

Politics 3334e: Contemporary Political Theory 2020-21

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Contemporary Political Theory is a very large and very diverse area. Any course on the topic will have to be selective. The design of this course reflects two decisions. One decision, relating to course content, is that our readings will pick out issues arising from the three most-discussed values in recent political thought: liberty, equality, community. The Fall term will discuss issues connected with liberty. The Winter term will turn to equality (first half) and community (second half). We will read and discuss some of the most influential and controversial works devoted to those issues.

The second decision, related to learning outcomes, is that the emphasis throughout should be on *political argument*. The most important objective is that students should be helped to develop the ability to reach, present and defend reasoned positions on contested matters, in ways that take account of rival views. We will try to develop this ability both in our seminar discussions and in our written work.

In 2020-21 the course will be offered online, synchronously, via Zoom. Zoom meetings will be at 11.30-1.30 on Tuesdays, and there will be a Zoomed office hour 2.30-4 on Tuesdays. Those times will be set up as recurrent meetings in my Zoom account and students will receive weekly invitations with a link to attend. The office hour is of course voluntary but students should feel free to attend it if they have questions. Since all students have access to the office hour, private "office hour" consultations are not possible, but students should also feel free to email me at any (preferably weekday!) time.

Here is how the course will be structured. Each meeting will have three parts: (1) break-out group discussions of the week's readings (approx. 20 minutes) (2) reports from the break-out groups leading to a general discussion (approx. an hour) (3) a talk by me (approx. 20 minutes) introducing the readings for the following week.

Assignments:

1. A one-page weekly report on the readings. A sentence or two on each reading, stating what you take the main point to be; a sentence or two on what you take to be the main point of difference between the readings; a statement of your own view and/or a question that you want to raise. **To be submitted to me by email by 4 pm on the day before each class.** There is no mark for the weekly report, which is simply meant to ensure that you are informed enough to be in a position to contribute to class discussion. But if you fail to submit 18 acceptable weekly reports, on time, during the year, you will not be eligible for a participation grade (see below).
2. Participation grade: 25%. This will be based on the helpfulness of your contributions to our discussions during the year. The quantity or number of contributions is not in itself a criterion,

but as a rule of thumb you should be concerned about your contribution if you let two weeks or more go by without being part of the discussion.

3. Two term papers, due December 8 2020 and April 5 2021, worth 25% each. Late penalty 2% per day. 10-12 pages double-spaced. Use in-text referencing rather than footnotes. The paper should be on one of our weekly discussion topics, drawing on and critically evaluating the set readings for that topic. Other readings should not be used, except as sources for relevant facts. If you want to do a “crossover” topic drawing on the readings for different weeks, that’s fine, but check with me first.

4. Final exam, 2 hours, essay-type questions, 25%, on a date to be set by the Registrar. The topics will be drawn from the whole year. Near the end of winter term I will give you a list of topics to be covered. The questions will involve bringing together readings from different weeks.

Schedule: [Note – all readings are on the OWL course site under “Resources.” The title of the OWL file follows the topic of the week]

September 15: Introduction to the course

September 22: Icebreaker week – Should we take down statues? Discussion of Chong-Ming Lim, “Vandalizing Tainted Commemorations,” *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 2020 . No written weekly report due this week --- read Lim’s paper and think about which argument(s) you find most persuasive. [OWL Lim]

September 29:

Are there “Two Concepts of Liberty”? Isaiah Berlin’s classic paper, “Two Concepts of Liberty,” and a critique by Charles Taylor, “What’s Wrong with Negative Liberty?” both in David Miller ed., *Liberty* [OWL Berlin&Taylor]

The following four weeks take up specific controversial claims in Berlin’s paper.

October 6: Nonstate impediments to freedom? Friedrich Hayek, “Freedom and coercion,” in Miller ed *Liberty*, chapter 2, Jeremy Waldron. “Homelessness and the Issue of Freedom,” in *Liberal Rights*, [OWL Hayek&Waldron]

October 13: Is paternalism *really* bad? Nicholas Dixon, “Boxing, Paternalism and Legal Moralism,” *Social Theory and Practice* 2001, Ronald Dworkin, “Can a Liberal State Support Art?” in *A Matter of Principle* [OWL Dixon&Dworkin]

October 20: *Is there a minimum area of freedom that must not be infringed?* Alan Dershowitz, *Why Terrorism Works*, ch 4, David Luban, “Liberalism, Torture and the Ticking Bomb,” *Virginia Law Review* 2007 [OWL Dershowitz&Luban]

October 27: Are liberty and democracy different values? Jeremy Waldron, "Rights and Majorities," in *Liberal Rights*, Stephen Holmes, "Precommitment and the Paradox of Democracy," in Elester and Slagstad eds., *Constitutionalism and Democracy* [OWL Waldron&Holmes]

The following four weeks take up particular liberty-related issue areas

November 9: How important is autonomy? Sarah Conly, *Against Autonomy*, ch 1, Cass Sunstein and Robert Thaler, *Nudge*, Introduction [OWL Conly&Thaler]

November 16: How free should expression be? Two controversies. Bhiku Parekh, "The Rushdie Affair," *Political Studies* 1990, Dale Miller, "JS Mill and Charlottesville" [OWL Parekh&Miller]

November 23: Free movement? Joseph Carens, "Migration and Morality," in Barry and Goodin eds, *Free Movement*, David Miller "Immigration: The Case for Limits," in Cohen and Wellman eds., *Contemporary Debates in Applied Ethics* [OWL Carens&Miller]

November 30: Freedom to procreate? David Benatar, *Better Never to Have Been* ch 2, Hugh LaFollette, "Licensing Parents," in Tittle ed , *Should Parents be Licensed?* [OWL Benatar&LaFollette]

December 1: *Class cancelled in favour of extended office hours for advice on essays, 11.30-1.30 and 2-4.*

December 8: **Term 1 essay due** by 5.p.m. A talk introducing the second term topics.

Six weeks on "Equality"

January 6: Equality vs. liberty? Rawls v. Nozick. We read a chapter of Adam Swift's *Political Philosophy* as an introduction to the question [OWL Swiftchapter]

January 13: What is the point of equality? Elizabeth Anderson, "What is the Point of Equality?" *Ethics* 1999, T.M. Scanlon, "The Diversity of Objections to Inequality," in Clayton and Williams eds *The Ideal of Equality* [OWL Scanlon&Anderson]

January 20: What should be the scope of equality? Susan Okin, *Justice Gender and the Family* ch 5, G.A. Cohen, *If You're an Egalitarian How Come You're So Rich?* Ch 8 [OWL Cohen&Okin]

January 27: Does equality require equal treatment? The question of affirmative action. Dworkin, "Bakke's Case," in *A Matter of Principle* ch 14, Robert Simon, "Preferential Hiring," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 1974 [OWL Dworkin&Simon]

February 2: Just adults? Equality for children. Frances Shrag, "Children and Democracy," *Politics, Philosophy and Economics* 2004, Joanne Lau "Two Arguments for Child Enfranchisement," *Political Studies* 2012 [OWL Shrag&Lau]

February 9: Equal rights for all humans? Maurice Cranston, "What are Human Rights?" in Raphael ed *The Rights of Man*, Charles Jones, "Subsistence Rights" [OWL Cranston&Jones]

The final six weeks discuss aspects of "Community"

February 23: Is patriotic community a good thing? Alasdair MacIntyre, "Is patriotism a Virtue?" in Beiner ed *Theorizing Citizenship*, Simon Keller, "The Case Against Patriotism," in Kleinig, *The Ethics of Patriotism* [OWL MacIntyre&Keller]

March 2: Should cultural communities get special consideration? Will Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship* ch 5, Susan Okin, "Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women?" [OWL Kymlicka&Okin]

March 9: May parents induct their children into their culture? Robert Sparrow, "Defending Deaf Culture" *Journal of Political Philosophy* 2005, Sarah Hannan and Richard Vernon, "Parental Rights," *Theory and Research in Education* 2008 [OWL Sparrow&Hannan]

March 16: Do religious communities have special status? Anna Galeotti *Toleration as Recognition* ch 4, David Miller "Majorities and Minarets," *British Journal of Political Science* 2016 [OWL Galeotti&Miller]

March 23: An intergenerational community (1) – past generations? Janna Thompson, *Intergenerational Justice* ch 6, Jeremy Waldron "Superseding Historic Injustice" *Ethics* 1992 [OWL Thompson&Waldron]

March 30: An intergenerational community (2) – future generations? Annette Baier "The Rights of Past and Future Persons," in Partridge ed *Responsibilities to Future Generations*, Wilfred Beckerman "The Impossibility of a Theory of Intergenerational Justice," in Tremmel ed *Handbook of Intergenerational Justice* [OWL Beckerman&Baier]

April 5: **Term 2 essay due** by 5 p.m.