

**PSCI 308: Studies in Historical Political Thought**  
Individualism and the Self in Modern Political Thought

Fall 2014  
Thursdays, 12:25-2:55 p.m.  
Commons 363

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Office Hours: Tuesdays, 11 a.m.-12 p.m.; Wednesdays, 2-3 p.m., and by appointment

**Course Description:**

This course focuses on one important strand of modern political thought—the liberal tradition and its critics in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, with some movement into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In particular, we will explore one major problem for liberal political thinkers and their critics—the relationship between the individual and society. To what extent is the individual shaped by his or her social and cultural interactions? How have liberal theorists addressed the critical tension between individuality and sociability in their work? How should we evaluate their efforts today?

Modern political thinkers—both liberals and their critics—approach the problem of individualism by examining the impact of a range of collective practices on the identity and behavior of individuals—education, religious community, cultural and social customs and manners, commerce, and democratic political institutions, among others. With these themes and the above questions in mind, we will read widely in modern political thought, including groundbreaking works in moral and social psychology, educational treatises, and democratic theory.

A caveat: Each of the texts we will read *far* surpasses the central theme of this seminar, so each week we will work together to balance two goals—(1) treating each work as philosophically and politically rich and interesting in its own right, and (2) using each new text to build a conversation over the course of the semester about individuality and sociability in the liberal tradition, broadly defined.

**Course Objectives:**

- To provide graduate-level training in the methods, practices and aims of political theory as a field;
- To pursue a thematic consideration of some texts from of a major tradition in the field—liberalism—and a study of one of its central questions and concepts;
- To research and critically engage with primary sources and secondary interpretations of these sources; and
- To encourage investigation of how these texts and their arguments and insights might interact with our own research in our respective fields.

### Course Readings:

The following books are available for purchase at the bookstore. I've also put copies of them at the library on reserve. Please do try to acquire these editions so that we are all working with the same translations and page numbers.

- W.E.B. DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (Penguin, 1989).
- Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*, trans. J. Strachey (WW Norton, 2010).
- Karl Marx, *Early Political Writings*, trans. R. Livingstone and G. Benton (Penguin, 1992).
- John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty and Other Essays*, ed. J. Gray (Oxford, 1991).
- Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. W. Kaufmann (Knopf, 1986).
- Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile*, trans. A. Bloom (Basic, 1979).
- Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, eds. A.L. Macfie and D.D. Raphael (Liberty Fund, 2009).
- Henry David Thoreau, *Walden and Civil Disobedience*, ed. M. Meyer (Penguin, 1983).

Any additional readings are posted on OAK, and I have marked them on your syllabus.

### Course Grading and Requirements:

We will have twelve substantive meetings over the course of the semester. Beginning with our second meeting, we will move chronologically (more or less!) through a chosen set of texts in the history of modern political thought.

About half our meetings will begin with a student presentation. For the rest of our meetings, we'll each bring a question, comment, critical passage or set of concerns to the table for our discussion.

Since this is a seminar, attendance at all meetings is mandatory, barring some kind of emergency or illness. **Regular attendance and participation will be worth 25% of your grade for the class.**

Each of you will do one presentation on the week of your choice during the semester. The presentations should last for 20-30 minutes. You should prepare your presentation in advance, either in paragraph-prose or a *very* detailed outline, using whatever format or style of presentation you prefer. Please submit to me a one-page handout for your colleagues by 5 p.m. the night before class, containing a short outline of your presentation and perhaps some questions or points you'd like us to consider as a group. I'll print out some copies for the group.

Rather than presenting a summary or an outline of the reading for the group, you should assume we've all read the text(s) and have our own sketches and outlines of the argument in hand. Further, you are not required to cover every aspect of the reading. Instead, your task is to help us think more deeply about a central question or problem generated by the reading and forge connections between it and other materials we have studied together. That is, you should use

your time to argue for what's interesting about the particular reading at hand and to push forward our conversation for the semester.

Your presentation should be *thesis-driven*. This means that your presentation must contain a clear argument about a question or problem that invites disagreement among readers. Your presentation must clearly articulate a question or problem you think is important, and then sketch how you would respond, given a range of possible answers. This can be an interpretive argument [e.g. We can interpret this text as arguing X or Y, but I want to argue that we should read it as arguing Y.] or an evaluative argument [e.g. This text offers the important argument X, and I want to support or criticize that argument for the following reasons.].

**The presentation will be worth 25% of your final grade.**

For your written work, there are three options or “tracks” from which you may choose. Given that you are coming to our seminar table from different fields and with different learning goals and aims, you should choose what works best to help you advance *your* research and training.

**Option I:** One seminar research paper on a topic of your choice. The paper should be between 8,000-10,000 words (between 25-30 pages). Over the course of the semester, you will hand in a short abstract, a bibliography of primary and secondary source materials, a rough draft if you wish, and a final draft. **The “prep” will be worth 10% of your final grade, and the final paper will be worth 40% of your final grade.**

**Option II:** Two papers of 3,000-5,000 words (between 10-15 pages) each, on topics of your choice. These papers do not require additional research, although the incorporation of additional secondary sources is certainly welcome. These will follow the same approach as your presentation—a thesis-driven argument about a particular question or problem that you find in a text or set of texts. This option will allow you to explore one or two themes that interest you without additional research. **Each of these papers is worth 25% of your final grade.**

**Option III:** One paper of 3,000-5,000 words (as with option two) and a practice comprehensive exam. This option is geared toward graduate students who plan to take the qualifying exam in political theory, but other students are welcome to choose this option as well. **The paper will be worth 25% of your final grade, and the practice comp will be worth 25% of your final grade.**

You may choose whichever of the three options that you prefer. I would like you to inform me of your choice no later than October 15 so that we can settle appropriate due dates for your assignments. I am happy to talk with you at any stage about your proposed topics or about what track you should choose.

**Schedule of Readings:**

For each week, the primary, required readings are listed. At any point, I am more than happy to help you get started with the extensive secondary literature on any of these authors/texts, so do let me know if you want suggestions.

08/21/14 Introduction to the course.

08/28/14 Out of town for APSA. No class.

### **The Socialized Self: Smith and Hume on the Cultivation of Moral Sentiments**

09/04/14 Adam Smith, *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Parts I-II.

09/11/14 Smith, *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Part III.

David Hume, “Of the Delicacy of the Tastes and Passions,” and “Of the Dignity or Meanness of Human Nature,” in *Essays Moral, Political, and Literary*. **OAK: Course Content**

### **A Solitary Education for Society: Rousseau’s *Emile***

09/18/14 Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile*, Preface and Books I-II, pp. 33-164

09/25/14 Rousseau, *Emile*, Book IV, pp. 211-356

### **Species-Being and the Social Self: Marx on Capitalism, Labor, and Alienation**

10/02/14 Karl Marx, “On the Jewish Question” and excerpts from “Philosophic and Economic Manuscripts,” in *Early Political Writings*, pp. 211-242 and 322-358.

### **The Solitary Individual: Thoreau’s *Walden* and Emersonian Self-Reliance**

10/09/14 Henry David Thoreau, Excerpts from “Walden,” in *Walden and Civil Disobedience*, pp. 125-199, 220-284, 303-329, 368-382.

Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Self-Reliance,” in *The Portable Emerson*, eds. C. Bode and M. Cowley (Penguin, 1981), pp. 138-164. **OAK: Course Content**

10/16/14 Fall Break. No class.

### **Social Critiques and the Stifled Individual: Mill and Wharton**

10/23/14 John Stuart Mill, “On Liberty,” Ch. 1-4, in *On Liberty and Other Essays*, pp. 5-103.

10/30/14 Edith Wharton, *The Age of Innocence*

### **19<sup>th</sup>-Century Reflections on Tyranny and Individuality: Mill, Tocqueville, and Thoreau**

11/06/14 Thoreau, “Civil Disobedience” in *Walden and Civil Disobedience*, pp. 383-414.

Mill, "On Representative Government," Ch. 3-8, in *On Liberty and Other Essays*, pp. 238-345.

Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America and Two Essays on America*, trans. G. Bevan, ed. I. Kramnick (Penguin, 2003) Volume I, Part 2, ch. 1-9, and Volume II, Part 2 and Part 3, ch. 1-3, pp. 201-369 and 583-662. **OAK: Course Content**

**The Imperiled Individual: Nietzsche's *Beyond Good and Evil***

11/13/14 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*

**Twentieth-Century Perspectives on Society and the Self: DuBois and Freud**

11/20/14 W.E.B. DuBois, "The Forethought," "Of Our Spiritual Strivings," "Of the Meaning of Progress," "Of the Training of Black Men," "Of the Sons of Master and Man," and "Of the Coming of John," in *The Souls of Black Folk*, pp. 1-12, 51-62, 74-90, 133, 143, and 186-203.

11/27/14 Happy Thanksgiving! No class.

12/04/14 Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*