

Teaching

Selected recent seminars

Liberalism and Empire

This course explores liberalism's historical and theoretical relationship to empire from the early-modern period to the present. Modern political thought emerged alongside European imperial expansion, and the liberal tradition, in particular, might be said to have a mutually constitutive relationship with empire. Key liberal concepts and languages — freedom and despotism, sovereignty, and the autonomous individual — were conceived and articulated in light of, in response to, and sometimes in justification of imperial and commercial expansion beyond Europe. European empires, in turn, were profoundly shaped by liberal preoccupations with progress and development, self-government, contract, and the rule of law. We begin by reading a number of thinkers in the liberal tradition (broadly understood), including Locke, Adam Smith, Burke, J.S. Mill, and Tocqueville; we will also consider more recent scholarly and political debates around the politics of humanitarianism and development. Conceptual questions we consider include: How is it possible for liberalisms apparently grounded in universal and democratic principles to legitimate imperial domination and intervention? Is liberalism an inherently imperialist doctrine? How have liberals justified, or criticized, imperial rule, and how have they analyzed and understood imperial politics? Do certain features of liberal thought lend themselves more readily than others to collusions with empire? Is empire a necessary feature of a liberal world order? What would be an effective form of criticism against the revival of arguments for liberal empire today?

History of International Thought

The field of International Relations long traced its history through traditions and conceptions (realism, liberalism, anarchy, international society) understood to be derived from a series of founding figures and moments — Grotius, Hobbes, Kant, the 1648 Westphalia treaties, and others. At the same time, the history of international thought was until recently relatively neglected by political theorists and intellectual historians. This course examines some of the most influential “originary” figures and moments for theorists of international relations, alongside recent historical work, in order to reconsider possibilities for international theory and the history of international thought.

Burke in an Age of Empire and Revolution

This course considers some major themes in eighteenth-century political thought through the lens of the work of Edmund Burke and some of his interlocutors. It examines the course of Burke's thought from his earliest published essays on aesthetics and religion through his late writings on the French Revolution, with particular emphasis on themes of empire, conquest, war, and global commerce; religious and legal pluralism; and the American and French revolutions. In addition to Burke, we read contemporaries such as Thomas Paine, Mary Wollstonecraft, Richard Price, and also some selected secondary sources.

Approaches to the History of Political Thought

This course examines some of the most influential recent statements of method in the history of political thought, alongside work by the same authors that may (or may not) put those methods or approaches into practice. We read works by Quentin Skinner, Reinhart Koselleck, J.G.A. Pocock, Leo Strauss, Sheldon Wolin, Michael Oakeshott, Michel Foucault, and David Scott among others, with some emphasis on writings about Hobbes and questions of sovereignty and the state.

Global Justice

What duties do states, societies, and their members have beyond their borders? Are obligations of justice global in scope? What is the moral standing of states? This course examines some of the major political theoretical writings about issues of global justice, particularly in light of global social structures and international inequalities. We consider Immanuel Kant's contribution to cosmopolitan theory and John Rawls's *Law of Peoples*, along with scholarly reaction to each of these texts. We read a number of contemporary philosophers and political theorists on issues of global distributive and political justice, cosmopolitan democracy, sovereignty, global poverty, and military intervention.

Liberalism confronts Democracy: Tocqueville and Mill

This course focuses on liberalism's wary embrace of democracy through an examination of the political thought of Tocqueville, JS Mill, and selected contemporaries. We look at their arguments for, and worries about, democratic politics in the context of selected topics (e.g., American events, French revolutions of 1789, 1830, and 1848; British Reform Acts). We explore ways in which debates over expanding political participation intersected with other themes (e.g., the nation, representation, gender, moral character, class, slavery, empire, and international politics).