This course will introduce you to some of the major books of political theory and some of the major problems of politics these books address. The goal of the course is to teach you how to read some of these famous texts and more significantly, how to think through and argue about some of the central questions of politics. This course is going to focus on one of these central questions: the relation between equality and freedom (liberty). While this question seems hopelessly abstract, it is central to a variety of contemporary political debates. Here are a few of them:

1. If democracy assumes all citizens are equal with regard to civil and political liberty defined as the opportunity to influence fundamental political decisions, how should we distribute political resources (money, wealth, political power, and political knowledge) to make sure that political liberty is enjoyed equally? Are there justifications for inequalities of political liberty? Is the person who argues this way an anti-democrat?

2. If we assume each individual should have an equal freedom of choosing his/her plan for life, what goods must we provide for such freedom to be realized?

3. What happens when individual liberty (especially when such liberty is identified with the market behavior) and political equality conflict? What should give way? Does liberty to dispose of property as one sees fit trump political equality if this liberty leads to unequal resources? Does maintenance of political equality as equal political liberty require regulation or redistribution of the right to dispose of property?

4. How much equality or inequality of property is compatible with individual, social, and political liberty?

5. What is the relation between individual liberty and political authority—do we need protection from political authority or is political authority a condition for the enjoyment of both political and individual liberty? For example, does government surveillance threaten individual liberty? On the other hand is governmental authority necessary for the realization of public goods, which we enjoy equally such as aid to education, health care, pensions, environmental regulation, financial regulation, parks, libraries, and security? Does a defense of individualism paradoxically lead to centralized government and administration?

6. Are individual and political liberty simply empty terms defending merely the pursuit of our arbitrary desires, and so we would be better off with rule by elites or guardians with superior knowledge?

These are some of the questions we will debate in this course. As part of this debate, we will be reading a number of major political thinkers—including Plato, Rousseau, de Tocqueville and
Marx—each of whom give different answers to the questions above. Plato will claim justice demands unequal political rule and distribution according to function; Rousseau and de Tocqueville will seek to show equality and freedom can only reconciled when we participate with other citizens equally in making decisions for our community; Rousseau and Marx will show in different ways that private property undermines social and political freedom. We will close the course with a debate over whether the inequalities produced by the market enhance freedom or undermine it.

Course Objectives:
- Refine your capacity to analyze political concepts for their meaning and political arguments for coherence on fundamental questions of politics.
- Learn to interpret political theory texts—their strategy of argument, style, and levels of meaning.
- Learn to understand differences between older political arguments and present ones.
- Learn how abstract political arguments apply to day-to-day politics.
- In general you will learn to focus on those arguments that hold a political theory together, the assumptions about human motivation that political thinkers make, how the logic of a political argument can lead to unexpected conclusions; and when a political argument is contradictory and when it is merely paradoxical.

Required Books
Plato, The Republic (Hackett) trans. by Grube and Reeve
Jean-Jacques Rousseau, The Basic Political Writings (Hackett)
Alexis de Tocqueville, Democracy in America (Harper)
Michael Sandel, What Money Can’t Buy: The Moral Limits of Markets (Farrer, Straus, Giroux)

Additional Readings on E-Reserve now on Blackboard (the password: pos103)
A short section on property from John Locke, Second Treatise of Government
Milton Friedman, Capitalism and Freedom (chs. 1,2)

Course Outline (*means you should read with extra care.)

I. Introduction to the course and to political theory (August 27th)—no class August 29th.

II. Inequality without freedom: Plato, justice, and guardianship

Does justice require rule by those who by nature have superior character and insight? What is a just distribution of political and social goods? What should be politically distributed? What should not? Do we “deserve” the benefits of our natural and social endowments?

Plato, The Republic: Justice as Identity of Polity and Properly Ordered Soul.

-September 3, Book I and Book II until (par 363). (Ordinary concepts of justice—equality vs inequality: paying debts; helping friends and harming enemies; right of the stronger; power vs. right—what does it mean to rule well?; the story of the Gyges Ring.)
-September 5, no class.

-September 10 Rest of Book II (Understanding justice as building the most perfect polis in theory. Polities as forms of education. Political education and the need for fictions. Creating a stratified polity according to function)
-Sept 12, Book III (Completing the education of the guardians and selecting rulers)

-Sept 17, Book IV* (A new definition of justice. Isomorphism of just city/polis and just soul—inseparability of just human being and just city. Inequality in soul reflected in inequality in political rule.)
-Sept 19, Book V (The completion of the kallipolis: communal ownership, the rule of philosophers based on the differences in genuine knowledge vs. opinion) (The superiority of theory to practice).

-Sept 24 Book VI* (Justice as knowledge of the good and why only philosophers have access to it. Knowledge of forms vs. knowledge of appearances. )
-Sept 26, Book VII* (The double meaning of the allegory of the cave—political and philosophic. Is dialectic the only way to grasp justice? If justice can only be understood by philosophy can justice be “political”? Book VIII (552d-566d) (Plato’s criticism of politics: How does oligarchy lead to democracy and democracy to tyranny? Is democratic justice as equal political membership defensible?)

Essay on Plato on Justice and Inequality due in class October. 8th.

II. Thinking about democracy I Equality and Political Liberty

Is democracy equality of individual protection through civil liberties or the equal enjoyment of full citizenship through participation in fundamental decisions affecting common life? How should we combine equality with freedom? Why is liberty as the pursuit of private interest a threat to political freedom? Is private liberty compatible with political liberty? What does the realization of political equality require under modern conditions of politics-the 1/n problem?

Jean-Jacque Rousseau, Social Contract
-Oct 1, Book I
-Oct 3, Book II**
-Oct 8, Book III, chs. 1, 13-15, 18, Book IV, ch 1**
-Oct 10, Book IV, ch. 1

III. Thinking about democracy II: Equality of condition--Political Liberty or Democratic Despotism?

Alexis de Tocqueville, Democracy in America,


- Oct 22, Vol I Part II, chs 7-8 **(246-276) [Tyranny of Majority vs. Political Liberty]

- Oct 24, Volume II: Part I: chs. 1, 2 (429-436) [Equality, distrust of all authority and submission to most general ideas]. Part II, chs. 1-5**(503-517) 7-8 (520-528) [Equality and individualism and how its dangers are offset via associations and self-interest rightly understood]

- Oct 29, Volume II Part II ch 20 **(555-558) [an new aristocracy of industry], Part III, ch. 17 [democracy and inclination toward materialism], Part IV, ch. 3 (“How Feelings and Thoughts in Democratic Nations are in Accord in Concentrating Power”), 6**-8 (690-702) [Dangers of Democratic Despotism].

Do read the assignment to the end! The last chapters are extremely important! (**Should be read with special care).

IV. Politics and Property I: Is Property the source of Social and Political Inequality?

Rousseau, Discourse on the Origins of Inequality


- Nov. 5, Part II ( A hypothetical history of the origins of social and political inequality. The political contract as deception--inequality of property and power in the modern state as the height of injustice. How should we restore equality of political membership?)

November 7 (Thursday), Midterm Exam on Rousseau and de Tocqueville’s accounts of equality and political liberty (Social Contract and Democracy and America)

V. Politics and Property II: Capitalism, Class Inequality and Freedom. What does inequality of property mean for individual and social liberty? What would equality of property mean for individual and social liberty?

Karl Marx. The denaturing of property through history. Class conflict. Capital as Exploitation.
- Nov 12. The Communist Manifesto, in Marx-Engels Reader

VI. Market Liberty and Inequality vs Equality as shared Public Goods.
- Nov 21, Milton Friedman, Capitalism and Freedom, ch. 1 (e-reserve on Blackboard)
- Nov 26, Milton Friedman, Capitalism and Freedom, ch. 1 (e-reserve on Blackboard)
- Dec 5, Michael Sandel, What Money Can’t Buy, chs 3-4
- Dec 10, Michael Sandel What Money Can’t Buy, ch 5 + Catching up and Summing Up.

Final exam on Monday, Dec 16th: 10:30am -12:30pm
Assignments and Course Obligations:
1) You will have two short essays (of approximately 6 pages) on different accounts of the relation of equality to liberty: the first on Plato’s defense of inequality, the second on Rousseau and Marx on property inequality and its consequences for freedom. The first essay on Plato’s defense of inequality and guardianship will be due in class on Tuesday October 8th. The second essay on equality and liberty in Rousseau and Marx will be due in discussion sections on Friday November 22nd. Topics will be handed out at least a week before the papers are due.

2) There will be a series of unannounced quizzes given in lecture. These quizzes will be short and based on points made in previous lectures. You will only be able to answer the questions on the quizzes if you have attended lectures.

3) Finally there will also be an in-class midterm on November 6th on theories of equality and political liberty in Rousseau and de Tocqueville, and a final exam on Monday, Dec 16th: 10:30am -12:30pm in LC 18 on equality, liberty, and the market focusing on Friedman and Sandel.

4) You are expected to attend every class and every section. If you are absent from section more than two times without a legitimate excuse, your grade will fall by a half. Two more, it will fall by a half again and so on. You cannot pass the class if you do not attend sections.

Grading:
Grading will be as follows:

The two papers will each count 15% of your grade for a total of 30%
The midterm: 20%,
The final: 20%.
Section grade 15%
Quizzes: 15%
Grading will take improvement into account. But note: 30% of your grade will be based on section participation and in-class quizzes.

Plagiarism
Plagiarism means to pass off someone else’s work as your own. Please be warned that should I find you have plagiarized, you will receive an immediate E in the course and further actions will be taken, including sending your case before a university committee. You should also be warned that taking text off internet sites such as Sparknotes or Wikipedia will also earn you an E along with further actions. It is your job to demonstrate to us that you have worked out your essays from the texts at hand through clear arguments and proper citations. It is not our job to demonstrate you haven’t!

Teaching Assistants and Office Hours:
The teaching assistants for this course are Turkhan Sadigov (tsadigov@albany.edu), Eileen Brino (ebrino@albany.edu), and Yeu-Fen Hsieh (yhsieh4@albany.edu). You should feel free to see them in their office hours, talk to them after class, or write them e-mails. They will be happy to discuss the class material with you as well as help you with any problems you are having with the class. Since this is a class that deals with the “big” questions of politics you should not feel any hesitation in engaging either the TAs or me in dialogue on the course material. You are also welcome to see me during my office hours: Tu Th 11:40 to 12:40 in HU B16 or the hour before class. I am also happy to meet with you in my downtown office Milne 204 on Wednesday afternoons or answer your question and comments through e-mail: pbreiner@albany.edu

E-Reserve:
As mentioned above, a number of the readings are on E-reserve on Blackboard. Find our course, RPOS 103, Introduction to Political Theory, and then click the password: pos103 (lower case). Here you will find not just the additional readings but also a sheet on how to write political theory papers, the syllabus, and occasionally lecture outlines. You must download and print off the readings on e-reserve, for you will be expected to bring them to section and lecture. Reading them on line will simply not do!