

MC 271-002: Constitutionalism and Democracy
Spring 2020
TR 10:20-11:40am
331 Case Hall

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Office Hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays 11:45am-12:45pm, 2:00-4:00pm

General Information

Description

This is the second course in the Political Theory and Constitutional Democracy sequence, examining the radical break brought about by modern political theorists who came up with the fundamental principles of liberal constitutional democracy in the West. We will begin with the philosophical foundations of modern constitutionalism, then move to a study of their application in the great American experiment.

The philosophical foundations of liberal constitutional democracy come to us from British philosophers Thomas Hobbes and John Locke, who were writing in the context of their country's own constitutional crisis – the English Civil War, Restoration, and Glorious Revolution. We will see how our “mother country” dealt with its own attempt at liberal government, and how it inspired the political theory of modern constitutional democracy.

We will then turn to the American experiment and its application of these constitutional principles to the founding of a new country. In this section, we will study Thomas Paine's arguments for the American colonists' revolution against Britain, the Federalist and Anti-Federalist debate over the proposed constitution, and our founding documents, the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution.

We will finally study how this experiment turned out. We will first do this through the eyes of a foreign visitor, Alexis de Tocqueville, who is one of the most insightful observers of American civic culture. Here we get to take a step back to consider how our unique form of government affects our character generally, and how it relates to the education you are receiving as PTCD students.

To conclude, we will examine our greatest constitutional crisis: conflict over the institution of slavery and the preservation of the Union, which culminates in the American Civil War. We will study the speeches and writings of Abraham Lincoln as he navigated our nation through this crisis, and the speeches and writings of Frederick Douglass, a former slave and later statesman who fought for the civil rights and liberties outlined in the Constitution for all Americans. We will see whether our Constitution was fundamentally flawed in its conception by permitting slavery in the American republic, or if America has been on a slow but steady path to living up to its principled ideals of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness for all.

Learning Goals

- To read philosophical and political texts closely and critically
- To clearly articulate arguments through writing in different forms
- To understand the foundations of modern liberal constitutional democracies in the West
- To uncover the assumptions about human life that obscure our philosophical ignorance

Expectations

Students are expected to attend class, participate in class discussion and reflections, complete course readings, and submit all assignments on time throughout the duration of the course. The course is structured so that the workload is evenly distributed throughout the semester, giving you time to complete your work and me time to complete my evaluation of it.

As your instructor, will prepare lecture materials and guide discussion for each class. I will reply to all emails within 24 hours during the work week (within 48 hours on the weekend), and provide detailed feedback on all assignments within one week of submission.

Course Materials

Since critical reading is a core learning objective for this class, we will often work through the texts together in class. For this reason, you need to obtain the **exact** editions of the texts for this course so we have the same page numbers and, in some cases, translations. You will need the following books:

- Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Penguin Books, ISBN: 978-0140431957
- John Locke, *Two Treatises on Government*, Cambridge, ISBN: 978-0521357302
- Thomas Paine, *Rights of Man, Common Sense, and Other Political Writings*, ISBN: 978-0199538003
- *The Federalist Papers*, Signet Classics, ISBN: 978-0451528810
- Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, Trans. Harvey Mansfield, Chicago University Press, ISBN: 978-0226805368

I will post additional readings as PDFs on D2L and will note those on the reading schedule.

Assignments

I will provide detailed assignment guidelines and general grading rubrics for each assignment in class and on D2L. Assignments increase in value as the semester progresses, allowing you to make mistakes and get your bearings early in the semester so you can adjust your work on later assignments that are worth more.

Plagiarism Quiz

As noted below, plagiarism will not be tolerated in this class. However, many students, even at the college level, do not always understand what constitutes plagiarism. To remedy this, and to ensure that you understand that plagiarism will result in a zero on the assignment, you must complete an online quiz, found here: <https://www.indiana.edu/~istd/test.html>

To complete the assignment, you must submit a copy of the completion certificate to the designated Dropbox (do **not** email me).

Participation and Reflections

We will be working through course texts in class and discussing their meanings and implications together. This portion of your grade includes your preparation for class (i.e. reading the assigned text for the day), participation in discussion, and completion of reflection questions I will ask during class to gauge where you're at. Sometimes you will reflect on your own, sometimes you will discuss with a partner or small group, but **each student** will submit their own reflection responses at the end of class each day.

Short Papers

After closely reading the texts and thinking about how they answer humans' fundamental questions about life, we want to be able to clearly articulate and evaluate these answers. You will write two short papers during the semester that will respond to an essay prompt and should be 4-5 pages long.

Final Paper

For the final paper, you will respond to an essay prompt that follows from the other exercises you've done in class so far. This paper will be about 7-10 pages long and will address a larger, more general philosophical question. If you want to write on a question of your own choosing, you must get your question/topic approved at least 3 weeks prior to the final paper deadline, as indicated on the schedule below.

Assessment

Final Grade Breakdown

Plagiarism Quiz	10%
Participation and Reflections	15%
Short Paper #1 (4-5 pages)	20%
Short Paper #2 (4-5 pages)	25%
Final Paper (7-10 pages)	30%

Grading Scale

Letter Grade	Percentage	Grade Point
A/A+	92-100	4.0
B+/A-	86-91	3.5
B-/B	80-85	3.0
C+	75-79	2.5
C-/C	70-74	2.0
D+	65-69	1.5
D-/D	60-64	1.0
F	59 and under	0.0

Course Schedule

Week	Topic	Assignments	Due
Week 1 1/6 – 1/10	Introduction Why are we here? Where have we been? Classical political theory	- [no reading] • Plagiarism quiz	T 1/7 Th 1/9 F 1/10
Week 2 1/13 – 1/17	Modern Political Theory Thomas Hobbes	- Hobbes, <i>Leviathan</i> Dedicatory epistle, Intro, ch 1-4 - Hobbes, <i>Leviathan</i> ch 8-11	T 1/14 Th 1/16
Week 3 1/20 – 1/24	Modern Political Theory Thomas Hobbes	- Hobbes, <i>Leviathan</i> ch 13-15 - Hobbes, <i>Leviathan</i> ch 17-18, 20-21	T 1/21 Th 1/23
Week 4 1/27 – 1/31	Modern Political Theory John Locke	- Locke, <i>First Treatise</i> Intro, ch 1-4 - Locke, <i>Second Treatise</i> Intro, ch 1-4	T 1/28 Th 1/30
Week 5 2/3 – 2/7	Modern Political Theory John Locke	- Locke, <i>Second Treatise</i> ch 5 - Locke, <i>First Treatise</i> ch 5-6 (through §58), <i>Second Treatise</i> ch 6-7	T 2/4 Th 2/6
Week 6 2/10 – 2/14	The American Revolution Thomas Paine	- Locke, <i>Second Treatise</i> ch 9-14, 19 - Paine, <i>Common Sense</i> p 3-19 - Short paper #1 due	T 2/11 Th 2/13 F 2/14
Week 7 2/17 – 2/21	The American Founding Declaration of Independence and Constitution Federalist Papers	- Paine, <i>Common Sense</i> p 19-46, Declaration of Independence (<i>Federalist Papers</i> p 528-32) - U.S. Constitution (<i>Federalist Papers</i> 542-68), Federalist #9 and #10	T 2/18 Th 2/20
Week 8 2/24 – 2/28	The American Founding Federalist Papers	- Federalist #47-51 - Federalist #68, #70-72	T 2/25 Th 2/27
SPRING BREAK 3/2 – 3/6			
Week 9 3/9 – 3/13	The American Founding Anti-Federalist Papers	- Articles of Confederation (<i>Federalist Papers</i> p 533-41), Brutus 1 (D2L) - <i>Anti-Federalist Papers</i> , Centinel 1,	T 3/10 Th 3/12

		Cato 4 (D2L)	
Week 10 3/16 – 3/20	The American Character Tocqueville	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Tocqueville <i>Democracy in America</i> Introduction, I.2.7 (3-15, 235-49) - Tocqueville <i>Democracy in America</i> I.2.1-4, half of 5 (165-99) 	T 3/17 Th 3/19
Week 11 3/23 – 3/27	The American Character Tocqueville	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Tocqueville II.2.1-4, 8-9; II.4.1-3, 6-7 (p 479-88, 500-506, 639-45, 651-65) - Tocqueville II.2.10-17; II.3.17-19 (508-524, 587-604) 	T 3/24 Th 3/26
Week 12 3/30 – 4/3	Our Constitutional Crisis Lincoln, the Union, and Slavery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Tocqueville, <i>Democracy in America</i> I.2.10 (p 302-307, 326-48) - Lincoln, <i>Great Speeches</i> “Lyceum Address” p 1-8, “House Divided” p 24-32 • Short Paper #2 due 	T 3/31 Th 4/2 F 4/3
Week 13 4/6 – 4/10	Our Constitutional Crisis Lincoln, the Union, and Slavery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lincoln, <i>Great Speeches</i> “Address at Cooper Institute” p 35-51, “First Inaugural Address” p 53-61 - Lincoln, <i>Great Speeches</i> “Gettysburg Address” p 103-104, “Second Inaugural Address” p 106-108 - Final paper question/topic due 	T 4/7 Th 4/9 F 4/10
Week 14 4/13 – 4/17	Our Constitutional Crisis Douglass, Slavery, and Civil Liberties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Douglass, <i>Great Speeches</i> “Oration in Honor of Abraham Lincoln” p 59-68, “My Slave Experience in Maryland” p 4- • No class 	T 4/14 Th 4/16
Week 15 4/20 – 4/24	Our Constitutional Crisis Douglass, Slavery, and Civil Liberties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Douglass, <i>Great Speeches</i> “What to the Slave is the 4th of July?” p 26-47, “What the Black Man Wants” p 51-58 - [no reading] 	T 4/21 Th 4/23
FINALS WEEK 4/27 – 5/1 Final paper due Friday, May 1 by 10:00am			

Additional Information and Resources

Changes to the Syllabus

I retain the right to make adjustments to the course, syllabus, and assignments as needed throughout the semester. If I make any changes, I will update the syllabus or related documents, and announce these changes on D2L. It is your responsibility to read these announcements and contact me if you have any questions or concerns.

Plagiarism

Plagiarism is lying, cheating, and stealing, and it is in no way acceptable. Assignments that are plagiarized will receive a 0. All work is expected to be original, and not previously or simultaneously turned in for credit in another course (unless you get explicit permission from me beforehand). All students at Michigan State University are responsible for knowing and adhering to the academic integrity policy of this institution. Violations of this policy may include: cheating, plagiarism, aid of academic dishonesty, fabrication, lying, bribery, and threatening behavior. Students who are found to be in violation of the academic integrity policy will be subject to both academic sanctions from the faculty member (failing the assignment or this class) and non-academic sanctions (including but not limited to university probation, suspension, or expulsion). For more information, please see the following:

<https://www.msu.edu/unit/ombud/academic-integrity/index.html>

Disabilities Accommodation

The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) provides protection from illegal discrimination for qualified individuals with disabilities. Students requesting instructional accommodations due to disabilities must arrange for such accommodation. If you qualify for accommodations because of a disability, please submit to me a letter from Disability Services **within the first week of class** so that your needs may be addressed. Disability Services determines accommodations based on documented disabilities.