

PO2E3-15 Foundations of Political Theory

26/27

Department

Politics & International Studies

Level

Undergraduate Level 2

Module leader

Miri Davidson

Credit value

15

Module duration

10 weeks

Assessment

100% exam

Study location

University of Warwick main campus, Coventry

Description

Introductory description

Why should we obey our government? Could modern societies function without private property? Should we abolish marriage? Does a capitalist economic system help us to flourish, or alienate us from what makes us human? What does it mean to 'decolonise'? Guided by these kinds of questions, this module introduces students to some of the foundational debates in modern (mainly) European political theory. Students will critically examine arguments about democracy and revolution, gender and race, markets and capital, and freedom and alienation made by some of the most important political thinkers from the 17th century up until today. They will be expected to read these thinkers' primary writings in depth, to critically analyse them and consider whether, or how, they apply to our world today. A major part of the module is therefore also to consider how these foundational theories speak to contemporary debates in political theory, including debates about democracy in times of crisis, gender roles, work, anticolonial violence, and prisons.

Key texts may 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's *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, Hayek's *The Use of Knowledge in Society*, Franz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*, and Davis's *Are Prisons Obsolete?*

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

The main aim of this module is to help students understand where our most foundational ideas and assumptions about politics come from. It does this by introducing you to some of the most influential political thinkers (in the Western tradition) from the 17th century up until the present. You will be expected to read their key writings in depth, as well as secondary literature on them, to critically analyse them and consider whether, or how, they apply to our world today. In doing so, you will come to understand how political thought is bound up in world-historical events and structures such as the English and French Revolutions, European colonialism, class struggle, feminism, and decolonisation. Finally, and importantly, you will learn how to critically assess these theories by debating their merits - and flaws - in class and in writing.

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

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

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

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

Week Five: Marx on Alienation (core text: Karl Marx's Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts)

Week Six: Reading Week

Week Seven: Mill and Taylor on Marriage (core text: J S Mill and Harriet Taylor's The Subjection of Women)

Week Eight: Hayek on Markets (core text: Friedrich Hayek's 'The Use of Knowledge in Society OR The Road to Serfdom')

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

Week Ten: Davis on Prisons (core text: Angela Davis's Are Prisons Obsolete?)

Learning outcomes

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

- Interpret and assess critically the best-known texts of some of the most important European political and social thinkers, from Hobbes to Davis.
- Confront and assess complex ideas in political theory, and present and defend your point of view in writing.
- Demonstrate an understanding of how political ideas are bound up in world-historical events and structures such as the English and French Revolutions, European colonialism, class struggle, feminism, and decolonisation.

Indicative reading list

[Reading lists can be found in Talis](#)

Subject specific skills

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

- Interpret and assess critically the best-known texts of some of the most important European political and social thinkers, from Hobbes to Davis.
- Confront and assess complex ideas in political theory, and present and defend your point of view in writing.
- Demonstrate an understanding of how political ideas are bound up in historical events and structures such as colonialism, patriarchy, revolutions, capitalism, and decolonisation.

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

Students will prepare for seminars by reading the core reading and reflecting on the debate questions for the week's topic. They will complete the module assessment.

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 B1

	Weighting	Study time	Eligible for self-certification
Assessment component			
Take Home Examination	100%		No
A take home exam. Students will answer two questions out of a total of (depending on the number of topics) eight or nine questions. The total word count for both questions will be 2500 words with a 1250 limit for each answer. The questions will be released a week in advance of the deadline. The assessment will be 100% of the mark.			
There will be no formative assessment, but exam guidance and specimen questions will be provided. Students can submit a 500 word plan answer to a specimen question and get feedback on this from their seminar tutor.			

Reassessment component is the same

Feedback on assessment

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

[Past exam papers for PO2E3](#)

Availability

Courses

This module is Core for:

- Year 2 of UHIA-VM11 Undergraduate History and Politics

- Year 2 of UHIA-VM13 Undergraduate History and Politics (with a term in Venice)
- Year 2 of UPHA-V5L2 Undergraduate Philosophy and Politics
- Year 2 of UPHA-V7ML Undergraduate Philosophy, Politics and Economics
- Year 2 of UPOA-M100 Undergraduate Politics
- Year 2 of UPOA-M16A Undergraduate Politics and International Studies
- Year 2 of UPOA-M168 Undergraduate Politics and International Studies with Chinese
- Year 2 of UPOA-ML13 Undergraduate Politics and Sociology
- Year 2 of UPOA-M163 Undergraduate Politics, International Studies and French
- UPOA-M164 Undergraduate Politics, International Studies and German
 - Year 2 of M100 Politics
 - Year 2 of M164 Politics, International Studies and German
- Year 2 of UPOA-M166 Undergraduate Politics, International Studies and Hispanic Studies

This module is Core optional for:

- Year 2 of UIPA-L2L8 Undergraduate Politics, International Studies and Global Sustainable Development

This module is Optional for:

- Year 2 of UPHA-V7MW Undergraduate Politics, Philosophy and Law

This module is Core option list A for:

- Year 2 of UECA-LM1D Undergraduate Economics, Politics and International Studies
- Year 2 of UPHA-V7ML Undergraduate Philosophy, Politics and Economics

This module is Core option list B for:

- Year 2 of UPHA-V7ML Undergraduate Philosophy, Politics and Economics

This module is Core option list C for:

- Year 2 of UPHA-V7MW Undergraduate Politics, Philosophy and Law

This module is Option list B for:

- Year 2 of UPHA-V7ML Undergraduate Philosophy, Politics and Economics

This module is Option list D for:

- Year 2 of UPHA-V7ML Undergraduate Philosophy, Politics and Economics