



# OPGDI - BNU Philosophy Tutorial Programme Autumn 2021

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## *Welcome*

Dear Ji Xiang and Li Peixuan,

Welcome to our Oxford Prospects and Global Development Institute (OPGDI) Summer Tutorial Programme. Over the course of the next eight weeks, you will benefit from the guidance and expertise of an Oxford University professor through sessions delivered in Oxford's famous tutorial format. Unlike the large classes which are the norm at most universities, Oxford students receive one-on-one or two-on-one teaching. This can feel intense at first, but being tutored in such small groups provides a fantastic opportunity to further your intellectual development and to engage directly with a world-class academic. As such, we encourage you to make the most of the programme. Don't be afraid to speak up, to offer your ideas, and to ask questions! There is no such thing as a stupid question, and your tutor is here to help you through every challenge. You will also receive Academic Assistance sessions to develop your academic skills in English, which you can find more information about later in this pack.

You are here to learn, but also to enjoy yourself; you will discover new and exciting topics at the cutting-edge of research, and perhaps expand your own academic interests and ambitions in the process. We hope that you enjoy the programme, and that it will provide you with new modes of learning and thinking that will prove extremely valuable as you progress further in your studies.

Please find below some background information in preparation for your upcoming tutorials.

**The structure of the programme** is as follows:

**Length:** 8 weeks

**Format:** Week 0: Introduction to the Programme, Session explaining Tutorials at Oxford and another Session on Academic Writing.

Afterwards, eight one-hour tutorials occurring online on a weekly basis.

Extra: 3 Academic Assistance sessions throughout the course to provide extra help and guidance on your learning journey.

**Assessment:** Two 1500-2000 word essays.

## *Course Title*

### *Introduction to different thoughts of political philosophy*



**Dr Amna Whiston** is a philosopher specialising in ethics and the philosophy of mind, and she has a particular interest in the normativity of emotions. As an empirically minded philosophy researcher, she recognises the value of inter-disciplinarity, and has published and presented several papers that bear on ethical issues in neuroscience and IT. Dr Whiston has taught a number of undergraduate courses in the UK and abroad, including courses on Kant's moral philosophy and virtue ethics, and she currently works as a philosophy tutor at the University of Oxford, Department for Continuing Education, where she teaches a range of online and in-class courses.

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## **Course Description**

These tutorials will offer an introduction to a range of political ideas, approaches and contexts from Plato and Aristotle to Rawls and Arendt. Selected readings will allow the students to discuss the questions about topics such as freedom, equality, legitimacy, rights, human nature, justice, totalitarianism, democracy and liberalism. Tutorials will be organised in chronological order from the age of democracy before liberalism (Plato and Aristotle), to modernity and the age of monarchies (Machiavelli, Hobbes) to liberal democracy (Mill, Rawls) and its challenges as well as critiques of liberalism (Rousseau, Marx). We will also consider the contemporary relevance of classical political thought (Strauss), the value of collective deliberation and active citizenship (Arendt), and more generally contemporary assessments of the justification of the state, problems with democracy, and the relationship between morality and politics.

## **Course Objectives**

- Familiarize students with different theoretical approaches to political philosophy.
- Guide students' reading through a selection of classical and contemporary readings.
- Help students to understand the main problems in contemporary philosophy including the authority of the state, the justification of democracy and the distribution of property.
- Develop and improve students' argumentative skills by engaging them with the key arguments for and against the main debates in political philosophy.
- Enable students to think for themselves about the key issues involved in political philosophy.

## Course Assignments

Evaluations will consist equally of:

1) Two essays (approximately 1500 - 2000 words each), addressing the assigned questions.

**Saturday, 13<sup>th</sup> November Essay 1 due**

**Saturday, 11<sup>th</sup> December Essay 2 due**

Guiding essay topics and questions:

1. What is the good human life and the good political order according to ancient philosophers?
  2. Machiavelli thought that the power defines political activity, and that it is necessary for any successful ruler to know how power is to be used. Discuss.
  3. According to Hobbes, the creation of a sovereign solves the conflict in the state of nature. Discuss.
  4. How does Locke's theory of social contract differ from Hobbes?
  5. Compare Rousseau and Marx's view of private property.
  6. What are the key features of Rawls' theory of social justice?
  7. Is Strauss right in his claim that much of political philosophy is implausibly disconnected from human experience?
  8. Discuss Arendt's assessment of totalitarianism.
- 2) 8 weekly written critical analyses and summaries of reading content (precis)
- 3) Participation in tutorial discussions.

## *Course Topics*

### **Week 1: The age of democracy before liberalism: Plato and Aristotle**

#### **Brief description:**

What was the biggest problem with democracy for the ancient philosophers? What version of the rule of the few did they favour instead? This tutorial will introduce the students to the tradition of ancient Greek philosophy, and the political reality of city-states, focusing on Plato's *The Republic* and Aristotle's *Politics*. The tutorial will be geared around their contribution to political philosophical thought, considering in particular Plato's discussion of monarchy, timocracy, oligarchy, democracy and tyranny, as well as Aristotle's articulation of the idea of a political community in a polis or city-state.

#### **Essential Reading:**

- Plato, *The Republic* (online version available on <http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/republic.html>); Aristotle, *Politics*, Book 1, (online version available on <https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/6762>).

### **Week 2: Power, legitimacy and republicanism: Niccolò Machiavelli (1469-1527)**

#### **Brief description:**

Why did Machiavelli believe that there can be no law without a strong military foundation? How does he see the role of violence and deception in the workings of politics? The aim of this tutorial is to provide an understanding of key issues involved in Machiavelli's philosophy and how it has influenced contemporary politics, and to facilitate discussion, through the reading of *The Prince*, on the related topics including political reality, human nature, free will, power, and the ethics of the state. The students will also have an opportunity to think critically about Machiavelli's ethical views, and to apply Machiavelli's ideas to other domains, such as personal relationships and the dynamics of the workplace.

#### **Essential Reading:**

- Machiavelli N., *The Prince* (1998) trans. and ed. Quentin Skinner and Russell Price. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (online version available on [https://www.google.co.uk/books/edition/The\\_Prince/bRdLCgAAQBAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1&printsec=frontcover](https://www.google.co.uk/books/edition/The_Prince/bRdLCgAAQBAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1&printsec=frontcover)); Kahn, V. Virtù and the Example of Agathocles in Machiavelli's *Prince*. *Representations*, No. 13 (Winter, 1986), pp. 63-83.

### **Week 3: Social contract: Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679)**

#### **Brief description:**

What is the state of nature according to Hobbes? How does the creation of a sovereign solve the conflict in the state of nature? Is a coerced social contract valid? And what is the source of the sovereign's legitimacy, according to Hobbes? By examining Hobbes' *Leviathan* (focusing in particular on chapters 6, 13-14; 17-18 and 19-20) this tutorial will introduce the students to key features of Hobbes' social contract theory. The students will also be encouraged to critically engage with Hobbes's conceptions of human nature, freedom and political power and to discuss the contemporary relevance of his theory.

#### **Essential Reading:**

- Hobbes, T. *Leviathan: With Selected Variants from the Latin Edition of 1668*. Ed. Edwin Curley. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 1994 (online version available on <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/3207/3207-h/3207-h.htm>); G. A. Cohen, 'How to Do Political Philosophy?' (Ch. 11), *On the Currency of Egalitarian Justice and Other Essays in Political Philosophy*. Princeton University Press. pp. 225-235.

### **Week 4: Natural law and colonialism: John Locke (1632-1704)**

#### **Brief description:**

What is necessary for government to be legitimate? What are the circumstances in which Locke was writing? How does one come to acquire property in the state of nature? In this tutorial, we will look at Locke's *Second Treatise*, which outlines a theory of civil society, covering also topics such as conquest, slavery, colonialism and the representative government. Locke argues that people have certain rights such as the right to life, liberty, and property, that are independent of the laws and that the only legitimate governments are those that have the consent of the people. We will consider Locke's view of a social contract (comparing it to Hobbes) where people in the state of nature conditionally transfer some of their rights to the governments in order to better ensure the stability, happiness, liberty and property.

#### **Essential Reading:**

- Locke, J. *Second Treatise on Civil Government* (1988) (Chapters 1, 4 and 5) Edited by Peter Laslett. Student ed. Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought. Cambridge: Cambridge University. Original work published 1689, (online version available on <https://www.earlymoderntexts.com/assets/pdfs/locke1689a.pdf>); Simmons, A. J. (1992) *The Lockean Theory of Rights*, Princeton: Princeton University Press (Chapter 5)

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**Week 5: Freedom and equality: Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) and Karl Marx (1818-1883)**

**Brief description:**

How does Rousseau understand an ideal society? What is his assessment of slavery? How does Rousseau's account of property compare to Locke's? This tutorial will consider Rousseau's contribution to the theory of social contract and his appeal to the general will, and the way in which it imposes limits on the sovereign. In addition, we will be engaging with Marx's understanding of freedom and equality. While both Rousseau and Marx share the view that private property separates society into classes, creating alienation and oppression, Rousseau, unlike Marx who places emphasis on the economic dimension, sees property in the political context. The students will be able to critically analyse their different perspectives on these issues.

**Essential Reading:**

- Reading: Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. (1997). *The Social Contract and Other Later Political Writings*. Edited by Victor Gourevitch. Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. (pp. 41-152 *Of the Social Contract*); Marx, K. *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* 1844, First Manuscript, final section (on 'Estranged Labour'), (2011) Wilder Publications.

**Week 6: Political liberalism: John Stewart Mill (1806-1873) and John Rawls (1921-2002)**

**Brief description:**

What is the relationship between personal liberty and private property? Why do new liberals argue that classical liberalism is not an adequate foundation for a stable, free, society? This tutorial will examine the new liberal tradition in political thought, tracing it back to Mill's seminal work *On Liberty*, with the aim of gleaning a better understanding of what we should mean by liberalism and its core principles and values. We will further examine Rawls' theory of social justice, his difference principle and his related view about the welfare state and will also address the question of whether his liberalism is perhaps grounded in an implausibly abstract theory of the self and of what it means to make an autonomous choice.

**Essential Reading:**

- Reading: Mill, J.S. *On Liberty* (Chapters 3 and 4), (1972) Hackett Publishing, (online version available on <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/34901/34901-h/34901-h.htm>); Rawls, J. *A Theory of Justice*, revised edition. (1999) Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. (Chapters 2,4 and 5), (online version available on [https://www.consiglio.regione.campania.it/cms/CM\\_PORTALE\\_CRC/servlet/Docs?dir=docs\\_biblio&file=BiblioContenuto\\_3641.pdf](https://www.consiglio.regione.campania.it/cms/CM_PORTALE_CRC/servlet/Docs?dir=docs_biblio&file=BiblioContenuto_3641.pdf)).

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## **Week 7: Political philosophy and human experience: Leo Strauss (1899-1973)**

### **Brief description:**

What is the fundamental nature of political philosophy? What is the connection between political philosophy and human experience? And why did Strauss think that we need to return to political philosophy as practiced by Socrates, Plato and Aristotle? In this tutorial we will examine the 'Straussian method' of interpretation of political philosophy, and in particular Strauss's criticism of positivism and historicism, which is grounded in his understanding of experience. In following Strauss's appeal to the idea that all, including political, action ought to be guided by the thought of the good, the students will also have the opportunity to develop and discuss their own views about what constitute a meaningful political discourse.

### **Essential Reading:**

- Strauss. L., What is Political Philosophy?, *The Journal of Politics*, Vol. 19, No. 3 (Aug., 1957), pp. 343-368 (26 pages), Published By: The University of Chicago Press.

## **Week 8: Politics beyond the state: Hannah Arendt (1906-1975)**

### **Brief description:**

In this final tutorial we will consider Arendt's philosophical contribution, focusing on her conceptions of state and nation and her assessment of totalitarianism. We will look at the themes that are central to Arendt's philosophy, including the nature of political evil, the consequences of mass political violence and the terror, the victims of political atrocities, and the protection of rights of those who are most vulnerable in political society. Why did Arendt think that whilst the political realm ultimately redeems human existence, politics should remain distinct and autonomous from moral and ethical evaluation? How does Arendt's reliance on law as a source of protection relate to contemporary realities? The students will have the opportunity to address these related questions that are often raised by Arendt's critics.

### **Essential Reading:**

- Arendt, H. (1976) 'Ideology of Terror', from *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, (online version available on <http://virtuallaboratory.colorado.edu/Origins/class%20readings/Hannah%20Arendt%20-%20Ideology%20and%20Terror.pdf>).

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## Course Schedule

Your Tutorials will start on Monday, 18<sup>th</sup> October 2021.

### Tutorial schedule

Week N <sup>o</sup>	Date	Time	China Time	Zoom Link
Week 1	Mon, 18 <sup>th</sup> Oct	10:00 – 11:00	17:00 – 18:00	<a href="https://us02web.zoom.us/j/88549412834">https://us02web.zoom.us/j/88549412834</a>
Week 2	Mon, 25 <sup>th</sup> Oct	10:00 – 11:00	17:00 – 18:00	<a href="https://us02web.zoom.us/j/88549412834">https://us02web.zoom.us/j/88549412834</a>
Week 3	Mon, 1 <sup>st</sup> Nov	10:00 – 11:00	18:00 – 19:00	<a href="https://us02web.zoom.us/j/88549412834">https://us02web.zoom.us/j/88549412834</a>
Week 4	Mon, 8 <sup>th</sup> Nov	10:00 – 11:00	18:00 – 19:00	<a href="https://us02web.zoom.us/j/88549412834">https://us02web.zoom.us/j/88549412834</a>
Week 5	Mon, 15 <sup>th</sup> Nov	10:00 – 11:00	18:00 – 19:00	<a href="https://us02web.zoom.us/j/88549412834">https://us02web.zoom.us/j/88549412834</a>
Week 6	Mon, 22 <sup>nd</sup> Nov	10:00 – 11:00	18:00 – 19:00	<a href="https://us02web.zoom.us/j/88549412834">https://us02web.zoom.us/j/88549412834</a>
Week 7	Mon, 29 <sup>th</sup> Nov	10:00 – 11:00	18:00 – 19:00	<a href="https://us02web.zoom.us/j/88549412834">https://us02web.zoom.us/j/88549412834</a>
Week 8	Mon, 13 <sup>th</sup> Dec	10:00 – 11:00	18:00 – 19:00	<a href="https://us02web.zoom.us/j/88549412834">https://us02web.zoom.us/j/88549412834</a>

Please make sure that your internet connection is of adequate speed. Be on time, in a place where you can listen and talk freely.

Also, please have your **video camera and microphone on** as you will need to actively participate and discuss in the tutorial sessions.

If you have any queries, please contact the OPGDI team via WeChat.

## *Academic Assistance Sessions*

During the programme you will receive three Academic Assistance Sessions. These sessions will be conducted by an Academic Assistant who is a student at Oxford University, and are designed to provide you with extra support during your time on the programme.

Your coursemates will also attend the sessions, but you will be able to each speak with the Academic Assistant one-on-one. We encourage you to bring your written work to the sessions, or your plans for the written work if it has not yet been completed. The Academic Assistant will then give you feedback and guidance on honing your academic writing skills. We also encourage you to listen in to the conversations that your coursemates have with the Academic Assistant, as the advice they receive will likely also be relevant to you. Furthermore, it is always interesting to hear about the work of your peers!

In addition to being tutored by an Oxford academic, this is your opportunity to get to know an Oxford student. Our Academic Assistants are very friendly, and they are here to help you as much as they can! The content covered in these sessions is up to you; you can choose to focus on whatever you feel is most helpful. This can be directly related to the programme, or you can ask about any number of topics: examples include developing study skills, time management, applications for further study, or life at Oxford University.

### **Academic Assistant Schedule**

Details of the Academic Assistance sessions will be sent to you separately in your WeChat group.

We wish you every success! Enjoy the Tutorial Programme!

OPGDI Team  
Regent's Park College, Oxford