

Introduction to the Theory of Politics 2015/16

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A. Course Information

Tutorials

We will have 4 tutorials. You will be required to write an essay for each tutorial.

Essays should be **1500-2000 words**, and must be emailed to me by **2pm on the day before the tutorial**. Please also email essays to your tutorial partner(s), so they can read them before the tutorial.

In each tutorial one of you will give a **5 minute presentation** of their essay. I would suggest that you read out your introduction, summarise the argument of each paragraph, and then read out your conclusion. The student who does not present will respond to the argument, raise questions etc., and we will then have a discussion based on the issues that are raised.

Reading lists are below. Please ensure that you read the set texts on Rousseau and Mill, and as much of the rest of the reading list as you can. The readings are in alphabetical order, rather than priority order. The most important readings in the topical weeks are starred – but this does not mean that it would be sufficient to *only* do those readings. Indeed, it would not be.

The readings are based on the department's reading list, which you may want to consult if you wish to do any further reading for a topic.

If you have trouble finding any of the readings please let me know in advance of the tutorial.

There is a choice of essay questions each week. Please write your essay on one of the two questions listed under 'essay questions' in the reading lists below. It is fine if tutorials partners write essays on different questions.

Study questions are also given; these are worth thinking about after you've done the readings.

Essay tips

Essays should include a bibliography of all you've read, and references where appropriate.

Essays should be focused on the question asked. They should begin with a clear introduction in which you briefly state your conclusion and explain how your argument will develop section-by-section.

The aim is not to write everything you possibly can about the topic, but to give a focused and coherent answer to the essay question. This requires you to present and defend a thesis. It is important that you make an argument, rather than just presenting several sides of a case or summarising the readings.

For some questions, in order to remain focused you may need to narrow down the question to one of several possible interpretations.

Contacting me

If you have any problems or questions then please email me. If you are struggling with the workload at any point then please get in touch in advance of that week's tutorial.

B. Reading lists

1. Rousseau (*The Social Contract*)

Readings:

- Rousseau, Jean-Jacques, *The Social Contract*, 1762 (Various editions of this are available)
- Bertram, Christopher, *Rousseau and the Social Contract (Routledge Philosophy Guidebook)* (London: Routledge, 2003) (available online via SOLO)
- Cohen, Joshua, *Rousseau: A Free Community of Equals* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010) (available online via SOLO)
- Levine, Andrew, *Engaging Political Philosophy: From Hobbes to Rawls* (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2002), chapter 2
- Waldron, Jeremy, 'Rights and majorities: Rousseau revisited', in Waldron, Jeremy, *Liberal Rights: Collected Papers 1981-1991* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993) (This chapter is also available from the SSL issue desk)
- Wokler, Robert, *Rousseau and Liberty* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), chapters by Mason, Cranston, Crocker, and Hampshire-Monk
- Wolff, Jonathan, *An Introduction to Political Philosophy*, 2nd edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), chapter 3

Essay questions:

- In what senses are individual citizens in Rousseau's state 'free'?
- "Therefore when the opinion contrary to my own prevails, it proves nothing more than that I made a mistake and that what I took to be the general will was not." (*The Social Contract*) Why does Rousseau say this, and is he right to do so?

Study questions:

- What problem is Rousseau seeking to solve in *The Social Contract*?
- What's the state of nature for Rousseau, and why do we leave it?
- What does Rousseau mean by the 'General Will'?
- How can one distinguish the General Will from the will of all?
- Is it necessary that there is consensus among citizens if the 'General Will' is to prevail?
- Define the following terms in Rousseau: Sovereign, Government, Law, Civil Society, Community, and Common Good.
- What is Rousseau's distinction between natural, civil, and moral liberty?
- What role do laws play in determining the character of the people in a given state?
- What is the relationship between liberty and equality?
- Is it fair to say that while Rousseau aims for freedom in *The Social Contract*, the state he envisages would be highly oppressive?

Past exam questions:

- Does Rousseau's account of the general will assume that there is a single, correct solution to every political problem? (2007)
- 'Despite his protestations to the contrary, Rousseau prioritized collective decision-making over individual freedom.' Discuss. (2008)
- Does the role of the lawgiver in Rousseau's *Social Contract* render his theory essentially undemocratic? (2009)
- 'What, then, is the government? ... a body charged with the execution of the laws and the maintenance of freedom.' Is Rousseau's statement self-contradictory? (2010)

- What is the 'fundamental problem' for which Rousseau offers the 'social contract' as a solution? (2011)
- How plausible is Rousseau's idea of the general will? (2012)
- Is the law-giver consistent with Rousseau's idea of popular sovereignty? (2013)
- Man is born free, can be forced to be free, and is free when he lives under a law he prescribes for himself. Can Rousseau reconcile these claims? (HPOL, 2013)
- Is Rousseau's social contract consistent with constitutional democracy? (2014)
- Can the citizens of Rousseau's Social Contract meaningfully be described as free? (HPOL, 2014)
- 'The impulse of mere appetite is slavery, while obedience to the law one has prescribed to oneself is freedom.' Discuss with reference to Rousseau's *The Social Contract*. (2015)
- 'The society described by Rousseau in *The Social Contract* is an unrealisable utopia.' Discuss. (HPOL, 2015)

2. Democracy

Readings:

- Barry, Brian, 'Is Democracy Special?', in his *Essays in Political Theory 1: Democracy and Power* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), or in Laslett, Peter and James Fishkin, *Philosophy, Politics and Society: Fifth Series* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1979)
- *Christiano, Thomas, 'Democracy as Equality', in Estlund, David (ed.), *Democracy* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002)
- *Cohen, Joshua, 'Deliberation and Democratic Legitimacy', in Estlund (ed.), *Democracy*
- Dahl, Robert, *On Democracy* (London: Yale University Press, 1998), parts 1-3
- Fishkin, James S., *Democracy and Deliberation: New Directions for Democratic Reform*, (1991), chapters 1-6, 8.
- Held, David, *Models of Democracy* (Cambridge: Polity, 1996), chapters 1-6
- *Jones, Peter, 'Political Equality and Majority Rule', in Miller, David, and Larry Siedentop (eds.), *The Nature of Political Theory* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983)
- Miller, David, 'Deliberative Democracy and Social Choice', in Estlund (ed.), *Democracy*
- *Schumpeter, Joseph, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1943), chapters 21-22
- *Swift, Adam, *Political Philosophy: A Beginners' Guide for Students and Politicians*, 2nd or 3rd edition (Cambridge: Polity, 2006 or 2013), part 5
- All other chapters in Estlund (ed.), *Democracy*

Essay questions:

- When, if ever, can it be democratic to place constraints on majority rule?
- "Democracy cannot exist, let alone flourish, without deliberation amongst citizens." Discuss.

Study questions:

- Is democracy necessary for liberty?
- Is democracy simply about majority rule? Can majorities govern undemocratically?
- What is the role of representation in a democracy? What kinds of representation are important?
- Can representative democracy be preferable to direct democracy?
- Should democracy be a matter of aggregating preferences or of reconciling judgments?
- To what extent is democracy compatible with a role for elites?
- To what extent does true democracy require high levels of deliberation and of popular participation?
- Is democracy justified by its intrinsic fairness or by its consequences?

Past exam questions:

- Can majorities govern undemocratically? (2007)
- What, if anything, is so special about democracy? (2008)
- Is the idea of democracy reducible to majority rule? (2009)
- Should the representatives in a democracy reflect the ethnic balance of the population? (2010)
- "Democracy cannot exist, let alone flourish, without deliberation amongst citizens." Discuss. (2011)
- Are elites compatible with democracy? (2012)
- 'Deliberative democracy is a nice idea in principle, but infeasible in practice'. Discuss (2013)
- Are the benefits of democratic decision-making entirely consequentialist? (HPOL, 2013)
- Can representation improve democratic decision-making? (HPOL, 2013)
- Is democracy a uniquely fair way of reaching political decisions? (2014)

- Does true democracy require high levels of popular participation? (HPOL, 2014)
- Does democracy require that there is widespread deliberation relating to public policy? (2015)
- Is there any role for direct democracy within modern political systems? (HPOL, 2015)

3. Mill (*On Liberty*)

Readings:

- Mill, John Stuart, *On Liberty*, 1859 (Various editions available)
- Berlin, Isaiah, 'John Stuart Mill and the Ends of Life', in Ryan, Alan (ed.), *Mill: Texts and Commentaries* (London: Norton, 1997); also in Berlin, *Four Essays on Liberty* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969)
- Gray, John, *Mill on Liberty: A Defence*, 2nd edition (New York: Routledge, 1996), chapters 1, 3
- Levine, Andrew, *Engaging Political Philosophy: From Hobbes to Rawls* (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2002), chapter 4
- Rees, John C., 'The Principle of Liberty', in Ryan (ed.), *Mill*; also published as 'A Re-Reading of Mill on Liberty', *Political Studies* 8:2 (1960)
- Riley, Jonathan, *Mill on Liberty (Routledge Philosophy Guidebook)* (London: Routledge 1998) (available online via SOLO)
- Waldron, Jeremy, 'Mill and the Value of Moral Distress', in Ryan (ed.), *Mill*; also in *Political Studies* 35:3 (1987); also in Waldron, *Liberal Rights: Collected Papers, 1981-1991* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993)
- Wolff, Jonathan, *An Introduction to Political Philosophy*, 2nd edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), chapter 4

Essay questions:

- Is Mill's Harm Principle clear enough to serve as an adequate basis for the task of regulating freedom in the modern state?
- Is liberty, in Mill's *On Liberty*, an end or a means to an end?

Study questions:

- What is the role of freedom of thought and expression in Mill's theory of freedom?
- How persuasive is Mill's defence of freedom of expression?
- What place does 'rationality' have in Mill's theory of liberty?
- Does Mill make a compelling case against state paternalism?
- Does Mill's celebration of individuality subvert the needs of citizenship?
- 'The principle of freedom cannot require that he should be free not to be free.' (Mill, *On Liberty*). Why not?
- What did Mill value more, individuality or the freedom that is a condition for it?
- Does Mill make a compelling case against state paternalism?

Past exam questions:

- "John Stuart Mill's *On Liberty* is a forceful defence of negative liberty." Discuss. (2007)
- Which did Mill care more about: 'liberty' or 'individuality'? (2008)
- "John Stuart Mill did not understand the benefits that many citizens derive from custom and tradition." Is this a forceful criticism of Mill's arguments in *On Liberty*? (2009)
- What role does the idea of progress play in Mill's vision of liberty? (2010)
- "The major problem with *On Liberty* is that Mill does not recognise that all actions are 'other regarding'." Discuss. (2011)
- Would it be correct to characterise John Stuart Mill as a thinker of negative liberty? (2012)
- Is Mill's defence of individual liberty compatible with his utilitarian beliefs? (2013)
- How illuminating is it to describe Mill's justification of freedom of expression as utilitarian in character? (HPOL, 2013)
- Do Mill's views on voluntary slavery undermine his case for the Harm Principle? (2014)

- Does Mill's argument in *On Liberty* rest upon a negative or a positive view of freedom? (HPOL, 2014)
- To what extent does Mill's argument in *On Liberty* succeed in differentiating harm and offence? (2015)
- Is Mill right to argue against state paternalism? (HPOL, 2015)

4. Liberty

Readings:

Most of these readings are (also) in David Miller's anthology *Liberty* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991). Readings with no location reference are only in Miller.

Several are also in Miller's *The Liberty Reader* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006).

- *Berlin, Isaiah, 'Two Concepts of Liberty' in his *Four Essays on Liberty* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969); reprinted in Goodin and Pettit (eds.), *Contemporary Political Philosophy: An Anthology*
- Cohen, Gerald, 'Freedom and Money', in his *On the Currency of Egalitarian Justice, and Other Essays in Political Philosophy*, ed. Michael Otsuka (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011) (available online via SOLO)
- *MacCallum Jr., Gerald, 'Negative and Positive Liberty', *Philosophical Review*, 76:2 (1967), and in Flathman, Richard (ed.), *Concepts in Social and Political Philosophy* (New York: Macmillan, 1973)
- Miller, David, 'Introduction'
- Pettit, Philip, *Republicanism: A Theory of Freedom and Government* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), chapters 1-2 (available online via SOLO)
- Skinner, Quentin, 'The Paradoxes of Political Liberty'
- Steiner, Hillel, 'Individual Liberty'
- *Swift, Adam, *Political Philosophy: A Beginner's Guide for Students and Politicians*, part II
- *Taylor, Charles, 'What's Wrong with Negative Liberty' in his *Philosophy and the Human Sciences* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); also in Ryan, Alan (ed.), *The Idea of Freedom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979)
- Waldron, Jeremy, 'Homelessness and the Issue of Freedom', *U.C.L.A. Law Review* 39 (1991); also in Waldron, *Liberal Rights: Collected Paper, 1981-1991* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993)

Essay questions:

- How (if at all) do economic circumstance affect an individual's liberty?
 - The Cohen and Waldron readings are especially useful for this essay
- Must one participate in political decision-making in order to be free?
 - The Pettit and Skinner readings are especially useful for this essay

Study questions

- How many concepts of liberty are there, and why should the answer to this question matter?
- Is liberty primarily about the absence of law or the authorship of law?
- Is there a single concept of liberty underpinning the many ways in which the term is used by political thinkers?
- Is the distinction between positive and negative liberty useful?
- How (if at all) do economic circumstances affect an individual's liberty?

Past exam questions:

- Must one participate in political decision-making in order to be free? (2007)
- What is the difference between being *free* to do something and being *able* to do it? (2008)
- Why is it acceptable for the state to tell its citizens which side of the road to drive on but not which religion to follow? (2009)
- Is the opportunity to influence law-making sufficient to make a society free? (2010)

- “Lack of money, like lack of ability, does not impact on the freedom of individuals, merely on their ability to take advantage of that freedom.” Discuss. (2011)
- “Freedom is to be found in human community, not in isolation.” Discuss. (2012)
- If I am so poor that I cannot afford to travel, is my freedom to travel of any value to me? (2013)
- ‘Freedom has only instrumental value: freedoms that do not promote autonomy have no normative value.’ Discuss (HPOL, 2013)
- Are positive and negative understandings of freedom answers to two different questions? (2014)
- Do threats limit an individual’s freedom? (HPOL, 2014)
- What does it mean to speak of a people as being free? (2015)
- ‘Individuals cannot be said to be truly free unless they play an active role in making the laws which bind them.’ Discuss. (HPOL, 2015)