Introduction to Political Philosophy: Liberalism and Its Challengers

M/W 1:00pm-4:10pm, 716 Philosophy Hall
Instructor: Joe Hamilton (he/him)
Office Hours: Monday 4:15pm-6:15pm (TA office)
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Course description

The course is an introduction to the thought and works of central figures and themes in contemporary Western political philosophy. Our organizing theme will be liberalism as a political philosophy and its challengers. We will begin with the classic debate between Rawls and Nozick on the nature of liberal political philosophy, before turning to a range of critiques of liberalism, such as feminism, Marxism, and conservatism, examining along the way how Nozick and Rawls might defend their positions. Our final weeks turn to reformist strategies that accept criticisms of liberalism but seek to preserve elements of it. Throughout the course, we will be attentive to the relationship between political philosophy and ideology, evaluating not only an author's arguments but also how their text might support or undermine an existing ideology, using approaches to ideology critique in Foucault, Marx, and Mills.

Format

Two weekly lectures (M/W: 1:00pm-4:10pm).

I will make time for seminar-style discussions, especially in later sessions.

Learning Objectives

By the end of the class, you will be able to:

1. compare different philosophical approaches and views in modern political philosophy.
2. read a philosophical text and explain its contents.
3. reconstruct an argument, evaluate it, and challenge/respond to it.
4. evaluate the ideological significance of a philosophical text.
5. apply political philosophical concepts to contemporary political issues.

Course Materials

All our primary readings will be posted on CourseWorks.

The following introduction to political philosophy is a useful reference point for many of the thinkers we will discuss:

- Kymlicka, Will. *Contemporary Political Philosophy: An Introduction*. 2nd ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.

Slides and handouts will be posted on CourseWorks.

Grade Breakdown

10%	Participation

10%	Discussion posts
20%	Midterm
30%	Final paper
30%	Final exam

Discussion Posts

You will be expected to write a discussion post about the assigned reading each session on CourseWorks by midnight before that class, beginning our second class and ending our penultimate class.

The post should include one claim you found interesting and one question you had from reading the text (this is merely a guideline; these elements can be synthesized, or be more critical of the author).

Two missing discussion posts of the ten total required will be excused without penalty. Beyond that, there are no late credits or makeups for discussion posts.

Participation

Attendance at every session is required. You are expected to participate in discussions and activities in a respectful and constructive manner. If for some reason you cannot attend a session, you need to reach out to me beforehand.

Questions are expected and encouraged—you should feel free to interrupt me at any time to ask brief clarifying questions. I will pause the lectures at regular intervals to make room for more substantive discussion.

Our sessions will involve group work of various kinds. It is important you come having completed the reading so that you can fully participate in these activities.

Final Paper

The final paper will be a substantive piece of philosophical writing, in one of the two forms of philosophical argumentation examined in this course. You may choose to address one of the prompts as an analytic philosophy essay, evaluating arguments set forth by authors in this course, or may choose to write an ideology critique of an author's philosophical position.

The final paper will include a brief 10-minute interview with me, scheduled the week of August 11th, worth 10% of the paper's grade. This will not be difficult, and will only evaluate your familiarity with the texts and the argument you develop in the paper.

Exams

The midterm and final exams will be in-person bluebook exams. We will discuss the kinds of questions on the exam further in class.

Readings

You are expected to have completed the readings before each session. Our class is very condensed, so I have tried to keep the readings as short as possible.

Schedule

Readings are subject to revision.
We will take at least one break every session.

July 7th — **Introductory Material and Rawls**
A Theory of Justice, §1-§2, §11-§13, §39
Optional: Kymlicka, *Contemporary Political Philosophy*, introduction

July 9th — **Rawls**
A Theory of Justice, §3-§4, §20-§29
Optional: Kymlicka, *Contemporary Political Philosophy*, chapter 3

July 14th — **Nozick**
Anarchy, State, and Utopia, 10-35, 108-113, 149-180 (from 'Locke's Theory' to the penultimate paragraph on 180), 213-216 (section titled 'Natural Assets and Arbitrariness')
Optional: Kymlicka, *Contemporary Political Philosophy*, chapter 4

July 16th — **Marx**
Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844, 70-81 ('Estranged Labour')
The German Ideology, 159-162, 172-174, 190-193
Capital, vol. 1, 'Primitive Accumulation,' 873-889 (ignore the footnotes), 896-907
Optional: Kymlicka, *Contemporary Political Philosophy*, chapter 5
If you are completely new to Marx, you may want to take a look at the 'Theses on Feuerbach,' which is two pages and a quick read, and the *Communist Manifesto*, which is longer but a relatively easy read. These are not mandatory but will give a broader accessible overview of what Marx is interested in. Both are easily found online.

July 21st — **Marx cont.**
Capital, vol. 1, 'The Fetishism of the Commodity and Its Secret,' 163-178
'On the Jewish Question,' 42-46

July 23rd — **Schmitt and Midterm**
First half of class is the midterm.
The Concept of the Political, chapters 2-4, first two paragraphs of chapters 5, 6, and 8

July 28th — **Foucault**
The History of Sexuality, vol. 1, 82-96
The Birth of Biopolitics, 61-70
'The Subject and Power,' 777-785
Optional: Lemke, 'The Risks of Security: Liberalism, Biopolitics, and Fear'

July 30th — **MacKinnon**
Toward a Feminist Theory of the State, chapters 1, 8, and 13
Optional: Kymlicka, *Contemporary Political Philosophy*, chapter 9

August 4th **Mills**

The Racial Contract, Introduction and Overview
Black Rights/White Wrongs, Epilogue
Optional: Mills, 'Ideal Theory as Ideology'

August 6th **Republicanism**

Pettit, *Republicanism*, 51-73
Anderson, *Private Government*, 37-74

August 11th **Review/Catch-Up Session**
N.B. FINAL PAPER DUE.

Your discussion post for this session is a topic you would like us to review.
Schedule interview session with me.

August 13th **Final Exam**

Class Policies

- You must bring a copy of the assigned reading to class (preferably printed out, but digital is OK).
- Please regularly check CourseWorks and your Columbia email for any syllabus changes or additional materials.
- Please contact me via email if you cannot make my regular office hours and would like to meet.

University Policies

- Academic integrity: You are expected to submit work that is entirely your own and abide by the Columbia College Honor Code:

  I affirm that I will not plagiarize, use unauthorized materials, or give or receive illegitimate help on assignments, papers, or examinations. I will also uphold equity and honesty in the evaluation of my work and the work of others. I do so to sustain a community built around this Code of Honor.

- Please note that any use of LLMs for writing, producing notes, or brainstorming constitutes plagiarism under Columbia's plagiarism policy. I strongly advise against any use of LLMs for this course.
- You should also read carefully and familiarize yourself with the Faculty Statement on Academic Integrity, here quoted in full:

  The intellectual venture in which we are all engaged requires of faculty and students alike the highest level of personal and academic integrity. As members of an academic community, each one of us bears the responsibility to participate in scholarly discourse and research in a manner characterized by intellectual honesty and scholarly integrity. Scholarship, by its very nature, is an iterative process, with ideas and insights building one upon the other. Collaborative scholarship requires the study of other scholars' work, the free discussion of such work, and the explicit acknowledgement of those ideas in any work that inform our own. This exchange of ideas relies upon a mutual trust that sources, opinions, facts, and insights will be properly noted and

carefully credited. In practical terms, this means that, as students, you must be responsible for the full citations of others' ideas in all of your research papers and projects; you must be scrupulously honest when taking your examinations; you must always submit your own work and not that of another student, scholar, or internet agent. Any breach of this intellectual responsibility is a breach of faith with the rest of our academic community. It undermines our shared intellectual culture, and it cannot be tolerated. Students failing to meet these responsibilities should anticipate being asked to leave Columbia.

- For more information on academic integrity at Columbia, students may refer to the Columbia University Undergraduate Guide to Academic Integrity: http://www.college.columbia.edu/academics/academicintegrity
- Disability services (DS): Students who have a disability or impairment that requires special accommodation should get in touch with the Office of Disability Services at http://health.columbia.edu/disability-services. All requests must go through this office, which grants special accommodations. Students should also familiarize themselves with the list of rights and responsibilities that bind students, DS, and instructors.
- Academic Support Services: Students should keep in mind that Columbia offers a variety of resources to help their academic progress. In particular, students in this course might find it helpful to visit Columbia's Writing Center and to access the many writing resources freely accessible through their website.