

MODERN CONCEPTIONS OF FREEDOM
CC.111/17.04
Spring, 2016
MIT

T/R 3-4:30
16-160

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COURSE DESCRIPTION:

Little captures our hearts and moves our souls as much as the invocation of freedom; human beings across the globe willingly risk their lives to obtain and protect it. Today, though, we tend to take for granted both its acceptance as a fundamental tenet of political life and how relatively new a phenomenon this has been. There are many parts to the extraordinary story of how freedom became the central modern political value. This course will examine the theoretical story of our modern conception of freedom. We will first examine the theoretical foundations of modernity in the writings of Niccolò Machiavelli, Thomas Hobbes, and John Locke. We will then turn to the American founding, its complex attitude towards freedom, and Tocqueville's reflections on the character of the regime it established. We next study the renewal and reexamination of freedom in America in the writings of Lincoln and Frederick Douglass. We conclude with works by the 18th century philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau and the 19th-century German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, both of whom sharply attack the Enlightenment, Rousseau arguing that it destroys freedom and Nietzsche, on the basis of his critique of it, questioning the value of freedom itself.

OBJECTIVES:

- Grasp and explore the central arguments in each text and the major themes of freedom in modern, Western political thought.
- Learn how to “debate” with the text and to bring the texts into debate with each other.
- Write clearly and formulate structured, cogent arguments
- Discuss difficult questions in a rigorous but respectful way.
- Argue by listening to others’ objections and responding to them, trying together to arrive at a better, deeper understanding

REQUIREMENTS:

Texts for purchase (available for purchase at the MIT coop; there are kindle versions of most of these): please try to purchase these particular editions so that we can all be on the same page when we read together in class.

Machiavelli, *The Prince* (Harvey C. Mansfield Jr., translation)
Hobbes, *Leviathan* (Edwin Curley editor)
Locke, *The Second Treatise* (Peter Laslett, editor)
Locke, *The Letter Concerning Toleration* (James Tully, editor)
Rousseau, *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality* (Masters translation)
Rousseau, *Social Contract* (Masters translation)
Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morals* (Kaufmann translation)
NEW: Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (Mansfield translation)

Optional Texts:

Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy* (Mansfield/Tarcov translation)

The rest of the required readings are excerpts that are or will be made available to you online.

Grade Distribution

Grades are calculated as follows:

Paper 1 (1000 words):	10%
Paper 2 (1000 words):	10%
Paper 3: (2000 words):	20%
4 Question sets (300 words):	20%
Class Attendance/Participation	40%

EXPECTATIONS:

Class Attendance:

Regular class attendance is MANDATORY. Your presence in class alone, however, does not constitute participation. Exploration, analysis and discussion of the materials we are reading are crucial aspects of the work required for this class. You don't learn something fully by hearing someone else explain it; active thinking, questioning and discussing are vitally important to a genuine education.

Participation:

The quality of your experience in class, and that of everyone else's in it, depends to a large extent on **YOU**. Your participation grade will be based on the extent to which you are a responsible and active discussant. Being an active discussant means taking responsibility for helping the class as a whole investigate and explore whatever question is on the table. For some of you, this may mean learning to speak up more than you have before; for others, this may mean learning to be more judicious and patient. Please note that engaging in class discussion does not mean that you have to know the answers before you speak; often – or even usually – the most useful kind of discussion involves a question rather than an answer.

Written Assignments:

Question sets: four times during the semester, you are responsible for submitting approximately one-page that elucidates a few of the important problems or questions raised by the reading for that day's class. This must be submitted before class or you will not get credit for the assignment.

Shorter papers: you must choose two weeks during the semester (one before spring break and one after spring break) to submit a short paper on that week's readings. You must hand in your paper before the class in which we will be discussing that reading.

Longer paper: This paper will be due at the end of the semester. I will distribute a list of possible prompts before spring break. You are welcome to choose a topic of your own, but please consult with me before you get too far along on it.

Late papers will not be accepted without a signed, official excuse.

Papers must be typed, numbered and double-spaced. Please also familiarize yourself with MIT's plagiarism policy here: <http://integrity.mit.edu>

Miscellaneous:

- Computers are not permitted in class (this should go without saying, but neither are cell phones – they must be stored away and turned down – or other notebooks/devices).
- If you have more than two unexcused absences, you will begin to lose a half a grade for each class (i.e., if your grade is an A, after 2 unexcused absences, it will be lowered to an A-, after 3, B+, etc...). I realize that this is harsh, but this class requires your physical and mental presence. We want to explore these texts and questions as a group, and regular absences will make this difficult, if not impossible, to do.

CLASS SCHEDULE

THE ENLIGHTENMENT

A New Understanding of Human Nature and Politics

Feb. 2, 4

Reading: Machiavelli, *The Prince*, chapters 1-13

Feb. 9, 11, 18 (no class Feb. 16)

Reading: Machiavelli, *The Prince*, chapters 15-26

Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy*, (Dedicatory Letter; Book I, preface, 1-6, 9-10; 12-15; Book II, preface, 2-5)

The Birth of the Social Contract

Feb. 23, 25

Reading: Hobbes, *Leviathan* (Letter to Francis Godolphin, Introduction, Part I, *Of Man*, chapters 1-6, 10-11, 13-15)

March 1, 3

Reading: Hobbes, *Leviathan* (Part II, *Of Commonwealth*, chapters 16-18, 20-21, 29-30; Part IV, chapter 46)

Freedom and Limited Government

March 8, 10

Reading: Locke, *The Second Treatise on Government*, chs. I-IX

March 15, 17

Reading: Locke, *The Second Treatise on Government*, chs. X-XIX

SPRING BREAK

Religious Liberty

March 29, 31

Reading: Locke, *A Letter Concerning Toleration*

LIBERTY AND AMERICAN CONSTITUTIONALISM: Triumph of the Enlightenment

The American Founding: Liberty and Slavery

April 5,

Readings: *The Fundamental Constitutions of Carolina*, *Notes on the State of Virginia* (Jefferson; excerpt), *The Declaration of Independence*; Federalist 10, 51

April 7

Readings: Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*: Volume I: Author's Introduction; Part I, chapter 2-3; Part II, chapter 1, 6-8, 10 (only the initial intro and section on the "Situation of the Black Race in the U.S.")

America: Liberty Renewed

April 12, 14

Readings: Lincoln-Douglas debates 1858 (selections)
Frederick Douglass, "The Constitution of the U.S.: Is It Pro-Slavery or Anti-Slavery?"
Frederick Douglass, "What To the Slave is the 4th of July?"

America: Liberty At Risk

April 21 (no class April 19)

Readings: Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*: Volume II: Part I, chapters 1-5, 10, 15, 20; Part II, chapters 1-15; Part III, chapters 8-12; Part IV, chapters 6-7

A CRITIQUE OF THE ENLIGHTENMENT: The Problem of Freedom

Human Nature and the Rise of Inequality

April 26, 28:

Reading: Rousseau, *Second Discourse (Discourse on the Origin and Foundations of Inequality among Men)*, First and Second Parts, and footnotes I, L and O

Civic Freedom

May 3, 5:

Reading: Rousseau, *The Social Contract* (Book I, chapters 1-10; Book II, chapters 1-6; Book IV, chapters, 7-8)

A Different Vision: Enlightenment as Slavery

May 10, 12

Reading: Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morals*