

The political essay has never been a clearly defined genre.... We commonly associate political thought with full-scale treatises by philosophers ... whose understanding of politics was central to their account of human nature. Hobbes' *Leviathan*, Montesquieu's *Spirit of the Laws*, Rousseau's *Social Contract*, Mill's *Representative Government*, and, closer to our time, Rawls's *Theory of Justice*, all satisfy that expectation. What, then, is a political essay?

— David Bromwich, *Writing Politics*

Political Science 7982
Seminar in Early Modern Political Theory: Political Essays
Fall 2022

The essay is the distinctive form of modern political discourse, meant to be read at a single sitting and pondered. In its early form, in the authors we'll be reading, it is not usually designed to advocate a particular policy or course of action, but to stimulate the kind of reflection that will lead citizens and statesmen to choose wisely in their own circumstances. It wants to be debated as well as pondered, keeping one eye on the time and place for which it is composed, one eye on enduring principles. It educates republicans and brings intelligence to democratic decision.

Instructor: James Stoner, Stubbs 214
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Office Hours: Mondays, 1:30-2:30, Wednesdays, 4:30-5:30, Fridays, 3:00-4:00,
and by appointment

Books available for purchase:

- Donald M. Frame, trans., *The Complete Essays of Montaigne* (Stanford) [ISBN 9780804704861]
- Francis Bacon, *The Essays* (Penguin) [ISBN 9780140432169]
- David Hume, *Essays Moral, Political, and Literary* (Liberty Fund) [ISBN 9780865970564]
- Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Essays: First & Second Series* (Library of America) [ISBN 9781598530841]

Course requirements:

- Attendance at all class sessions and participation in discussions [10%]
- Four 500-word papers on the assigned reading, one on each author, due before class (& read aloud) [30%]
- Research paper, 20-25 pages, on a topic approved by the instructor (topic due 11/4; preliminary presentation on 11/16 or 11/30; final paper due 12/8) [60%]

Grading scale: A+ (98%-100%), A (93%-97%), A- (90%-92%)
B+ (88%-90%), B (83%-87%), B- (80%-82%), etc.

SYLLABUS:

Wed., 8/24 Introduction

I. Montaigne's *Essays*

Wed., 8/31 Montaigne, *Essays*, book I

Wed., 9/7 *Essays*, book II

Wed., 9/14 *Essays*, book III

II. Bacon's *Essays*

Wed., 9/21 Bacon, *Essays*, ## 1-29

Wed., 9/28 *Essays*, ## 30-58

III. Hume's *Essays*

Wed., 10/5 Hume, *Essays*, Part One, I-XVIII

Wed., 10/12 *Essays*, Part One, XIX-XXIII; Part Two, I-X

Wed., 10/19 *Essays*, Part Two, XI-XVI

III. Emerson's *Essays*

Wed., 10/26 Emerson, *Essays*, First Series, I-VII

Wed., 11/2 *Essays*, First Series, VIII-XII; Second Series, I-II

Wed., 11/9 *Essays*, Second Series, III-VIII, and "New England Reformers"

IV. Workshop: Presentation of Research

Wed., 11/16 Presenting:

Wed., 11/30 Presenting:

Thurs., 12/8 PAPERS DUE