

# 203 Theory of Politics Reading List

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## 1 Course Overview

The current description of this paper in undergraduate Course Handbooks is as follows:

The course is devised so as to develop a manifold range of skills necessary for constructing critical arguments in political theory, for working with problems of consistency and justification, for analysing the complexities of the usage of political language, for understanding the principal forms through which political thought presents itself, both as theory and as ideology, and for appreciating the main current and recent debates that command attention in the field.

To those ends philosophical, ideological and historical analyses are all appropriate, and the merits of each type may be assessed and contrasted. Students are therefore encouraged to explore different ways of approaching these issues, though they are also enabled, if they so wish, to choose a specific strategy from among these approaches. Students are also invited, in consultation with their tutors, to balance a broad appreciation of the field with a development of their own interests within the wide choice of available concepts and ideologies. The literature to which they are directed is therefore diverse, encompassing classical texts, seminal philosophers and theorists, significant journal articles, and typical examples of ideological debate. Both substantive arguments and methodological issues are consequently aired.

By extending the initial understanding of political thought gained by students in the first year introduction to politics, or by building on other related introductory lectures and papers, the course provides the basis for specialisation in political theory, as well as tools that other specialisations may draw upon. It will enable students to reflect on the principles underlying politics, to make reasoned assessments of political discourse, and to develop their own arguments at a requisite degree of sophistication.

Here is the relevant extract from the University's official Examination Regulations:

The critical study of political values and of the concepts used in political analysis and methods and approaches in political theory. Topics may include:

ideal theory and realism;  
power, authority, and related concepts;  
liberty;  
rights;  
justice;  
equality;  
democracy and representation;  
political obligation and civil disobedience;  
neutrality and perfectionism;  
libertarianism;  
multiculturalism;  
socialism; and conservatism.

The topics we will cover have been selected in the light of the above, and examination questions over the last five years. It is worth looking at past papers, to have a sense of the kinds of questions that have been asked. It is also important to read the examiners' reports for the theory of politics paper and to look at the faculty reading list. Past papers, examiners' reports, and the faculty reading list are all available on WebLearn.

## 2 Tutorial Structure

We will have eight 1-hour tutorials, one tutorial per week. For every tutorial but one you will be expected to produce an essay on the topic question(s) for that week. For that week that you do not produce an essay, you will simply give a presentation on the selected topic. For this week, a short handout of the presentation should be submitted in advance.

The details for the tutorials and essays are as follows:

**Tutorial Time and Location:** TBD

**Word Limit:** 1500-2000 words. Please double-space.

**Deadline:** Each essay is due 24 hours before the tutorial is scheduled.

**Email:** [l.j.davies@lse.ac.uk](mailto:l.j.davies@lse.ac.uk). Please send your papers in .doc format.

These tutorials will cover the following topics:

Week 1. Power

Week 2: Civil disobedience

Week 3. Liberty

Week 4. Rights

Week 5. Justice

Week 6. Democracy

Week 7. Feminism

Week 8. Ideal theory

### 3 Reading List and Essay Questions

This reading list begins with some general introductory readings, including some excellent online resources. For each week, I have included a question and the readings. It is good practice to go over the readings a few times before each tutorial, and to do as much of the recommended reading as time permits. Remember that doing good philosophy is hard, and takes time. Time management will thus be very important.

Also note that there are several excellent online resources, including the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (<http://plato.stanford.edu>), the Philosophy Compass (<https://philosophy-compass.com>), and the Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy (<https://www.rep.routledge.com>). **Note that Wikipedia is unlikely to be an excellent online resource.**

This reading list is not exhaustive, neither in terms of the readings for each topic nor the list of topics for the paper. For this reason, it is worth seeking further readings. For example, one should look at the bibliographies in the readings below. Nevertheless, it is certainly not expected that a student will have covered all the suggested reading for a particular topic for a weekly essay. At the bottom of this document, there are some helpful links for writing a good philosophy essay.

If you have questions or comments concerning this reading list, please send them to me.

#### Introductions

David Miller, *A Very Short Introduction to Political Philosophy* (2003)

Jonathan Wolff, *An Introduction to Political Philosophy* (2016)

Adam Swift, *Political Philosophy: A beginners' guide for students and politicians* (2014)

Cecile Fabre, *Justice in a Changing World* (2007)

#### Week 1: Power

**Question:** Is the use of violence for political ends ever justified? -OR- Who has power in a democracy?

Foucault, Michel, 'Two Lectures on Power'

Lukes, Steven (ed.), *Power*, 2nd edn (2005), esp. the introduction.

Miller, David, 'The Use and Abuse of Political Violence', *Political Studies* 32(3) (1984), 32, pp.401-19.

hooks, bell, 'Overcoming White Supremacy: a comment' in *Talking Back: thinking feminist, thinking black* (1989)

Young, Iris Marion, '5 Faces of Oppression' in *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (2011)

<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/feminist-power/>

## Week 2: Civil disobedience and political legitimacy

**Question:** In what circumstances, if any, can one be justified in breaking the law? -OR- How successful is fairness as a ground for political obligation?

<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/political-obligation/>

Schmidtz, D. 'Justifying the state', *Ethics* 1999

Simmons, A. J. 'Philosophical anarchism'

Simmons, A. J. *Moral Principles and Political Obligation*, Princeton University Press 1979

Dworkin, R. 'Civil Disobedience' in *Taking Rights Seriously* 1977

Wolff, J. 'What is the problem of political obligation?', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 1990

Klosko, G. 'Presumptive benefit, fairness, and political obligation', *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 1987

## Week 3: Liberty

**Question:** Is a lack of money tantamount to a lack of freedom? -OR- What is the difference between negative and positive liberty? Is it the same as the difference between 'freedom from' and 'freedom to'?

<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/liberty-positive-negative/>

Berlin, I. 'Two concepts of liberty'

Cohen, G. A. 'Freedom and money'

MacCallum, G. 'Negative and positive freedom', *Philosophical Review* 1967

Taylor, C. 'What's wrong with negative liberty'

Wenar, L. 'Meanings of freedom'

Miller, D. 'Constraints on Freedom', *Ethics* 1983

Carter, I. *A Measure of Freedom* (1999)

Miller, D. (ed.), *Liberty* (1991)

Raz, J. *The Morality of Freedom* (1986) chs 14, 15

## Week 4: Rights

**Question:** Should individual rights trump promotion of the common good? -OR- Are there any natural rights and, if so, which are absolute?

<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/rights/>

Hart, H. L. A., 'Are There Any Natural Rights?'

Steiner, Hillel, *An Essay on Rights* (1994), chapter 3

Thomson, Judith Jarvis, *Rights, Restitution and Risk: Essays in Moral Theory* chs. 3, 5

Wenar, Leif, 'The Nature of Rights'

## Week 5: Justice

**Question:** Does the pursuit of justice require us to restrict liberty? -OR- 'Theories of justice concern the public rules of political institutions rather than personal choices of individuals.' Discuss.

<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/justice/>

Rawls, J. *A theory of justice*, part I

Nozick, R. *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, part II

Ryan, C. C. 'Yours, mine, and ours: property rights and individual liberty'

Miller, D. 'Two cheers for meritocracy'

Scheffler, S. 'Desert and justice in liberal theory'

Cohen, G. A. 'Self-ownership, freedom and equality'

## Week 6: Democracy

**Question:** 'Democracy is justified by its consequences, not by its supposed intrinsic fairness.' Discuss. -OR- In what sense, if any, must democracy be 'deliberative'?

<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/democracy/>

Christiano, Thomas, *The Rule of the Many* (1996)

Cohen, Joshua, 'Deliberation and Democratic Legitimacy', in his *Philosophy, Politics, Democracy: Selected Essays* (2009)

Estlund, David M., *Democratic Authority: A Philosophical Framework* (2008)

## Week 7: Feminism

**Question:** How, if at all, does feminism affect what our understanding of what politics is? -OR- To what extent are differences among women a problem for feminism?

<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/feminism-liberal/>

Pateman, Carole, *The Sexual Contract* (1988), chs. 1 and 4

Okin, Susan Moller, *Justice, Gender and the Family* (1989)

Nussbaum, Martha C., *Sex and Social Justice* (1999), ch. 2 'The Feminist Critique of Liberalism'

Zerilli, Linda, 'Feminist Theory and the Canon of Political Thought' in *The Oxford Handbook of Political Theory*

## Week 8: Ideal theory

**Question:** Must the recommendations of political theories be feasible? -OR- What is ideal theory?

Cohen, G. A., *Rescuing Justice and Equality* (2008), esp. ch 6.

Estlund, David M., *Democratic Authority: A Philosophical Framework* (2008), ch. 14, 'Utopophobia'.

Miller, David, 'Political Philosophy for Earthlings' in his book *Justice for Earthlings: Essays in Political Philosophy* (2013)

Stemplowska, Zofia, 'What's Ideal about Ideal Theory?', *Social Theory and Practice* 34(3) (2008)

Simmons, A.J., 'Ideal and Nonideal Theory', *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 38(1) (2010)

## 4 Tips for Good Philosophy Essays

The best advice I have seen on how to write good philosophy essays is Jim Pryor's (<http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/writing.html>). I highly recommend studying this guide, as well as returning to it frequently to refresh your memory.