



Lakehead University
Contemporary Political Thought (2012)
POLI-4513-FA
T 11:30-2:30 – Ryan Building 2026

Instructor: Dr. Patrick Cain (Political Science)
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Office hours: Wednesday 1-3:00 pm and Tuesday 2:30-4:30 pm (or by appointment)

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Much of contemporary political philosophy has focused on the meaning of modernity and the role played by liberalism in its development. As part of this debate, a group of critics has emerged who are critical of the modern world and its liberal ethic, arguing that it mistakenly diminishes the important political and social role played by citizenship and community. Some of these critics have gone further, arguing for the need to revisit the foundations of the modern project.

This course will explore this debate with the aim of coming to a fuller understanding of the strengths and limits of modernity and liberalism, and with the purpose of exploring major thinkers from the contemporary period. These theorists tend to neither support nor oppose modernity unequivocally, but they all touch on common themes that will become, for us, topics for reflection and comparison. The themes include (1) an effort to understand liberal education (2) an attempt to describe aspects of modernity in terms of intellectual movements, and especially the movement of liberalism; (3) an attempt to define the conditions necessary to the fulfillment of human freedom and equality (4) an interest in the relationship between law, rights, and human freedom.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Required Texts:

Because we will refer often by page number to the texts during class, and because some translations are better than others, please purchase the editions listed

1. Course Kit (available at LU bookstore)
2. J. S. Mill, *On Liberty* (Norton Critical Edition)
3. Leo Strauss, *Liberalism: Ancient and Modern* (University of Chicago Press)
4. Pierre Manent, *A World Without Politics?* (Princeton University Press)

Grading:

Paper 1: 20%

Paper 2: 20%

Final Exam: 20%

Quizzes and Reading Assignments: 4% X 5 = 20%

Participation: 20%

Assignment and Grading Details:

Reading Assignments

There will be 11 reading assignments (one for each class except the first). Each reading assignment is associated with a particular set of readings. Assignments will generally consist of one or two sets of questions based on the day's readings. Students will answer the questions in full sentence form, filling 4-5 double spaced pages with standard font size (12 inch Times New Roman or equivalent size) and 1 inch margins.

Each student's top 5 reading assignment scores will be counted, with each worth 4% of the final grade. Each student should therefore be sure to hand in at least 5 reading assignments. (Students may hand in more than 5 assignments, if they wish, but **only the top 5 scores** will be counted).

Each reading assignments will be sent to students via email at least 48 hours prior to its due date. All reading assignments are due in-person at the beginning of the class for which they are assigned, and will not be accepted late for any reason. Missing assignments will be given a grade of zero.

Papers: Paper topics to be distributed. Unless otherwise stated, assignments are due in class on the date scheduled. Late assignments will see a grade deduction of 2% per day. Extensions may be requested in advance of the due date, but not afterwards.

Class Participation: Although the instructor will occasionally provide formal lectures, the focus of class time will be spent discussing the assigned readings. Students are expected to fully participate in this discussion. To do so, students should: 1. Read assigned material carefully; 2. Bring the readings to class; 3. Be prepared to discuss the readings; 4. Avoid being inattentive and/or appearing inattentive.

In order to facilitate discussion, and in order to allow the lectures to be executed in the most effective manner, students are required to follow the seating direction of the instructor, who will advise students which seats are available for use.

Class Readings: The readings from this course involve complicated ideas and difficult arguments. Moreover, the presentation of these ideas and arguments sometimes take forms that may not be familiar to students. Students should therefore expect to have to

read the assigned readings carefully, slowly, and even several times in order to grasp their content. The importance of this task is reflected in the weight of the grade given to quizzes/reading assignments (20%), class participation (20%), and the assigned papers, which will ask you to focus on class texts.

Other Policies:

Communication

The instructor will regularly communicate with students about a variety of matters, both through in-class announcements and via email (using students' Lakehead email account). Students are encouraged to contact the instructor with any questions that arise during the course of the semester. While course administrative questions are entirely appropriate, students are also encouraged to meet with the instructor to discuss questions related to the course's subject matter. Students are reminded that while email is appropriate for factual inquiries, more complex questions are usually best handled in person.

Electronic Devices

Cell phones should be left at the front of the class, or should not be visible to the instructor (e.g. placed in a bag or purse). If a cell phone is visible, the instructor will assume that it is being used. Laptop use is not allowed. No audio or video recording of the class is allowed without the permission of the instructor.

Academic Honesty

Academic honesty is expected of all Lakehead University students. Cheating, collusion, and plagiarism will not be tolerated. Students are expected to make themselves fully familiar with Lakehead's policies in this area. Although all these policies will be enforced in full, it is worth emphasizing the following:

Plagiarism involves presenting another's work, ideas, theories, or interpretation as one's own.

To avoid plagiarism, writers should always:

1. Put quotation marks around any words from sources
2. Paraphrase material completely; changing (with the help of a thesaurus) or rearranging a few words or the tense of a verb is not paraphrasing.
3. Give accurate and complete citations for all material *including paraphrased material.*
4. Avoid borrowing entire arguments or approaches to a subject from another writer. Make it 'original' while staying faithful to the assignment parameters.

COURSE SCHEDULE

(Readings and schedule will be adjusted throughout the year at the instructor's discretion)

9/13 Course Outline
Opening Lecture: What is Liberalism? What is Modernity?

Perspectives on Liberalism

9/20 Stanley Fish, *There's No Such Thing as Free Speech, and it's a Good Thing, Too*
J. S. Mill, *On Liberty*, Chapter 1

9/27 J. S. Mill, *On Liberty*, Chapter 2
J. S. Mill, *On Liberty*, Chapter 3
Stephen Block, *Introduction to Liberalism* (to be provided)

10/02 Stanley Fish, *Mission Impossible*
Joseph Cropsey, *Radicalism*
Mansfield, *Liberal Democracy as a Mixed Regime*

Modern Liberalism: Leo Strauss on Its Consequences, Alternatives, and Possibilities

10/9 Plato, *Republic*, Book IV (selections on the soul and noble lie); Book VII (selections on liberal education); the myth of Er (selections on noble lie) (All selections will be provided)

Strauss, *Liberalism*, Preface

Strauss, *Liberalism*, Forward

Paper 1 Due

10/16 Strauss, *Liberalism*, Chapter 1 / What is Liberal Education?
Strauss, *Liberalism*, Chapter 2 / Liberal Education and Responsibility
Strauss, *Liberalism*, Chapter 3 / The Liberalism of Classical Political Philosophy

10/23 Plato, *Minos*
Strauss, *Liberalism*, Chapter 4 / On the *Minos*

11/30 Strauss, *Liberalism*, Chapter 8 / An Epilogue
Strauss, *Liberalism*, Chapter 9 / Preface to Spinoza's Critique of Religion
Strauss, *Liberalism*, Chapter 10 / Perspectives on the Good Society

Paper 2 Due

Pierre Manent on Modernity (Is it Liberal?) and its Consequences for Humanity

11/6 Manent, *A World Without Politics?* Preface to the American Edition vii

Manent, *A World Without Politics?* Introduction

Manent, *A World Without Politics?* Chapter 1: The Organization of Separations

Manent, *A World Without Politics?* Chapter 2: The Theologico-Political Vector

Manent, *A World Without Politics?* Chapter 3: The Movement of Equality

Manent, *A World Without Politics?* Chapter 4: The Question of Political Forms

11/13 Manent, *A World Without Politics?* Chapter 5: The Nation and the Work of Democracy

Manent, *A World Without Politics?* Chapter 6: Europe and the Future of the Nation

Manent, *A World Without Politics?* Chapter 7: The Wars of the Twentieth Century

Manent, *A World Without Politics?* Chapter 8: The Forces of Trade

Manent, *A World Without Politics?* Chapter 9: Declaring the Rights of Man

11/20 Manent, *A World Without Politics?* Chapter 10: Becoming an Individual

Manent, *A World Without Politics?* Chapter 11: The Religion of Humanity

Manent, *A World Without Politics?* Chapter 12: The Body and the Political Order

Manent, *A World Without Politics?* Chapter 13: Sexual Division and Democracy

Manent, *A World Without Politics?* Chapter 14: The Question of Communism

11/27 Manent, *A World Without Politics?* Chapter 15: Is There a Nazi Mystery?
Manent, *A World Without Politics?* Chapter 16: The Empire of Law
Manent, *A World Without Politics?* Chapter 17: The Empire of Morality
Manent, *A World Without Politics?* Chapter 18: The Human Political Condition and the
Unity of the Human Race

FINAL EXAM