

# Course # | Contemporary Political Philosophy

## Description

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This course offers an advanced introduction to some major lines of thought in contemporary political theory. The narrative pivots around the revolution in contemporary political philosophy triggered by the publication of John Rawls's *A Theory of Justice* in 1971, and it considers the costs and benefits of this development for our ability to think seriously about political life. Although the course has an Anglo/analytic bias in the thinkers it focuses on, the syllabus is designed to reveal the ways the analytic/continental division in political theorizing is (and ought to be) more porous than it is often made out to be. By the end of the course, students will be acquainted with many of the major approaches to contemporary political theorizing, and they should have a strong sense of how these approaches developed in relation to one another.

## Assignments

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- (1) *Two Reading Critiques*: Sign up for two weeks on which you will write a 1,000-word critique of a reading. These should both summarize and evaluate the reading. While your evaluations should take a position on the reading—i.e., do you agree or disagree with the author's thesis?—they should also attempt to situate the article in the wider context of both the course as a whole and the section we are studying at that time. A critique does not necessarily mean the same thing as criticism. Strong criticism can often stand in the way of subtlety and depth. If you decide to be strongly critical, you should be sure to be critical in a way that still does justice to the author's argument. Moreover, although you are responsible for summarizing the reading, a summary is not the same thing as a “play-by-play” of the reading. A good summary should be able to convey the essence of the reading without giving all the details. Fill in details only insofar as it is necessary to explicate the essential points. The best way to approach these critiques is to think of yourself as the teacher. What should students know from your reading? What questions should they ask about it? Finally, your critique should introduce questions and topics that would be useful and important for the class to take up in discussion. On the day that we cover the reading you critiqued, you should also be prepared both to summarize the reading and to facilitate the class's discussion of this material: you will become the teacher! Also, if writing on more than one reading, you should feel free either to concentrate entirely on one reading or to write an integrative analysis of all of them. This should be posted to the course site forty-eight hours before the class on which the reading is due to give those who will critique it time to write their critiques.
- (2) *Two Peer Critique Responses*: In order further to facilitate productive discussion in class, you will also be responsible for writing two 300-word critiques of your peers' critiques over the course of the semester. These should evaluate and react to the main arguments that your classmate has made in their critiques. You should answer the following kinds of questions: Do they misunderstand the reading? Do they overstate the author's case? Do they understate it? Is their disagreement justified? You should email me these critiques before the beginning of the class on which we will cover this reading. This should also be posted to the course site for all to access.
- (3) *Simulation*: An in-class simulation will take place [date]. In addition to participating in the activity, you will be asked to respond to several short reflection questions about the experience.
- (4) *Term Paper*: The major work of this semester is the writing of a term paper between 2,500 and 3,500 words in length on an approved topic. A number of mandatory, interim assignments are designed to help you write this paper:
  - a. 500-word proposal due [date]
  - b. 500-word propositional outline due [date]
  - c. Rough draft due [date]
  - d. In-class presentations on [date]
  - e. Final draft due [date]

## Course Schedule

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### Justice, Legitimacy, and the State

- 01.
    - Hobbes (1668): *Leviathan*, Chapter 13.
    - Rousseau (1762): *The Social Contract*, Book I.
    - J.S. Mill (1863): *Utilitarianism*, Chapter V.
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### Philosophy of History, Power, and Ideology

- 02.
    - Kant (1784): "Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Intent"
    - Marx (1859, 1843): "Marx on the History of His Opinions" and "On the Jewish Question," in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, pp. 3-6 and 40-46.
    - Nietzsche (1886): "On the Prejudices of Philosophers," in *The Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, pp. 199-222.
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### The Concept of the Political

- 03.
    - Carl Schmitt (1932): *The Concept of the Political*, pp. 19-79.

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  - 04.
    - Hannah Arendt: "Introduction Into Politics," in *The Promise of Politics*, pp. 93-153.

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  - 05.
    - Hannah Arendt: "Introduction Into Politics," in *The Promise of Politics*, pp. 153-200.
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### The Crisis of Modernity

- 06.
    - Leo Strauss (1975): "The Three Waves of Modernity"
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### The Rawlsian Revolution

- 07.
    - John Rawls (2001): "Fundamental Ideas," in *Justice as Fairness*, pp. 1-38.  
[In-class simulation: "The Original Position"]

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  - 08.
    - John Rawls (2001): "Principles of Justice," in *Justice as Fairness*, pp. 39-79.

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  - 09.
    - John Rawls (2001): "The Argument from the Original Position," in *Justice as Fairness*, pp. 80-134.

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  - 10.
    - John Rawls (2001): "Institutions of a Just Basic Structure," in *Justice as Fairness*, pp. 135-179.
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### Libertarianism

- 11.
    - Robert Nozick (1974): *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, Chapter 7, pp. 183-228.
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### Marxism

- 12.
    - G.A. Cohen (2000): "Justice, Incentives, and Selfishness" and "Where the Action Is: On the Site of Distributive Justice," in *If You're an Egalitarian, How Come You're So Rich?*, pp. 117-147.

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  - 13.
    - Louis Althusser (1970): "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes Towards an Investigation)"
    - Ernesto Laclau (1996): "The Death and Resurrection of the Theory of Ideology," *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 1(3): 201-220.
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**Feminism**

14.       ▪ Iris Marion Young (1990): “Displacing the Distributive Paradigm” and “The Ideal of Impartiality,” in *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, pp.15-38 and 96-121.
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15.       ▪ Joan Tronto (2013): *Caring Democracy*, Chapters 1 and 6
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**Critical Race Theory**

16.       ▪ Charles Mills (2017): “Racial Liberalism” and “White Ignorance,” in *Black Rights, White Wrongs*, pp. 28-71.
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17.       ▪ Charles Mills (2017): “Racial Liberalism: Rawls and Rawlsianism,” in *Black Rights, White Wrongs*, pp. 139-200.
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**Communitarianism**

18.       ▪ Michael Sandel (1984): “The Procedural Republic and the Unencumbered Self”
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19.       ▪ Charles Taylor (1994): “The Politics of Recognition,” in *Multiculturalism*, pp. 25-74.
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**Civic Republicanism**

20.       ▪ Philip Pettit (2014): *Just Freedom*, Chapters 1 and 2.
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21.       ▪ Philip Pettit (2014): *Just Freedom*, Chapters 3 and 4.
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22.       ▪ Frank Lovett (2016): “Civic Republicanism and Social Justice”
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**Realism and Idealism in Political Theorizing**

23.       ▪ Bernard Williams (2005): “Realism and Moralism in Political Theory,” in *In the Beginning Was the Deed*, pp. 1–17.
- Charles Mills (2017): “Ideal Theory as Ideology,” in *Black Rights, White Wrongs*, pp. 72-90.
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24.       ▪ Raymond Guess (2008): “Failures of Realism,” in *Philosophy and Real Politics*, pp. 60-94.
- Laura Valentini (2012): “Ideal vs. Non-Ideal Theory: A Conceptual Map.” *Philosophy Compass* 7 (9): 654–64.
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**Political Liberalism**

25.       ▪ John Rawls (2001): “The Question of Stability,” in *Justice as Fairness*, pp. 180-202.
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26.       ▪ Charles Larmore (2003): “Public Reason,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Rawls*, pp. 368-393.
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**Is Political Liberalism Political Enough?**

27.       ▪ Chantal Mouffe (1999): “Deliberative Democracy or Agonistic Pluralism?” *Social Research* 66 (3): 745–58.
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28.       ▪ Judith Shklar (1989): “The Liberalism of Fear”
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