

PO2E3-15 Foundations of Political Theory

24/25

Department

Politics & International Studies

Level

Undergraduate Level 2

Module leader

Miri Davidson

Credit value

15

Module duration

10 weeks

Assessment

100% coursework

Study location

University of Warwick main campus, Coventry

Description

Introductory description

The aim of this module is to introduce students to some of the foundational arguments and debates in modern (mainly) European political theory, as well as some of the discipline's most important primary texts. To this end, students will critically examine claims about freedom, equality, democracy, revolution and crisis made by some of the most important political thinkers since about 1640. Key texts will include Hobbes's *Leviathan*, Locke's *Second Treatise of Government*, Rousseau's *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*, Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, Marx and Engels's *The Communist Manifesto*, Du Bois's *The Souls of Black Folk*, Clara Zetkin's *Fighting Fascism*, and Franz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*. The module will also consider how these theories speak to contemporary debates in political theory, such as debates about gender and sexual difference, economic crisis, reparations for colonialism and the resurgence of the far right. The module builds on ideas explored in *Introduction to Politics* during your first year, and it leads towards the term two module *Topics in Political Theory*, which deals with present-day arguments about social justice.

Module aims

This module aims to give you an understanding of the political theories of some of the most

important (mainly) European thinkers from 1640 onwards. You will be encouraged to read widely in both the primary and secondary literature concerning these writers. We aim to develop your understanding of how these thinkers' political convictions are shaped by their understandings of human nature and the unfolding of world history. You will also come to understand how political thought is bound up in world-historical processes and events such as European colonialism, the transatlantic slave trade, class struggle, fascism and decolonisation.

Outline syllabus

This is an indicative module outline only to give an indication of the sort of topics that may be covered. Actual sessions held may differ.

Indicative syllabus:

Week One: Introduction + Hobbes's State of Nature (core text: Thomas Hobbes's *Leviathan*)

Week Two: Hobbes on Sovereignty (core text: Thomas Hobbes's *Leviathan*)

Week Three: Locke on Property (core text: John Locke's *Two Treatises of Government*)

Week Four: Rousseau on Inequality (core text: Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Discourse on Inequality*)

Week Five: Wollstonecraft on Feminism (core text: Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*)

Week Six: Reading Week

Week Seven: Marx on Class Struggle (core text: Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels's *The Communist Manifesto*)

Week Eight: Du Bois on Race and Racism (core text: WEB Du Bois's *The Souls of Black Folk*)

Week Nine: Zetkin on Fascism (core text: Clara Zetkin's *Fighting Fascism*)

Week Ten: Fanon on Decolonization (core text: Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*)

Learning outcomes

By the end of the module, students should be able to:

- Demonstrate an understanding of how political theory relates to issues concerning freedom, equality, human nature, and forms of oppression.
- Interpret and assess critically the best-known texts of some of the most important (mainly) European political thinkers, from Hobbes to Fanon.
- Confront and assess complex sets of ideas in political theory, and present and defend your point of view in writing.

Indicative reading list

Core readings:

Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (Minneapolis: Lerner, 2018).

John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, ed. Richard Cox (Illinois: Harlan Davidson, 1982).

Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality* (London: Penguin, 1984).

Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (London: Penguin, 2015).

W. E. B Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (Gorham: Myers, 2018).

Clara Zetkin, *Fighting Fascism* (Chicago: Haymarket, 2017).
Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 2021)

Recommended readings:

Robbie Shilliam, *Decolonizing Politics* (Cambridge: Polity, 2021).
Charles W. Mills, *The Racial Contract* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997).
Carole Pateman, *The Sexual Contract* (Cambridge: Polity, 1988).
Philip Pettit, 'Republican Elements in the Thought of Mary Wollstonecraft', in Sandrine Bergès (ed.), Alan M. S. J. Coffee (ed.), *The Social and Political Philosophy of Mary Wollstonecraft* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).
China Mieville, *A Spectre, Haunting: On the Communist Manifesto* (London: Bloomsbury, 2022).
Anthony Appiah, 'The Uncompleted Argument: Du Bois and the Illusion of Race', *Critical Inquiry* 12 (1), 1985.
Robert Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism* (London: Penguin, 2005).
Lewis R. Gordon, *What Fanon Said: A Philosophical Introduction to his Life and Thought* (New York: Fordham, 2015).

Subject specific skills

On completion of this module, you should be able to:

- Demonstrate an understanding of how political thought relates to issues concerning freedom, equality, human nature, and forms of oppression.
- Interpret and assess critically the best-known texts of some of the most important western European political and social thinkers from Hobbes to Fanon.
- Confront and assess complex sets of ideas in political theory, and present and defend your point of view in writing.

Transferable skills

The module provides students with opportunities to acquire and to develop the following key skills:

- Critical thinking and analytical skills. This involves identifying premises and conclusions of arguments; determining whether the conclusions follow from the premises; and understanding the practical implications of theoretical commitments.
- Close textual analysis skills. This involves interpreting a complex text, and distilling from it various interconnected lines of argument.
- Written communication skills. This involves presenting your interpretation, analysis or critique of an argument in a clear, organised, and persuasive way.
- Oral communication skills. This involves communicating complex ideas in person and responding constructively to the view of others.

Study

Study time

Type	Required
Lectures	9 sessions of 1 hour (6%)
Seminars	9 sessions of 1 hour (6%)
Private study	132 hours (88%)
Total	150 hours

Private study description

For private student and independent learning, students are expected to read and study the core and supplementary texts, as well as reflect on each week's seminar questions. In addition, they are expected to research, plan and write their assessments during this time.

Costs

No further costs have been identified for this module.

Assessment

You do not need to pass all assessment components to pass the module.

Assessment group A

	Weighting	Study time
Critical Review	30%	
You are asked to concisely explain a key argument of a given thinker (for example, Hobbes on absolute sovereignty, Locke on private property, Rousseau on the origins of inequality, or Wollstonecraft on women's equality) and to reflect critically on the strengths and/or weaknesses of this argument.		
Essay	70%	
Students should write an essay in response to one of the questions provided. Questions will be released four weeks before the deadline. Students are expected to form an argument in response to the question.		

Feedback on assessment

Written feedback will be provided via Tabula. Assessments are marked according to criteria set out in the Undergraduate Handbook.

Availability

Courses

This module is Core for:

- Year 2 of UPOA-M100 Undergraduate Politics
- UPOA-M16A Undergraduate Politics and International Studies
 - Year 2 of M16A Politics and International Studies
 - Year 2 of M16A Politics and International Studies
 - Year 2 of M16A Politics and International Studies