historical materialism? How does historical materialism “invert” the Hegelian (or Kantian) philosophy of history?
2. Is historical materialism plausible?

Readings:

- Marx, “The German Ideology,” *The Marx-Engels Reader*: pp. 155 – 163.
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M Nov 12 **No Class – Veterans Day**

W Nov 14 **Marx: Economic Theory**

Key Questions:

1. How does capitalism contain the seeds of its own destruction, according to Marx? Why might his predictions have failed to be born out?
2. Is meaningful political action possible according to this view of things? (Or, what’s the *point* of being a communist?)

Readings:

- Marx and Engels, “Wage Labor and Capital,” *The Marx-Engels Reader*: pp. 203 – 217.
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F Nov 16 **Marx: Historical Materialism and Ideology**

Key Questions:

1. In what ways do ideas matter in Marx’s theory of historical materialism?

Readings:

- Engels, “Letters on Historical Materialism,” *The Marx-Engels Reader*: pp. 760 – 767.
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M Nov 19 **Political Ideology**

Key Questions:

1. How do economic forces shape the flawed political ideologies of both the weak and the powerful, according to Stanley?
2. Would Marx agree with Stanley's account of ideology?

Readings:

- Stanley, Jason. "Political Ideologies," in *How Propaganda Works*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015: 223-251.

W Nov 21 **Political Ideology, cont'd.**

Key Questions:

1. Does Stanley's account accurately describe the ideologies witnessed in contemporary American political life?
2. Is liberalism just a "legitimizing myth" perpetuated by the powerful?

Readings:

- Stanley, Jason. "Political Ideologies," in *How Propaganda Works*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015: 223-251.

F Nov 23 **No Class – Thanksgiving**

M Nov 26 **Pateman: Feminist Challenges to the Liberal Social Contract Tradition**

Key Questions:

1. What is the "sexual contract" and what are its terms? What are its consequences?
2. Is the sexual contract a historical contract?
3. What is problematic about the public/private distinction common to liberal political theories?
4. Is Pateman indicting contract theory as practiced or in principle?

Readings:

- Pateman, Carole, *The Sexual Contract*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1988: pp. 39 – 76.

W Nov 28 **Mills: The Racial Contract**

Key Questions:

1. What is "the racial contract" and what are its terms? What are the consequences of the racial contract?
2. Is the racial contract a historical contract?
3. Is Mills indicting contract theory as practiced or in principle?

Readings:

- Mills, Charles W., *The Racial Contract*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997: pp. 9-40.

Challenges from the Right

F Nov 30 **Burke: An Entailed Inheritance**

Key Questions:

1. What does Burke mean when he praises “prejudice”?
2. Can tradition be a source of legitimacy?
3. In what sense is Burke a “conservative” critic of liberalism?
4. Why are there so few “conservative” critics on the syllabus? Is this defensible?

Readings:

- Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, selections TBA.
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PART 3: The Future of Liberalism

Rawls's *Theory of Justice*

M Dec 3 **Rawls: The Main Idea of Justice as Fairness**

Second paper due!

Key Questions:

1. How does Rawls's theory compare to the social contract theories of Hobbes, Locke, or Rousseau?

Readings:

- Rawls, John. *A Theory of Justice*. Revised ed. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999, §§ 3 – 4, 11: pp. 10 – 19, 52 – 56.
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W Dec 5 **Rawls: The Two Principles of Justice**

Key Questions:

1. What are the two principles of justice?
2. What does it mean to say the principles have a lexical prioritization?
3. Are the two principles Rawls defends the principles that would be chosen in the Original Position?

Readings:

- Lovett, *Rawls's A Theory of Justice*, selections #1
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F Dec 7 **Rawls: The Argument for Justice as Fairness**

Key Questions:

1. What types of arguments does Rawls make for his theory? Which type is most persuasive?
2. Is Rawls's theory an improvement on those of Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, etc.?

Readings:

- Lovett, *Rawls's A Theory of Justice*, selections #2
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Liberalism Today

M Dec 10 **Illiberal Democracy and Undemocratic liberalism**

Key Questions:

1. Do you believe it is “essential” to live in a country that is governed democratically?
2. Why is liberal democracy especially vulnerable in the early 21st century?
3. What is more worrying, illiberal democracy or undemocratic liberalism?

Readings:

- Mounk and Foa, “The Undemocratic Dilemma.”
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Concluding Reflections

W Dec 12 **Shklar: The Liberalism of Fear**

Key Questions:

1. How does Shklar defend the legitimacy of the liberalism of fear (and critique other liberal theories)?
2. Is the liberalism of fear a “lowering of one’s sights”?
3. What would Mill think of Shklar’s argument? What would Nietzsche think?

Readings:

- Shklar, Judith. “The Liberalism of Fear.” In *Liberalism and the Moral Life*, edited by Nancy L. Rosenblum. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1989: pp. 21 – 38.
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F Dec 14 **Wrap-up and Review**

Key Questions:

1. Can liberal contract theories meet the force of their critics?
2. What is necessary for government to be legitimate?

Readings:

- None
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