# Fall 2025 Prof. R. Ruderman

T/Th 9:30-10:50am; WH 121 WH133

Office Hours: W 11-12 (Zoom link under “Course Content”); T/R 11:30-12:30 (office) and by appointment; email: richard.ruderman@unt.edu (please identify yourself) (I don’t respond on Friday nights and Saturdays)

**Topics in Political Theory:**

**Liberalism and Its Critics**

Required Texts (first three for purchase):

Fukuyama, Francis, *Liberalism and Its Discontents*

Swift, Jonathan, *Gulliver’s Travels*

Táíwò, Olúfémi, *Against Decolonization*

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Croly, Herbert, *Progressive Democracy* (selections) [PDF]

Deneen, Patrick, [*Why Liberalism Failed*](https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/unt/reader.action?docID=5199879&query=&c=UERG&ppg=1)[PDF of selected chapters; click on link to read the whole book online through our library]

Essays (provided by me):

John Locke ([Second Treatise](https://myunt-my.sharepoint.com/personal/richard_ruderman_unt_edu/Documents/Classes/Locke%2C%20selections%20from%20First%20and%20Second%20Treatise%2C%20Property.pdf)) and Karl Marx ([Communist Manifesto](https://myunt-my.sharepoint.com/personal/richard_ruderman_unt_edu/Documents/Classes/Manifesto%20of%20the%20Communist%20Party.pdf))—selections provided

Bean, Jonathan, *Race & Liberty in America* ([Intro](file:///C%3A%5CUsers%5Cruderman%5COneDrive%20-%20UNT%20System%5CClasses%5CCivil%20Rights%20and%20Classical%20Liberalism%20by%20J.%20Bean.pdf) and ch. 6)

Rob Henderson, “[Luxury Beliefs](file:///C%3A%5CUsers%5Cruderman%5CDesktop%5CHenderson%20How%20the%20luxury%20beliefs%20of%20an%20educated%20elite%20erode%20society.docx)”

Sheri Berman, [The Pipe Dream of Illiberal Democracy](file:///C%3A%5CUsers%5Cruderman%5COneDrive%20-%20UNT%20System%5CClasses%5CThe%20Pipe%20Dream%20of%20Undemocratic%20Liberalism.pdf)

… and, if you want to follow a defense and discussion of classical liberalism in real time, follow the Substack blog [Persuasion](https://www.persuasion.community/) (Yasha Mounk and Francis Fukuyama).

Course Outline and Objectives:

Just recently, on Aug 7, 2025, *NY Times* columnist David Brooks published an essay, “[Why More People in the World are Feeling Hopeful (Except Us)](https://www.nytimes.com/2025/08/07/opinion/happiness-community-wealth.html?unlocked_article_code=1.dk8.IYJu.l6OblgheFNkZ&smid=url-share).” Those feeling unhopeful and even miserable are those living in the most advanced (that is, the richest and freest) liberal democracies: the countries in Western Europe, Canada, Australia, and especially the US. And the young people in these countries are feeling the worst of all. Upon reading it, you will see that liberalism (especially its individualistic rejection of traditional forms of socializing, chiefly religion) may be bad for your sense of well-being; progressivism (especially the aspect of it that stresses the liberal value of autonomy to the extreme) is even worse.

This course aims to alleviate that misery! We will try to get to the bottom of this phenomenon. We will do so by trying to understand:

(1) what the original concept of liberalism (which arose in the latter half of the 17th century) was—important because the idea has been utterly misrepresented and misunderstood over time, with conservatives claiming it is indistinguishable from socialism and even communism, and progressives claiming it is indistinguishable from fascism;

(2) how a philosophically-constructed politics (rather than the more “organic” types of politics that preceded it)—a politics that requires a new kind of mass yet elite education (liberals after all are “made,” not “born”)—might work;

(3) why there has been a democratic reaction against “elite” liberalism (sometimes called “populism”) in our time (even though it was fully outlined and predicted by Jean-Jacques Rousseau in the 18th century);

(4) why Marx criticized liberalism’s destruction of humanity’s wholeness and universality; and why various forms of nationalism (promoting humanity’s diversity and particularism) also reacted against it;

(5) what damage liberalism has done to itself by “overreaching” (or trying to accommodate some of its critics on the left and on the right); and

(6) how or whether liberalism can possibly withstand the overturning of reason that Nietzsche announced (in the 19th century) and postmodernism entrenched in the universities (in the late 20th century).

Rules for Success in this Class:

1. Don’t waste time looking at phones or computer screens during class. A college education is centered on learning how to engage in dialogue with others’ viewpoints. I try to model that in the classroom by (1) making the case for the writers we study (some of whom don’t use contemporary language or categories and so require my assistance to see where they still fit into the discussion today—if you don’t listen carefully you’ll mistakenly think we’re just looking at irrelevant ancient history) and (2) asking you to engage in the conversation (which cannot be done if your mind is elsewhere).
2. Please come on time: most important announcements and summaries of where we are in the evolving discussion occur at the start of class.
3. Attend class. As mentioned, you learn best by engaging in the conversation. You need to be in class to do this and even to learn how to do it (by observing your colleagues). You are permitted two unexcused absences. After that, I deduct 1/3 of a grade from your final grade for each additional absence (e.g., A- becomes a B+).
4. AI Policy: Because too many students substitute AI generated work for the writing of essays, I no longer use take-home essays in the classroom. Assignments will be (open book) in-class writing assignments and (for exams) multiple choice quizzes (again, open book). You are certainly permitted to use AI for thinking about the prompts, books, and essays prior to sitting down to write your in-class short essays. But I need to warn you: the central point here is to replace widespread misunderstandings of liberalism with the complex truth about it. Until you know enough to challenge AI’s first response with intelligent, informed questions (requiring it to do better), its responses will only reproduce the general misunderstanding!
5. To ensure you yourself have grasped the ideas covered, you must write the papers in-class without any AI support. **Note**: I will return your writing assignments to you with 2-3 areas highlighted as not clear\* and/or not really addressing the question asked. You will then be required to come to office hours where I will ask you to explain to me ONE of the areas I highlighted (best to prepare something on each of them).
6. ***Ask questions***! Learning isn’t a passive experience. If something in the reading—or in the lecture—doesn’t make sense to you, don’t assume that’s on you! Several thoughts and arguments we will be covering are anything but obvious or straightforward. Worse: some of the authors we are covering—even Fukuyama who tries to offer the basic definition of liberalism—are guilty of contradicting themselves or leaving out crucially relevant information that undermines their argument. Call them out on it when you see it! Bonus: if you’re confused, I guarantee that several or even most of your colleagues are as well. They will be forever grateful to you for raising your question!

\* “Not clear” can mean two things: unclearly stated or a statement that simply parrots (accurately!) the author! In fact, the latter is (in my experience) more common. Re-stating something in the author’s exact words is NOT a clear sign that you understand what they are trying to say.

Classroom Etiquette:

As a courtesy to your fellow students, please come to class on time. Please turn off all cell phones before coming to class. And, especially since this is a seminar, do please resist the temptation to get up during class—to fill a bottle of water, call a friend, or check on your stock portfolio—unless Nature absolutely demands it.

Course Grading Policy:

 Participation: in addition to regular participation (asking and answering questions in class), I will call on one or two students during the early part of class to ask a formal, well-developed question on the reading for that day—come prepared; it might be you!) 20%

3 in-class writing assignments 60%

 Final Exam: an online, open-book, multiple choice exam 20%

**Tentative Class Schedule**

Aug. 18/20: What is Liberalism?

**Read**: Fukuyama, Preface, Ch. 1, 2

Aug. 25/27: Is there Illiberal Democracy (Populism) and Undemocratic Liberalism (Expert Rule)?

**Read**: Victor Orban, [Speech of July 2014](https://2015-2019.kormany.hu/en/the-prime-minister/the-prime-minister-s-speeches/prime-minister-viktor-orban-s-speech-at-the-25th-balvanyos-summer-free-university-and-student-camp) ; Sheri Berman, [The Pipe Dream of Undemocratic Liberalism](file:///C%3A%5CUsers%5Cruderman%5COneDrive%20-%20UNT%20System%5CClasses%5CThe%20Pipe%20Dream%20of%20Undemocratic%20Liberalism.pdf); John Dewey, from [*The Public and Its Problems*](https://myunt-my.sharepoint.com/personal/richard_ruderman_unt_edu/Documents/Dewey%20The%20Public%20and%20Its%20Problems%20%28excerpt%20from%20ch.%206%29%20.docx) (on the undemocratic nature of expert rule)

Sept. 2/4: (Why) Is Liberalism Inherently Connected to the Free Market? (Why) Is Democratic Socialism Opposed to it?

**Read**: Locke, [Selections, esp. *Second Treatise*, ch.5](https://myunt-my.sharepoint.com/personal/richard_ruderman_unt_edu/Documents/Classes/Locke%2C%20selections%20from%20First%20and%20Second%20Treatise%2C%20Property.pdf); *Federalist Papers* #62 (on instability giving an advantage to the wealthy and entrepreneurial); Marx, *Communist Manifesto*, [Pt. One (Bourgeois and Proletariat)](file:///C%3A%5CUsers%5Cruderman%5COneDrive%20-%20UNT%20System%5CClasses%5CManifesto%20of%20the%20Communist%20Party.pdf)

Sept. 9: Is Liberalism Inherently Racist? Antiracist?

**Read**: Bean, *Race and Liberty in America*, [Intro](file:///C%3A%5CUsers%5Cruderman%5COneDrive%20-%20UNT%20System%5CClasses%5CCivil%20Rights%20and%20Classical%20Liberalism%20by%20J.%20Bean.pdf) and Ch. 6

Sept. 11: No Class (APSA Conference)

Sept. 16/18: Liberalism’s “Sovereign Self” (Individualism as chief value)

 **Read**: Fukuyama, L&D, Chs. 3, 4

Sept. 23/25: The Democratic Critique of Liberalism (here, the People rule!)

**Read**: Rousseau, [*Social Contract*](file:///C%3A%5CUsers%5Cruderman%5COneDrive%20-%20UNT%20System%5CClasses%5CRousseau%2C%20Social%20Contract%20%28excerpts%29.pdf), Bk. 1; Bk. 2; Bk. 3, chs. 4 (Democracy), 8, 9-11; Bk. 4, ch. 1

Sept. 30: Do Elite Liberals Live by their own Beliefs?

 **Read**: Rob Henderson, “[Luxury Beliefs](https://www.thetimes.com/uk/article/how-the-luxury-beliefs-of-an-educated-elite-erode-society-0mx8fd2nl)”

\*Oct. 2: In-class writing assignment #1

Oct. 7: Class cancelled (religious holiday)

Oct. 9: A Classical Critique of Liberalism

 **Read**: Swift, *Gulliver’s Travels*, Preface, Book One.

Oct. 14/16: The Limits of Liberalism:

 **Read**: Fukuyama, Ch. 5, 6.

Oct. 21/23: A Conservative (that is, Traditionalist, NOT capitalist) Critique of Liberalism (Part One):

 **Read**: Deneen, *Why Liberalism Failed*, Introduction, chs. 1, 3

Oct. 28/30: The Traditionalist Critique of Liberalism—Debated (Part Two):

**Read**: Deneen, *Why Liberalism Failed*, chs. 4, 6, Conclusion; Garsten, [The Liberalism of Refuge](file:///C%3A%5CUsers%5Cruderman%5COneDrive%20-%20UNT%20System%5CDocuments%5CGarsten_The%20Liberalism%20of%20Refuge.pdf); Deneen, [Response: A Refuge from Liberalism](file:///C%3A%5CUsers%5Cruderman%5COneDrive%20-%20UNT%20System%5CDocuments%5CDeneen_A%20Refuge%20from%20Liberalism_.pdf).

\*Nov. 4: In-class writing assignment #2

Nov. 6: Progressive Democracy’s Critique of Liberalism

 **Read**: Croly, *Progressive Democracy* (selections; PDF provided)

Nov. 11/13: Can/should postcolonial nations be liberal?

 Read: Tá$íwò$, *Against Decolonisation: Taking African Agency Seriously*

Nov. 18/20: Swift’s Critique of Scientific Enlightenment Liberalism

 Read: Swift, *Gulliver’s Travels*, Bk. 3

Nov. 25/27: Thanksgiving Week (no classes)

\*Dec. 2: In-class writing assignment #3

Dec. 4: Review Session

Dec. 9: Final Exam (online; 9am-12; open-book; multiple choice)

Course drop information: see schedule at –

<http://essc.unt.edu/registrar/schedule/scheduleclass.html>

**UNT Policies**

**Academic Integrity, Plagiarism, and Generative AI/Chatbots**: All work turned in for this course must be your own original work. Such actions as plagiarizing by using a source without giving it proper credit, or using material written by somebody else or by generative AI/chatbots like ChatGPT and presenting it as your own, represent violations of academic integrity. Accord-ing to the UNT Academic Integrity Policy ([UNT Policy 6.003](https://policy.unt.edu/sites/default/files/06.003%20Student%20Academic%20Integrity.pdf)), any form of "unauthorized assistance" constitutes cheating. As a result, use of any artificial intelligence is not authorized for completion of assignments or exams in this course, unless specifically authorized by the instructor.

Violations will not be tolerated and will be handled in accordance with UNT’s academic integrity policies. Please note that penalties will apply even if you did not knowingly intend to plagiarize or cheat – you must be familiar with the rules of academic integrity and doing your own original work, whether this is at UNT or later in your career, and ignorance is no excuse.

Academic integrity is defined in the UNT Policy on *Student Standards for Academic Integrity*: ([UNT Policy 6.003](https://policy.unt.edu/sites/default/files/06.003%20Student%20Academic%20Integrity.pdf)). This policy indicates the following constitute violations of academic honesty: a student has another person/entity do the work of any substantive portion of a graded assignment for them, which includes purchasing work from a company, hiring a person or company to complete an assignment or exam, and/or using generative AI tools (such as ChatGPT) and others (for a list see [UNT Policy 6.003](https://policy.unt.edu/sites/default/files/06.003%20Student%20Academic%20Integrity.pdf))

Any suspected case of academic dishonesty will be handled in accordance with current University policy and procedures, as described [here](https://vpaa.unt.edu/ss/integrity). If this is your first academic integrity violation, you can expect a failing grade on the assignment, and you will be reported to the university’s Academic Integrity office; repeat violations will lead to stronger sanctions up to and including expulsion from UNT.

**ADA Accommodation Statement.** UNT makes reasonable academic accommodation for students with disabilities. Students seeking accommodation must first register with the Office of Disability Accommodation (ODA) to verify their eligibility. If a disability is verified, the ODA will provide a student with an accommodation letter to be delivered to faculty to begin a private discussion regarding one’s specific course needs. Students may request accommodations at any time, however, ODA notices of accommodation should be provided as early as possible in the semester to avoid any delay in implementation. Note that students must obtain a new letter of accommodation for every semester and must meet with each faculty member prior to implementation in each class. For additional information see the ODA website at disability.unt.edu.

**Emergency Notification & Procedures.** UNT uses a system called Eagle Alert to quickly notify students with critical information in the event of an emergency (i.e., severe weather, campus closing, and health and public safety emergencies like chemical spills, fires, or violence). In the event of a university closure, please refer to Blackboard for contingency plans for covering course materials.

**Acceptable Student Behavior.** Student behavior that interferes with an instructor’s ability to conduct a class or other students' opportunity to learn is unacceptable and disruptive and will not be tolerated in any instructional forum at UNT. Students engaging in unacceptable behavior will be directed to leave the classroom and the instructor may refer the student to the Dean of Students to consider whether the student's conduct violated the Code of Student Conduct. The University's expectations for student conduct apply to all instructional forums, including University and electronic classroom, labs, discussion groups, field trips, etc. The Code of Student Conduct can be found at deanofstudents.unt.edu/conduct.

**Survivor Advocacy.** UNT is committed to providing a safe learning environment free of all forms of sexual misconduct, including sexual harassment sexual assault, domestic violence, dating violence, and stalking. Federal laws (Title IX and the Violence Against Women Act) and UNT policies prohibit discrimination on the basis of sex, and therefore prohibit sexual misconduct. If you or someone you know is experiencing sexual harassment, relationship violence, stalking, and/or sexual assault, there are campus resources available to provide support and assistance. UNT’s Survivor Advocates can assist a student who has been impacted by violence by filing protective orders, completing crime victim’s compensation applications, contacting professors for absences related to an assault, working with housing to facilitate a room change where appropriate, and connecting students to other resources available both on and off campus. The Survivor Advocates can be reached at: SurvivorAdvocate@unt.edu or by calling the Dean of Students Office at 940-565-2648. Additionally, alleged sexual misconduct can be non-confidentially reported to the Title IX Coordinator at oeo@unt.edu or at (940) 565-2759.