

# Taster Programme 2021

Do you want to understand more about how global power and politics are changing? If so, try one or more of these taster sessions and help us choose which particular topics the Power and Politics Group will study next:

## 1. [History of Political Ideas taster session on 7th May at 1430](#)

At our first meeting we will discuss the free podcast called '[Hobbes On Power](#)' from the series "Talking Politics / History of Ideas" by Professor David Runciman of Cambridge University. In this hour long lecture, David explores what Hobbes was trying to achieve in his book Leviathan, which was published in 1651. This was about a vision of politics that came out of the English Civil that reimagined how we could do politics. It redefined many of the ideas that continue to shape modern politics: representation, sovereignty, the state. There are optional extras in the form of articles, videos and a free version of the book for those who would like to go deeper.

## 2. [Economic Growth and Distributive Justice taster session on 21st May at 1430](#)

At our next meeting we will discuss the video lectures in **Week 1** of a course called '**Economic Growth and Distributive Justice**', which will focus on the question "what the state can do for you"? The notion of HAPPINESS will be a major theme through touching diverse issues such as: defining happiness; finding out what makes us happy; and what the state can do to maximize the individuals' wellbeing. It will also discuss market failures such as externalities and free-riding on public goods, and understand the role of the state in overcoming them. There are optional extras in the form of readings, quiz and survey for those who would like to go deeper.

This course can be found on Coursera, which is a global online learning platform that offers anyone, anywhere, access to online courses and degrees from leading universities and companies:

[Economic Growth and Distributive Justice Part I -The Role of the State | Coursera](#) (<https://www.coursera.org/learn/economic-growth-part-1>)

If you are new to Coursera, it will require you to register and enrol on this free course using the audit option, which gives access to all the content but not a certificate. Please let Vivek know on [coursecoordinator.iu3a@gmail.com](mailto:coursecoordinator.iu3a@gmail.com) if you are having any problems with registering or accessing the 11 short video lectures.

## 3. [Politics on the Couch taster session on 4th June at 1430](#)

At our next meeting we will discuss the free podcast called '[Introducing: Politics on the Couch](#)' by the award-winning political columnist Rafael Behr. In this episode, Rafael is in conversation with Dr Leor Zmigrod about how cognitive science can help us understand how political identities are formed, and how people's ideological affiliations might affect how they respond to a national crisis.

The podcast series 'Politics on the Couch' looks at the way our minds respond to politics and the way politicians mess with our minds. In each episode Rafael Behr is

joined by a distinguished expert drawn from the world of politics, psychology or philosophy. The show will appeal to any listener interested in taking a deep dive into how psychology drives everyone's political thought and behaviour.

There are optional extras in the form of reader-friendly essays and relevant academic papers for those who would like to go deeper.

#### 4. [Revolutionary Ideas taster session on 18th June at 1430](#)

At our next meeting we will discuss the video lectures in **Unit 1** of a course called **Revolutionary Ideas**, which will focus on some of the fundamental problems in legal and political philosophy about the role and purpose of government. This course will consider the ideas and arguments of some of the world's most celebrated philosophers about these issues. The aim of the course is not to convince you of the correctness of any particular view or political position, but to provide you with a deeper and more philosophically-informed basis for your own views, and, perhaps, to help you better understand the views of those with whom you disagree. There are optional extras in the form of readings, quiz and survey for those who would like to go deeper.

This course can be found on Coursera, which is a global online learning platform that offers anyone, anywhere, access to online courses and degrees from leading universities and companies:

[Revolutionary Ideas: Utility, Justice, Equality, Freedom | Coursera](https://www.coursera.org/learn/revolutionary-ideas-utility-justice-equality-freedom)  
(<https://www.coursera.org/learn/revolutionary-ideas-utility-justice-equality-freedom>)

If you are new to Coursera, it will require you to register and enrol on this free course using the **Audit** option, which gives access to all the content but not a certificate. Please let Vivek know on [coursecoordinator.iu3a@gmail.com](mailto:coursecoordinator.iu3a@gmail.com) if you are having any problems with registering or accessing Unit 1 of this course.

#### 5. [Letters on Liberty taster session on 2nd July at 1430](#)

At our next meeting we will discuss a pamphlet called **FREEDOM IS NO ILLUSION** by **Frank Furedi**. In this, he argues that we should not take our liberty for granted or allow it to be traded for the illusion of security. This is the first in a [series](#) which draw on the tradition of radical pamphlets from the seventeenth century onwards that are designed to make you think twice and to be argued over.

#### 6. [Comparative Democratic Development taster session on 16th July at 1430](#)

At our next meeting we will discuss the video lectures in **Week 1** of a course called '**Comparative Democratic Development Part I: Conditions of Democracy**', which is intended as a broad survey of the political, social, cultural, economic, institutional, and international factors that foster and obstruct the development and consolidation of democracy. This course can be found on edX, the education movement for restless learners founded by Harvard and MIT:

[Comparative Democratic Development Part I: Conditions of Democracy | edX](#)

<https://www.edx.org/course/comparative-democratic-development-part-i-conditions-of-democracy>)

If you are new to edX, it will require you to register and enrol on this free course using the audit option, which gives access to all the content but not a certificate. Please let Vivek know on [coursecoordinator.iu3a@gmail.com](mailto:coursecoordinator.iu3a@gmail.com) if you are having any problems with registering or accessing the 11 short video lectures.

#### 7. [Moral Foundations of Politics taster session on 6th August at 1430](#)

At our next meeting we will discuss the [first video lecture](#) in a series called **The Moral Foundations of Politics with Ian Shapiro**'. In this video lecture, Professor Shapiro explains the format and structure of the lecture series during this opening session. He reviews the syllabus, and asks the central question of the series: **What makes a government legitimate?** He briefly explains the five ways to answer this question that he will focus on throughout the series. The first three traditions are those of the Enlightenment: **Utilitarianism, Marxism, and Social Contract Theory**. The fourth and fifth overarching ways to answer the central question in this series are the **Anti-Enlightenment and the Democratic Traditions**. Professor Shapiro then introduces the topic for the next lecture, the Eichmann problem.

The full series of video lectures can be found on Youtube:

[The Moral Foundations of Politics with Ian Shapiro](#)  
([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s6MOA\\_Y3MKE&list=PL2FD48CE33DFBEA7E](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s6MOA_Y3MKE&list=PL2FD48CE33DFBEA7E))

#### 8. [Comparative Political Systems taster session on 20th August at 1430](#)

At our next meeting, I was hoping to discuss the content of week 1 of a course called 'Comparative Political Systems'. Unfortunately, on the 29<sup>th</sup> of June the non-profit online learning platform that we were planning to use (edX) was taken over by a for-profit education technology company called 2U Inc. One immediate result of this has been that free access to the content of this course is going to be limited to 7 weeks only, not the 7 months we would have taken. If this had been known earlier, when the taster programme was being planned, this course would not have been included.

As FutureLearn has already joined this more commercial approach to online learning, we will need to rely on long life platforms like Youtube, websites with free content and platforms hosting free audio content in the future.

In light of these developments, I propose that we adopt the top two choices to date of the Members who have been participating in the Summer Taster Programme. These were the [Letters on Liberty](#) (LonL) pamphlets for 1430 on first Friday of the month and video lectures on [The Moral Foundations of Politics](#) (MFP) on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Friday of the month from September 2021.

The other key conclusions that came out of the review held at the end of the penultimate Taster Session were

1. the Group's programme should be as flexible as possible, so members can join the discussions just once a month or twice a month
2. the Group will try to develop the spirit of sharing the workload on facilitating the discussions more widely than Vivek and one helper
3. the Group will try to shape the discussions more democratically by all members being invited to bring one question that they would like the discussion to cover

I will also be resurrecting an old tradition of some members having [lunch](#) together before our discussions. The new location will be one of the [covered patio areas](#) at the [front](#) of [The Vineyard](#) at [179](#) Upper Street, [N1 1RG](#) between 1230 and 1400 on the 20<sup>th</sup> of August 2021. All are welcome to join me for a [meal](#) or a [drink](#) before our discussion on Zoom at 1430 using this [link](#). I am really looking forward to meeting some of you in person. Please do let me know by email if you are thinking of joining me around 1230 at the Vineyard, so I can make the appropriate arrangements with the venue.

At 1430, I would like to have a discussion about the next 12 months and cover as many of the following topics as we can in about 90 minutes:

- How should we name and publicise these two Groups to iU3A Members?
- How should we organise the LonL discussions, as there 15 pamphlets today and might be 33 after 12 more months, and for how long?
- Whether to follow the [2010](#) version of the MFP video lectures over 12 months or the [2019](#) version over 10 months, with the risk that Coursera copies edX and starts limiting free access in the next 10 months?
- How should we be communicating with members joining for just the LonL discussions, just the discussions on MFP and those who will be joining both sets of discussions and how often?
- Who would like to communicate directly with other members taking part in the same discussions, on an opt in basis, using a direct messaging system like WhatsApp?
- Should we be planning to hold another taster programme next summer, and if so when and with how many morsels on the menu?
- Who will help in updating our Group's website for the new Groups, using just a word-processing programme of their choice?
- If the preferred frequency of emails is monthly, who will help in drafting the monthly emails to members of our flexible community, that I will send out using Beacon?
- How many people make use of Beacon, our membership system?
- How should we be archiving the journey we have been on since May 2020, when the current webpage for the Group was last updated?

I apologise for the much longer than normal email. Please do let me know if you will not be joining any of the new discussions that are starting in September and would not like to receive such emails in the future.