

Two Liberal Traditions: British & French
Fall 2017
Tuesdays 4-6:30 PM

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What does it mean to be a liberal? In America, we regularly take our “liberal heritage” for granted, so much so that liberal principles – commitment to individual rights, limited government, free markets – are simply accepted as political necessities, even truisms. Many of these principles come to us from well-known British thinkers like John Locke. But theorists in the French tradition offered equally rich, distinct perspectives on these values. This course will focus on “two liberal traditions,” British and French, through roughly the 19th century. We will study liberalism’s beginnings, its evolution, and its legacy.

We will explore some recurring themes across liberal thought: How do we define liberty, and under what conditions can it be protected? What is the trade-off between liberty and other values, like security, order, equality, or human progress? What is the relationship between economic and political liberty? We will also ask whether the study of liberal thought can teach us anything about contemporary politics, or whether many of these ideas were specific to a given place and time. Students will encounter the works of canonical liberals like Locke, Mill, Montesquieu, and Smith, along with lesser-known theorists like Benjamin Constant and Germaine de Staël.

Required Texts:

Most readings are available free through the Online Library of Liberty at oll.libertyfund.org. I have included links to the available PDFs. You will, however, need to have the following books:

Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*, ed. Anne M. Cohler (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), ISBN: 0521369746.

Tocqueville, *The Ancien Regime and the Revolution*, trans. Gerald Bevan (New York: Penguin Classics), ISBN: 014144164X.

Course requirements:

1.) Attendance, Participation, and Discussion Leader Role – 25%

In this course, we will examine some of the most puzzling and most enduring problems of politics through the lens of liberal political thought. The best way to approach such questions is through respectful discussion. When done well, this approach encourages us to examine our opinions by remaining open to challenge and disagreement. Your participation throughout the semester is vital to making this work. You will be assessed on the *quality* rather than *quantity* of your comments. The best comments are those that show you have read and thought about the topics for discussion in any given week. Of course, you have to attend in order to participate. You are allowed two absences for the term before it negatively impacts your grade.

In addition to regular, active participation, once a semester you will be asked to lead our class discussion on that week's readings. As discussion leader, your job is to frame a debate or topic in one or more of the readings, and pose a thoughtful question to the class to initiate conversation.

2.) Three short response papers (~600-1000 words) – 35%

Three times during the semester, you will submit a short response paper to that week's readings. You should submit the paper to me (gianna_englert@brown.edu) by 11:59 PM the night before our class meeting (in this case, you will submit the paper on Monday night). These papers should not be extended summaries of a book or essay. Rather, you should *respond* to one or more of the readings for that week. How can we make sense of a difficult argument? Did the author(s) offer a particularly convincing argument? Why or why not? Did some authors succeed where others failed? How could a flawed argument be improved? Did the text illuminate a contemporary problem in a different way? You should feel free to place the authors in conversation with one another, or with other readings you've done in related courses. Just be sure you are responding mostly to the readings assigned for that particular week.

3.) Final paper (~3000-4500 words) – 40%

Your major project in this course will be a final paper, due during Finals Week. This project is not intended to be a research paper (though some outside research might be necessary). Instead, you should use our course readings to address a question, problem, or theme.

Because this paper is meant to be developed over the course of the semester, you will submit a 1-2 proposal at the midterm point of the term. We will meet one-on-one to discuss your proposal, and at least once more during the term to discuss your ideas and progress.

Course-Related Time Expectations:

Over 14 weeks, students will spend 3 hours per week in class (42 hours total). Required reading for the seminar meetings is expected to take up approximately 7 hours per week (98 hours). In addition, writing and researching response essays and the final paper is estimated at total of approximately 40 hours over the course of the term.

Schedule:

Week 1, 9/12: Introduction to the Course, What/Who Is A Liberal?

Daniel Klein, "The Origin of Liberalism"

<https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2014/02/the-origin-of-liberalism/283780/>

Paul Crider, "Liberal Principles"

<https://www.liberalcurrents.com/liberalism-article-paul-crider/>

Andy Sabl, "Liberalism Beyond Markets"

<https://niskanencenter.org/blog/liberalism-beyond-markets/>

Week 2, 9/19: Lockean Foundations

John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government* (1689), Ch 1-10; 19

http://lf-oll.s3.amazonaws.com/titles/222/Locke_0057_EBk_v6.0.pdf

A Letter Concerning Toleration (1689) entire, begins on p. 36 of PDF

http://lf-oll.s3.amazonaws.com/titles/2375/Locke_1560_EBk_v6.0.pdf

Week 3, 9/26: Montesquieu on Spirit and Liberty

The Spirit of the Laws (1748)

Author's Forward; Preface; Books 1-5; Book 8, chs. 1-7 and 16

Week 4, 10/3: Montesquieu, cont'd

The Spirit of the Laws

Book 11, chs. 1-6; Book 12, chs. 1-4 and 19; Book 19, chs. 1-11 and 27; Book 20, chs 1-6, 12-13; Book 24, chs. 1-5, 8, 14

Week 5, 10/10: Commercial Society: The Scottish Enlightenment I

David Hume, *Essays Moral, Political, Literary*

“Of the Origin of Government”; “Of Civil Liberty”; “Of Commerce”; “Of Refinement in the Arts”; “The Idea of a Perfect Commonwealth”

<http://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/hume-essays-moral-political-literary-lf-ed>

Week 6, 10/17: The Scottish Enlightenment II

Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations* (1776)

Book I, Ch. 1 “Of the Division of Labor”; Ch. 2 “Of the Principle Which Gives Occasion to the Division of Labor”; Book IV, Ch. 2 “Of Restraints upon the Importation from Foreign Countries of such Goods as can be Produced at Home,” p. 452-457 only

http://files.libertyfund.org/files/220/0141-02_Bk.pdf

Book V, Ch 1, Part II “On the Expense of Justice”

<http://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/smith-an-inquiry-into-the-nature-and-causes-of-the-wealth-of-nations-cannan-ed-vol-2>

Week 7, 10/23: The Role of Sentiment

Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759)

Part I, Section I, Chapters I-V; Part II, Sections I and II (entire); Part III, Ch. I and Ch. IV; Part IV, Ch. II; Part V, Ch. II

https://direitasja.files.wordpress.com/2012/02/theory_of_moral_sentiments.pdf

Week 8, 10/31: Liberalism and Revolution

Germaine de Staël, *Considerations on the Principal Events of the French Revolution* (1817)

Part I, Ch. I, “General Reflections”; Part I, Ch. II, “Considerations on the History of France”;

Part I, Ch. XI, “Did France Possess a Constitution Before the Revolution?”;

Part III, Ch. XV “Of Political Fanaticism”; Part VI, Ch. 1 “Are Frenchmen Meant To Be Free?”

http://lf-oll.s3.amazonaws.com/titles/2212/Stael_1459_EBk_v6.0.pdf

Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*

http://lf-oll.s3.amazonaws.com/titles/656/Burke_0005-02_EBk_v6.0.pdf

Week 9, 11/7: Tocqueville on the Revolution

Alexis de Tocqueville, *The Ancien Regime and the Revolution* (1856)

Author's Foreword, Books I and II

11/12 - *Short Paper Proposals Due By Email*

Week 10, 11/14: Democracy – Discussion Leader: Ben Murphy

Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* *note: pay attention to the division of Books, Parts, Chapters, and Section titles (while this looks like a lot of reading, the sections are very short)

Vol I: Author's Introduction; Part I, Ch. 3 "Social State of the Anglo-Americans"; Part I Ch. 4 "Of the Principle of the Sovereignty of the People in America"; Part II Ch. 7 but only "Tyranny of the Majority" section; Part II Ch. 9 section "Of the Influence of Mores on the Maintaining the Democratic Republic in the United States"

Vol II: Part II, Ch. 1 "Why Democratic Peoples Show a More Ardent and More Enduring Love for Equality than for Liberty"; Part II, Ch. 5 "Of the Use That Americans Make of Associations in Civil Life"; Part IV, Ch. 6 "What Type of Despotism Democratic Nations Have to Fear"

<http://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/tocqueville-democracy-in-america-historical-critical-edition-vol-1>

Week 11, 11/21: Modern Liberty

Benjamin Constant, "The Liberty of the Ancients Compared with That of the Moderns" (1819)

http://lf-oll.s3.amazonaws.com/titles/2251/Constant_Liberty1521_EBk_v6.0.pdf

Principles of Politics Applicable to All Representative Governments (1815)

Ch. 1 "On the Purpose of This Work"; Book V, "On Arbitrary Measures" Chs. 1-5

http://lf-oll.s3.amazonaws.com/titles/861/Constant_0452_EBk_v6.0.pdf

Week 12, 11/28: Liberty and Democracy – Discussion Leader: Daniel Duarte Perdomo

J.S. Mill, *On Liberty*

Chapter 1: Introductory (begins on p. 216) and Chapter 2: Of the Liberty of Thought and Discussion

<http://lf-oll.s3.amazonaws.com/titles/233/0223.18.pdf>

Week 13, 12/5: Economic Liberty, Poverty, Inequality

Alexis de Tocqueville, *Memoir on Pauperism* (Canvas)

J.S. Mill, *Principles of Political Economy* (selections, Canvas)

Week 14, 12/12: Course Conclusion: Liberalism's Legacies

Isaiah Berlin, "Two Concepts of Liberty" (Canvas)

Final paper due on December 17