

What Is a State?

A history of the ideas underlying the modern concept of a state

Course #	21SWS
Format:	Seminar
Moderators:	Kathy Campbell Darcy Johnson
Date and Time:	Wednesday, 1:30-3:30 10 weeks, starting February 24 (with option to extend to 12 weeks)
Location:	ONLINE, via Zoom
Maximum number of participants:	12
Auditors accepted:	Yes, up to 2

Purpose: We will discuss the issues and themes running through some seminal works of political science, from Hobbes to Fukuyama, and their applicability to today's world.

Description: This seminar is based on David Runciman's lecture series "Talking Politics: History of Ideas" (2020). There were twelve lectures, each of which dealt with a single work by an influential writer. Each lecture covers not only the basic ideas and themes of that author, but also places each work in its historical context, relates it to earlier works, and suggests how it remains relevant to today, aspects that we will amplify in our own explorations.

While the series is Euro-centric, and covers such classics as Thomas Hobbes *Leviathan* (1651) and de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* (1835, 1840), it also includes less obvious selections, such as Gandhi's *Hind Swaraj* (1909) and Arendt's *The Human Condition* (1958), as well as a couple of lectures delivered at historically significant moments (Benjamin Constant, 1819, and Max Weber, 1919). All retain their salience in a time when the idea of liberal democracy is under challenge in many nations of the western world.

Role of participants: All participants will listen to each episode of Runciman's podcast at least once before it is discussed by the seminar. Each participant will be responsible for preparing extra material and questions to guide the group discussion of one episode.

Resources: The lectures can be downloaded from most podcast sites (look for Talking Politics History of Ideas). The entire series can be found at <https://play.acast.com/s/history-of-ideas/>, where the "episode detail" links displays "show notes" with many suggestions for further reading.

About the Moderators: Kathy has moderated a number of LIR seminars, many on political and economic topics. Darcy joins as co-moderator for the first time. She has attended LIR seminars on politics and history.