

Yeshiva College  
 Fall 2020  
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 MW: 6:45pm-8:00pm

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To what extent can reason inform political life? How far can science guide morality and politics? Does religion help or hinder political improvement or progress? To what extent is human nature fixed? How much political improvement or progress can and should we expect?

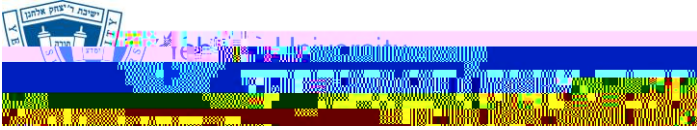
Though always addressed by the greatest political thinkers, these questions became the subject of vigorous public debate beginning especially in the seventeenth century. Around that time, a political movement emerged that sought to advance a politics based on the natural rights of individuals, religious toleration, and the progress of science and reason. This movement came to be called the Enlightenment. From its very early days, however, the Enlightenment project was met by both theoretical and political backlash and criticism. Thinkers raised key doubts about central tenets of Enlightenment and questioned, especially a) whether scientific progress and moral and political progress go together and b) whether reason can be a sufficient guide in political life. Debates about these questions continue down to our own day.

This course will consider the deepest and most important political thinkers who shaped the terms of the Enlightenment and debated the project. Thinkers to be studied include Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and Mary Wollstonecraft. Jewish perspectives on the Enlightenment and enlightenment will be considered along the way. Through careful study of the works of these political philosophers, students should come away with an appreciation of the major political-theoretical tensions and problems that have defined modern life.

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Students will be expected to carefully read between 100 and 150 pages a week. Prior to every class, students will be expected to have read and reflected upon the readings of





Readings: Yoram Hazony, [What is Conservatism?](#), Patrick Deneen: *Why liberalism failed* [Chapter 1],

Readings: Rousseau, *Second Discourse* [TBA]

Week 13 (November 30 – December 2)

Readings: Rousseau, *Second Discourse* [TBA]

Week 14 (December 7 – 9)

Readings: Mary Wollstonecraft, *Vindication of the Rights of Women* [TBA],

Week 15 (December 14 – 16):