

Tufts University  
Fall 2017  
Mon./Wed., 10:30-11:45  
Bromfield-Pearson 003

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Office hours: Mon., 1:30-3:30  
Packard Hall 109

### **PS 149 – Contemporary Political Theory**

Is the welfare state morally obligatory, or is it even defensible? How should we balance individual rights and communal responsibilities? How should liberal societies deal with the issues presented by cultural and religious pluralism? This course will address these and other pressing political questions through a survey of some of the key thinkers and themes of contemporary political theory, beginning in the second half of the twentieth century and continuing to the present day. We will begin with a brief look at Isaiah Berlin's pluralist liberalism and Michael Oakeshott's distinctive conservatism. We will then turn to John Rawls's influential theory of liberal justice – both the original theory and, a bit later, Rawls's "political liberal" revision of it – and a broad array of responses to this theory by Robert Nozick, G. A. Cohen, Charles Beitz, Michael Sandel, Iris Young, Susan Okin, Allan Bloom, William Galston, Stanley Fish, Stephen Macedo, and George Crowder. The main focus of the course will be contemporary liberalism – the various forms it takes and challenges it faces.

#### **Course Format and Requirements:**

By far the most important requirement of the course is that you complete all assigned readings *carefully* and *before class*. Most reading assignments will be relatively short, and you should do all of them more than once. My recommendation is to go over the readings relatively quickly once, to see what topics are covered and to pick out the main ideas, and then do them again, slowly and carefully, taking notes about what seems important or intriguing and about what you don't fully understand. These notes will also help immensely in generating useful and stimulating class discussion. To facilitate reading, I will hand out a list of study questions on each text; these questions can be used to guide your reading but are not exhaustive.

Attendance is required; more than two absences will affect your participation grade, and absence from more than a third of the classes will automatically result in a failing grade. Students arriving late will generally be counted as absent.

The use of laptops/tablets in class is permitted but discouraged. If you do use one, you may not use it for any purpose other than to look at the readings (when they are on Trunk) and to take notes: absolutely no email, Facebook, ESPN, etc. These non-class-related activities are disrespectful to me and your classmates and distracting for those sitting near you. I recommend disconnecting your computer from the internet during class to help avoid the temptation. You may not use your phone for any purpose during class time; if an emergency arises and you need to do so, please step out of the room first. If I see you using your computer for a non-class-related activity or your phone for any reason, I will lower your participation grade by 10 percentage points (each time).

The class will be conducted mostly in discussion format. I may have to lecture a bit on some days, but every class will involve a good deal of discussion, and you should plan on participating every day. High-level participation requires that you grapple with the central ideas and arguments of the readings ahead of time, and bring to class any questions or confusions you might have. You should always bring the relevant text to class.

There will be four paper assignments (5-6 pages each) over the course of the semester – see the schedule below. You can choose to write any three of the four papers, or you can choose to write all four of them and I will drop the lowest of the paper grades. The papers will be analytical in nature and won't require any research beyond the course readings; topics and guidelines will be handed out several classes in advance of the due date. Late papers will be penalized by 5 percentage points for each day they are late.

Papers will be given a numerical grade on the following scale:

A	93-100	B-	80-82	D+	67-69
A-	90-92	C+	77-79	D	63-66
B+	87-89	C	73-76	D-	60-62
B	83-86	C-	70-72	F	59 and below

Grades will be determined as follows:

Three papers	30 % each
Class participation	10 %

*The university's policy on academic honesty will be strictly adhered to.* For more information on plagiarism and the proper citing of sources, see:

<http://students.tufts.edu/academic-advice-and-support/academic-resource-center/what-we-offer/writing-support/avoiding>

### **Required Texts:**

Isaiah Berlin, *The Proper Study of Mankind* (Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 1998). ISBN: 9780374527174.

Michael Oakeshott, *Rationalism in Politics* (Liberty Press, 1991). ISBN: 9780865970953.

John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, revised edition (Harvard University Press, 1999). ISBN: 9780674000780.

Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* (Basic Books, 2013). ISBN: 9780465051007.

These books are available at the bookstore; please buy the editions listed here. All other readings will be made available on Trunk.

## **Course Schedule and Readings:**

9/6 Introduction

### **Berlin and Oakeshott: Liberalism and Conservatism, Pluralism and Rationalism**

9/11 Isaiah Berlin, "The Pursuit of the Ideal" (pp. 1-16)

9/13 Isaiah Berlin, "Two Concepts of Liberty," sections 1-2, 5 (pp. 191-206, 216-26)

9/18 Isaiah Berlin, "Two Concepts of Liberty," sections 7-8 (pp. 233-42)  
Charles Taylor, "What's Wrong with Negative Liberty" (pp. 211-29)

9/20 Michael Oakeshott, "Rationalism in Politics" (pp. 5-42)

9/25 Michael Oakeshott, "Political Education" (pp. 43-69)

9/27 Michael Oakeshott, "On Being Conservative" (pp. 407-37)  
**First paper topics handed out**

### **Rawls I and His Critics, Part 1: Welfare State Liberalism vs. Libertarianism**

10/2 John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, sections 1-8 (pp. 3-40)

10/4 John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, sections 11-14, 17, 48 (pp. 52-78, 86-93, 273-7)

10/6 **First paper due by noon (in my box in Packard Hall)**  
(Friday)

10/9 No class – Indigenous Peoples Day

10/11 John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, sections 20, 22, 24-26, 50, 65, 67 (pp. 102-5, 109-12, 118-39, 285-92, 372-80, 386-91)

10/16 Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, pp. ix-xiv, 149-64, 167-74

10/18 Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, pp. 183-204, 228-38

10/23 G. A. Cohen, "Why Not Socialism?" (pp. 1-82)

10/25 Charles Beitz, "Justice and International Relations" (pp. 360-89)  
**Second paper topics handed out**

### **Rawls I and His Critics, Part 2: Communitarianism, Multiculturalism, and the Tradition**

10/30 Michael Sandel, "The Procedural Republic and the Unencumbered Self" (pp. 81-95)

- 11/1 Michael Sandel, *Democracy's Discontent*, pp. 3-17, 317-33, 338-51
- 11/3 **Second paper due by noon (in my box in Packard Hall)**  
(Friday)
- 11/6 Iris Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, pp. 3-6, 15-27, 156-68, 173-83
- 11/8 Susan Okin, "Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women?" (pp. 9-24)
- 11/13 Allan Bloom, "Justice: John Rawls vs. the Tradition of Political Philosophy" (pp. 648-62)  
Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, "Prologue" part 5 (pp. 128-31)
- 11/15 Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind*, pp. 25-43, 246-56  
**Third paper topics handed out**

**Rawls II and His Critics: Political, Pluralist, and Virtue Liberalisms (or, Does Liberalism Have a Religion Problem?)**

- 11/20 John Rawls, "Justice as Fairness: Political not Metaphysical" (pp. 223-51)
- 11/22 No class (Thanksgiving)
- 11/27 John Rawls, "The Idea of Public Reason" (pp. 212-54)  
**Third paper due in class**
- 11/29 *Wisconsin v. Yoder* (1972)  
William Galston, "Two Concepts of Liberalism" (pp. 516-34)
- 12/4 Stanley Fish, *The Trouble with Principle*, prologue, chapter 8 (pp. 1-15, 153-61)
- 12/6 Stephen Macedo, *Liberal Virtues*, pp. 50-64, 254-85
- 12/11 George Crowder, "Two Concepts of Liberal Pluralism" (pp. 121-46)  
**Fourth paper topics handed out**
- 12/18 **Fourth paper due by noon (in my box in Packard Hall)**  
(Monday)