

FOUNDATIONS OF MODERN POLITICAL THOUGHT

(Lý thuyết Chính trị)

Spring 2021

Dr. Nguyễn Thành Trung (trungnt@hcmussh.edu.vn)

Meeting schedule: **Monday** or **Friday** (1:00 am-4:00 am)

Meeting room: D501

Office hours: Friday morning (9:00-11:00 am)

Course description:

This course offers an introduction to Western political ideas from Hobbes to Rawls through an examination of the major debates within the tradition. Although a chronology of modern political theory is provided to help students to better understand how a given thinker or political philosopher fits into the wider historical and political context, this course is not designed to depict modern political theory in a chronological order. The course familiarizes students with central debates in political theory and permits them an overview of the works of some of the discipline's most pertinent thinkers. It does so by pointing out long term traditions of thought as well as implications for contemporary politics and political science.

We will pay attention to enduring questions regarding freedom, equality, legitimacy, political economy, state and economy, and justice. We will try to answer questions such as What is a government? Why should (or shouldn't) we have one? How should it be organized? When does it become illegitimate? What are the proper purposes of political institutions? What political institutions can best achieve whose ends and bring to life values of liberty, equality, sound judgment, and participation? What are the moral responsibilities of citizens—whose representatives exercise political power in their name? Is democracy a human right?

Intended learning outcomes:

- Students will learn to critically engage with canonical texts, to compare them analytically, and to translate what they mean for the present.
- Students will acquire the critical analytical vocabulary to address political questions in a reflected and theoretically informed way.

Assignments and Assessments

Your final grade for the course will be calculated based on four assessments:

1. Two micro-essays (reading responses) – 40%. (of 1 page each, 1.5-spaced, 12-point Times New Roman font). I expect a short abstract of the texts' main tenets, an analysis that embeds the reading in earlier class discussions, and the articulation of one central synthetic question that engages the issues and debates addressed in the reading. The question should target a key aspect of the reading that you would like to debate in class and should serve as a starting point for broader discussion.

Response papers need to be submitted as an email-attachment by 9:00 pm Sunday before the 5th and 7th session.

2. 4-5-page final essay – 40%. Final take-home exam to be submitted two weeks after the last session (double-spaced, 12-point Times New Roman font).

3. A short quiz – 10%

4. Discussion participation and attendance – 10%

Reading texts: on top of canonical texts, you need to read

1. Wolff, Jonathan. 2006. *An Introduction to Political Philosophy*. Revised Edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

2. Jones, Tudor. 2002. *Modern Political Thinkers and Ideas*. London and New York: Routledge.

3. Heywood, Andrew. 2005. *Political Theory: An Introduction*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

These supplemental books are free and available online.

Hobbes – Leviathan

Locke – Political Writings

Locke - Two Treatises of Government

Kant – Political Writings

Rousseau – Basic Political Writings

Marx – Selected Political Writings of Karl Marx

Max Weber – The Vocation Lectures

WEEKLY SCHEDULE:

Part I: Rules, Order and the State

Session 1: Syllabus Review and Course overview

The first session will offer us time to get to know one another and to familiarize ourselves with the overall subject of the class.

- Wolff, Jonathan. 2006. *An Introduction to Political Philosophy*, pp. 1-6.
- Heywood, Andrew. 2005. *Political Theory: An Introduction*, pp. 1-14.
- Why Study Political Philosophy? (3 mins 56 secs)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PzhniSEhrIs&ab_channel=CoreCurriculum
- An Introduction to the Philosophy of Politics and Economics (44 mins 25 secs)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mm8asJxdcds&ab_channel=BigThink
-

Session 2: Sovereignty and Government

Sovereignty, in political theory, is the ultimate overseer, or authority, in the decision-making process of the state.

- Jones, Tudor. 2002. *Modern Political Thinkers and Ideas*, chapter 1, pp. 1-33.
- Wolff, Jonathan. 2006. *An Introduction to Political Philosophy*, chapter 2, pp. 34-59.
- Heywood, Andrew. 2005. *Political Theory: An Introduction*, pp. 89-120.
- The Political Theory of Thomas Hobbes: The Sovereign and the State (4 mins 32 secs)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BsN3f1DFbA&ab_channel=UQPoliticalScienceandInternationalStudies

Session 3: Representation: The Will of the People. Who Should Rule?

Voters participate in a system that determines, numerically, which representative will win what seat.

- Wolff, Jonathan. 2006. *An Introduction to Political Philosophy*, chapter 3, pp. 62-101.
- Heywood, Andrew. 2005. *Political Theory: An Introduction*, pp. 51-88, 220-251
- What is Liberalism? All you Need to Know (3 mins 29 secs)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gboxl2k4Tv2I&ab_channel=GetWisdom

Session 4: Legitimate Political Authority and Power

In political science, legitimacy usually is understood as the popular acceptance and recognition by the public of the authority of a governing régime, whereby authority has political power through consent and mutual understandings, not coercion.

- Jones, Tudor. 2002. *Modern Political Thinkers and Ideas*, pp. 35-57
- Heywood, Andrew. 2005. *Political Theory: An Introduction*, pp. 121-151.
- Political Authority - An Examination (9 mins 28 secs)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S7zaR-qwZz4&ab_channel=AcademyofIdeas

Part II: Values

Session 5: Political Ideologies and Principles

A political ideology is a certain set of ethical ideals, principles, doctrines, myths or symbols of a social movement, institution, class or large group that explains how society should work and offers some political and cultural blueprint for a certain social order.

- Barry, Norman. 1995. *An Introduction to Modern Political Theory*, pp. 115-143
- Political Ideology: Crash Course Government and Politics #35 (8 mins 46 secs)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j_k_k-bHigM&ab_channel=CrashCourse

Class 6: Liberty and Rights

The doctrine of liberty is underpinned by the ideal of autonomy. While the rights that have traditionally been of concern to liberals serve the interests of the people.

- Jones, Tudor. 2002. *Modern Political Thinkers and Ideas*, pp. 59-149.
- Wolff, Jonathan. 2006. *An Introduction to Political Philosophy*, pp. 104-131.
- Heywood, Andrew. 2005. *Political Theory: An Introduction*, pp. 180-219.
- What Are Rights? | Political Philosophy with Jason Brennan (12 mins 38 secs)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PdcvcMGxVJk&ab_channel=Libertarianism.org

Class 7: Justice, Equality,

In a series of thought experiments, American political philosopher John Rawls (1921-2002) has articulated a very influential conception of social justice. His argument is firmly rooted in the liberal tradition and we should be able to trace some of his core concepts back to the period of classical liberalism. According to him, what is a just society? And how can we tell? Moreover, why do his principles allow for a certain degree of inequality?

- Rawls, John. 2001. *Justice as Fairness: A Restatement*. Belknap, Harvard University Press, pp. 3-29.
- Wolff, Jonathan. 2006. *An Introduction to Political Philosophy*, chapter 2, pp. 133-176.
- Sandel, Michael. 2009. *Justice: What's the Right Thing to Do*, chapters 6&10
- John Rawls (6 mins 33 secs) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5-JQ17X6VNg&ab_channel=TheSchoolofLife
- ***Final Exam Questions will be distributed**