What values should our political institutions promote? One way to address this question looks at how our values were defended and articulated in the past. Thinking about the past can provide important insights of how we should live together. This course reviews some of the major figures in modern political thought from Hobbes to J. S. Mill. The course provides 1) an appreciation of how some political concepts and values such as authority, liberty, and equality were shaped during the XVII-XIX centuries, 2) a critical assessment of the arguments provided by these thinkers, 3) and a discussion about the methodological tools developed during the time. Special emphasis will be put on the significance of these ideas for contemporary controversies in political philosophy.

Aims:
- To trigger an understanding of central arguments in political philosophy.
- To be able to understand the historical context in which political ideas developed.
- To foster the ability to analyse and discuss arguments in political philosophy.
- To develop the ability to link and apply arguments of political philosophy to social and political issues.
- To foster the ability to communicate both orally and in writing arguments in political philosophy.
- To develop the capacity to learn new ideas and approaches, and to apply them in research.

Learning outcomes:
At the end of the course the student shall be able to:
- Understand the main arguments of modern political thought.
- Understand the key positions within the history of political philosophy.
- Produce critical and well-structured arguments in political philosophy.
- Balance and contrast the weakness and strengths of different positions in contemporary debates in liberal egalitarian thought.
- Summarise arguments clearly and succinctly.

Requirements:
- All students must read the core reading before the lectures and seminars.
- Attendance is compulsory. You need at least 90% of attendance to get a grade.
- Students should actively participate in the class discussion.
Grades will be awarded as follows:

- You should submit three short papers (1,500 words) on different authors during the course. Each will contribute a third of your final grade. (The papers are designed to test general skills: written expression, logical, critical and analytical reasoning among others. They are also designed to test the skills particular to this course listed in the learning outcomes).

- Academic dishonesty will be severely penalised. **Don’t plagiarise!!**

Grades mean the following:

- **F= Fail.** Poor
- **C+ Minimum Pass.** Significant confusions; unawareness of some crucial arguments; poor written style
- **B- Satisfactory.** Struggles to organize main ideas of the paper. Some confusions, but a general sense of the main arguments.
- **B Good.** Cover material covered in class, good reconstruction of main arguments, written expression is clear and succinct
- **B+ Very good.** Cover material covered in class, good reconstruction of main arguments, written expression is clear and succinct, plus understanding of subsidiary arguments, familiarity with secondary literature. Some display of analytical skills.
- **A- Excellent.** Cover material covered in class, good reconstruction of main arguments, written expression is clear and succinct, plus understanding of subsidiary arguments, familiarity with secondary literature; independent reconstruction of arguments; display of good analytical skills; some critical engagement with the material.
- **A outstanding.** Cover material covered in class, good reconstruction of main arguments, written expression is clear and succinct, plus understanding of subsidiary arguments, familiarity with secondary literature; independent reconstruction of arguments; display of good analytical skills, signals of independent thought, critical engagement with the arguments.

The essays must represent a significant piece of independent research; it can be a positive argument of your own, or a critical argument. They should provide succinct, clear statements of your positions and of arguments pro and con. Don’t make claims without arguing strongly for them! Also, when you criticise and argument, use the best counter-argument you find, don’t waste your time with straw men!

Finally, literary or emotive or heavily jargon-laden style is often unhelpful. **Do not write a one-sided essay: be sure to evaluate the strongest arguments on both sides!**

**Weekly Program:**
- **Week 1:** ‘Introduction’
- **Week 2:** ‘The state of Nature and the Social Contract’
- **Week 3:** ‘Political Obligation’
- **Week 4:** ‘Locke’s State of Nature’
- **Week 5:** ‘Private Property’
Week 6: ‘Civil Government’
Week 7: ‘Inequality’
Week 8: ‘The social contract’
Week 9: ‘Utilitarianism’
Week 10: ‘Liberalism’
Week 11: ‘Mill on Free Speech’
Week 12 ‘Revision and Conclusions’

General Books:

Good introductions:

Other general references:

**Week 1.**

‘Introduction’

We justify the importance of history of political thought, and discuss some methodological issues.

Seminar questions:
- Should we need to understand the author’s intentions to understand a text?
- How should we approach a text?

Core reading:

Supplementary reading:

**Week 2.**

‘Hobbes’s *Leviathan*: The State of Nature’

We introduce Hobbes magisterial work and some of its basic ideas: the laws of nature, the state of nature and the social contract.

Seminar questions:
- What are the laws of nature?
- Why is the state of nature conflictive?
- Could men get out of the state of nature?

Core reading:

Supplementary reading:

**Week 3.**

‘Hobbes’s *Leviathan*: Political Obligation’

In this seminar we discuss Hobbes’s account of political obligation and some problems that it raises.

Seminar questions:
  - Does Hobbes’s theory of obligation require God?
  - Are we obliged to obey anybody who has power over us?
  - Are there any limits to the sovereign?

Core reading:

Supplementary reading:


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**Week 4**

‘Locke on the State of Nature’

In this session we introduce the idea of natural rights and Locke’s account of the state of nature. We contrast it with Hobbes’s.

Seminar questions:

- How did Locke respond to Filmer’s criticisms of earlier natural rights theories?
- Why is Locke’s state of nature less conflict-ridden than Hobbes’s?
- Is Locke specific enough about what natural rights there are?

Core reading:


Supplementary reading:


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**Week 5.**

‘Locke on property’
In this session we discuss Locke’s theory of private property and whether there are any limits to inequality.

Seminar questions:
- Is Locke’s theory simply a justification of inequality?
- Is the ‘enough and as good’ proviso plausible?
- Is there any conflict between the right to self-preservation and the right to private property?

Core reading:
- Locke, *Second Treatise on Civil Government*, chapter 5

Supplementary reading:

**Week 6**

‘Locke on civil government’

We introduce Locke’s theory of civil government and political obligation. We discuss general problem of the consent theory of political obligation.

Seminar questions:
- What is the difference between tacit and explicit consent?
- Can consent be the basis of political obligation?

Core reading:

Supplementary reading:
- Waldron, ‘Locke’ in Boucher and Kelly.
Week 7
‘Rousseau on inequality’

We introduce Rousseau’s state of nature and his critique to modern inequality.

Seminar questions:
- What’s wrong with modern society?
- Is there any way out?
- How did we end up here?

Core reading:

Supplementary reading:
- Dent, Rousseau Routledge 2005. 57-68.
- Chapters in Levine and Boucher and Kelly.

Week 8
‘Rousseau on the social contract’

We introduce the idea of the social contract as reconciliation between authority and liberty. We also discuss the concept of the general will and its relevance for democracy.

Seminar questions:
- What are the principles behind the Social Contract?
- To what extent does the Social Contract provide a solution to the problems identified in the Discourse?
- What is the general will?
- How attractive is Rousseau’s conception of freedom?
- How is the general will related to democracy?

Core reading:

Supplementary reading:
- Chapters in Levine, Hampsher-Monk and Boucher and Kelly
Week 9
‘Mill on utilitarianism’

We introduce Mill’s controversial theory of qualitative, hedonist utilitarianism as a basis of justice.

Seminar questions:
- Does Mill provide a plausible account of what is it for a life to go well?
- How plausible is Mill’s defence of utilitarianism?
- Does he manage to reconcile justice and utility?

Core reading:
- Mill, ‘Utilitarianism’ chapters 1, 2, 4.

Supplementary reading:
- Chapters on Bentham and Mill in Boucher and Kelly, chapters on Mill in Hampsher-Monk and Levine.

Week 11
‘Mill’s liberalism’
In this seminar we discuss Mill’s defence of pluralism and liberty. We also discuss his famous ‘harm-principle’.

Seminar questions:
- What is the harm principle?
- What does it permit? What does it prohibit?

Core reading:

Supplementary reading:

**Week 12**

‘Mill defence of Freedom of Speech’

In this seminar we discuss Mill’s influential views on free speech.
- What is the best way to defend freedom of speech?
- Is Mill’s argument successful? What does it protect? Is it deferent from the ‘harm’ principle?’

Core reading:
- Mill, *On Liberty*, II.
Week 12
‘Conclusions’