

CENTRE FOR POLITICAL STUDIES  
SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES  
JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIVERSITY  
WINTER SEMESTER 2021

M.A. COMPULSORY COURSE: PO 416

COURSE TITLE: **READINGS IN POLITICAL THOUGHT**

INSTRUCTOR: DR AMIR ALI & DR PAPIA SENGUPTA

Credits 4

Scheme of Evaluation: A mid-semester exam (25%), tutorial assignment (25%) and an end-semester examination (50%)

The aim of this course is to introduce students to the original writings of great political thinkers whose work has significantly shaped our thinking about the nature of the political, the idea of state, just society and good government, and conceptions of the self. The Course identifies three political theorists for detailed study and analysis, and through a careful reading of their writings it will attempt to - a) develop the skill to read and interpret political ideas through textual reading; 2) critically engage with ideas that have shaped our contemporary understanding of liberal democracy; 3) appreciate the enduring significance of political thinkers and see how ideas get recontextualized in new and different contexts. John Stuart Mill remains the single most important theorist whose conception of the individual, freedom of speech and expression, the rights of women, law and punishment has shaped the thinking of contemporary liberal democracies. In the writings of Marx we have, from a completely different tradition, the most systematic critique of this understanding of the individual, state and capitalist society. Aristotle, in contrast to both these theorists, is writing in a premodern context. His ideas reflect notions of human self, nature and potentiality that were challenged by modernity. Yet, contemporary political philosophers, from Hannah Arendt, Jurgen Habermas to Martha Nussbaum and Ronald Beiner, return to these ideas to offer critiques of modernity and liberalism.

### **Aristotle**

A theory of moral action

- ii) Politics and practical wisdom
- iii) Political participation and the good life
- iv) Nature, Teleology and the Self

Required Readings:

Nichomachean Ethics, Books II & III The Politics

### **John Stuart Mill**

- i) Individualism
- ii) Liberty, and the harm principle
- iii) Representative Government
- iv) Utilitarianism and State Policy

Required Readings:

On Liberty

Utilitarianism

Considerations on Representative Government

The Subjection of Women

**Karl Marx**

i) Theory of Alienation

ii) Historical Materialism

iii) Analysis of Capitalism

iv) Social Classes and Political Power

Required Readings:

Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts (Selections)

‘Opposition of the Materialist and Idealist Outlooks’, The German Ideology

‘Theses on Feuerbach’, The German Ideology

Capital, Vol. I, Section on Commodities, 1, 2, 3

Critique of the Gotha Programme

Grundrisse, ‘Production, Consumption, Distribution, Exchange (Circulation)’ The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte.

**Recommended Readings:**

Ackrill J.L., Aristotle the Philosopher, Oxford University Press, New York, 1981.

Avineri S., The Social and Political Thought of Karl Marx, Cambridge Studies in the History and Theory of Politics, 1968.

Callinicos A., ed., Marxist Theory, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1989.

Cohen G.A., Karl Marx’s Theory of History: A Defence, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1978.

Kraut R. & S. Skultety, eds., Aristotle’s Politics - Critical Essays, Rowman and Littlefield, Lanham, Md, 2005.

Lukes S., Marxism and Morality, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1985.

Mulgan R.G., Aristotle’s Political Theory, Oxford, 1977.

N. Urbinati, ed., J.S. Mill’s Political Thought: A Bicentennial Reassessment, CUP, Cambridge, 2007.

Nussbaum M.C., *The Therapy of Desire: Theory and practice in Hellenistic Ethics*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ, 1996, ch. 2.

Ollman B., *Alienation - Marx's Conception of Man in Capitalist Society*, 2 nd ed. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1976.

Parekh B., "Liberalism and Colonialism - A Critique of Locke and Mill" in B. Parekh and J.N. Pieterse, *The Decolonization of Imagination*, Zed Books, London, p. 81-98.

Plekhanov G., *Fundamental Problems of Marxism*, (tr. 1929), Foreign Publishers, Moscow.

Poulantzas N., *Social Classes and Political Power*, New Left Books, London, 1973.

Rorty A.O., *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1980.

Skorupski J. ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Mill*, CUP, Cambridge, 1997.

Thompson D., *J.S. Mill and Representative Government*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1996.

Verma Vidhu., *Justice, Equality and Community: An Essay in Marxist Political Theory*, Sage, New Delhi, 2000.