

**Description:** This course examines some of the most important political writings of the Western tradition. In lectures and class discussions, we situate the theorists in their historical context and examine their positions and arguments. We consider the influence of the theories on our own political ideas, and discuss their relevance to the political issues we face today. The theorists studied are the major political thinkers in Europe during the 17<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup>, and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries and they developed the liberal, conservative, and socialist approaches to politics.

Through the theorists, we will reflect on such questions as: How do a country's institutions (families, religions, schools, economic enterprises, political bodies) shape our desires and ambitions? What does it mean to be free, as individuals and citizens, and how can we balance freedom with security? Are all men and women equal and should they be treated equally? What do we mean by rights and what rights should we have? Is social and cultural diversity a good thing in a society? Why do we have government and politicians? What makes a good political leader? What makes a good citizen? What do we mean by capitalism, socialism, communism, anarchism, and are they all compatible with democracy? What, in the end, do we mean by democracy and is it possible or desirable everywhere? Why are people religious, and what is the relationship between religion and politics, church and government? Is there such a thing as a just war, just conquest? Is violent revolution ever justified; is terror ever a legitimate political weapon?

This semester, we shall focus especially on **TRUTH AND POLITICS**---given the extraordinary developments in American politics during the 2016 – 2021 period. The relation between truth and politics has become increasingly important, culminating in denials of election results, the seriousness of the coronavirus, and evidence of climate-change. As one commentator noted, “Truth is pliable in Trumpland. Fact is fiction and anything goes. The president dresses up useful lies as ‘alternative facts’ and decries uncomfortable realities as ‘fake news.’ Stoking conservative passion and liberal fury, Trump stirs up confusion about the veracity of settled knowledge and, through sheer assertion, elevates belief to the status of truth.” Casey Williams, “Has Trump Stolen Philosophy’s Critical Tools?” NYT, 4/17/2017.

**Required Readings:** Books available from Rutgers Newark Bookstore (B & N) located in Hahnes.

**Thomas Hobbes**, Leviathan, (Oxford Univ. Press, or Penguin, or Yale University Press).

**John Locke**, Selected Political Writings, Sigmund, ed. (Norton Critical Editions). You must get this edition.

**Jean-Jacques Rousseau**, Basic Political Writings, (Hackett).

**John Stuart Mill**, On Liberty and Other Essays, Gray ed. (Oxford University Press).

**Karl Marx**, Marx: Selected Writings, Simon ed. (Hackett Classics).

These texts are **required**. For the texts marked “Norton” (published by W.W. Norton), please have that specific edition of the text as we will use some of the interpretive essays in those books. For all others, you may use any edition you choose. The editions listed above are the most inexpensive I could find (especially in the Hackett editions). In addition to these books, required readings include several short essays. They are either directly accessible online in Blackboard’s Course Documents or on library reserve **online** for this course.

## **Course Requirements**

Midterm and Final Exams.

Occasional short quizzes on the readings.

One-page definitions of key concepts, periodically throughout the semester.

Oral Presentation (see below) and class participation.

**Presentations:** Each student will make one short presentation to the class (10 minutes max), showing how the assigned reading for the day casts light on some current political event or issue described in:

An article or column in one of the following newspapers: the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Wall Street Journal*, *Politico*, *Star-Ledger* OR

An article in one of the following magazines: *New Yorker*, *Atlantic*, *Harper's*, *Economist*, *National Review*, *New York Review of Books*, OR

An article on one of the following blogs or on-line only publications: *Huffington Post*, *Daily Kos*, *Daily Dish*, *Daily Signal*, *Cato Journal*

With advance permission, students can substitute another source. I will distribute a schedule giving each student a date for the presentation. Bring a copy of the newspaper article to class for the instructor, and use the Zoom share option to post the article for the class to see. Be prepared to summarize the article and to show how it relates to the assigned reading for that day. (1) Describe the current event or issue. (2) Discuss how the assigned reading is applicable to the event. (3) Prepare 2 or 3 questions to lead class discussion.

Some Examples: In current debate about restoring the military draft, what would Machiavelli's position be? Would Saddam Hussein have benefited from reading Aristotle's advice on how dictators retain power?

**Participation:** Students are expected to attend class, keep pace with the readings, and participate knowledgeably in class discussions. Participation can take several forms, such as questions and comments on the readings directly or comments on current events that reflect some aspect of the readings. The class will be conducted via discussion as much as possible. We are a community of learning, teaching and listening to one another. Participation will therefore count for 10% of the grade –this is participation in addition to the presentation. This means that students who do not regularly participate knowledgeably in the class are forfeiting 10% of their grade.

### **Grades will be based on:**

Midterm            35%

Final                35%

Quizzes and Definitions: 15%

Oral Presentation & Participation 15%

**Attendance:** Class attendance is essential. Grades will be lowered if there are more than 2 absences. In accordance with university policy, absences can be excused only in the following cases: illness, death in the family, religious observance, official college business. These instances must be documented and, when possible, requested in advance.

### Course Goals and Objectives:

- (1) Students will read some of the most important books ever written---classic works of Western political thought in the modern period.
- (2) They will acquire skills in textual analysis and contextual interpretation---how to situate a thinker in historical context (the events of his time, the audience she was addressing, the writer's goals and objectives).
- (3) They will learn how to analyze and evaluate arguments about major political traditions (e.g., liberalism, conservatism, fascism, socialism)---as a step towards forming their own political identities. They will learn to think critically about political ideas, doctrines, and ideologies.
- (4) They will be introduced to feminist interpretations of major political thinkers. The course will consider what gender analysis has added to the study of political theory in our time.

**Academic Integrity:** Please remember that plagiarism, which means submitting another's work as your own either by copying from another student or from the author of an article, book, or internet source without giving credit, is a serious offense. University penalties range from failure on the assignment to failure in the course to probation, suspension and expulsion. See <http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu>

**Make-Ups for Presentations:** Students who miss class on the date they were scheduled to make their presentation will NOT be able to make it up on another date, unless the absence was documented and excused in accordance with the university policy outlined above. However, if a student cannot make the date assigned for the presentation for good reason, I will assign them an alternate date if I receive notice at least 2 weeks in advance.

### **21:790:372** **Course Outline/Schedule**

### **MODERN POLITICAL THEORY**

**Spring 2022**

Wed. Jan. 19	Introduction. <i>Blueprint for Political Theory</i> . What is political theory? And why study the classics of Western political thought?
Mon. Jan. 24	HOBBS. One-page definitions of <i>power &amp; authority</i> are <b>due</b> . Context of Hobbes' Theory: The English Civil War---1640 –1649.
Wed. Jan. 26	Thomas Hobbes, <u>Leviathan</u> , Part I Of Man, Ch. 6-13.
Mon. Jan.31	<u>Leviathan</u> , Part II – Of Commonwealth, Chs. 14-21.
Wed. Feb. 2	Finish discussion of Hobbes. Chs. 24, 27-29.

*What advice would Hobbes give to those seeking to establish a government in Iraq or Afghanistan?  
What type of government would he recommend? Why?*

Mon. Feb. 7 Historical context of Locke's political theory - The Revolution of 1688  
John Locke, The Second Treatise of Civil Government, Chs. I to VII.

*Is Locke a democrat?*

*According to Locke, how do we know we have natural rights, and which ones do we have? Would Locke be a useful guide to those trying to establish international human rights, for example, to try those who commit genocide or war crimes?*

Wed. Feb. 9 Locke, Second Treatise (continued), chs. VIII to XIV (property, slavery).  
James Farr, "Slavery in Locke's Political Thought," pp. 373-379 (Sigmund ed).

Mon. Feb. 14 Locke, Second Treatise of Government, Chs. XV – XIX (tyranny and revolution).  
Melissa Butler, "Locke and the Attack on Patriarchy," pp. 379-385 (Sigmund ed).

Wed. Feb. 16 Locke, A Letter on Toleration, p. 125-167. What is toleration? How does Locke justify it?  
According to Locke, is toleration limited? Are there some groups we should not tolerate?

Mon. Feb. 21 Film: "The Supreme Court's Holy Battles." (PBS)

*Can religious beliefs ever threaten public order and peace? If so, should they be tolerated?*

Wed. Feb.23 Definition of *equality due*. Jean-Jacques Rousseau & the Enlightenment.  
Short essay: Immanuel Kant, "What is Enlightenment?"

Mon. Feb. 28 Rousseau, Discourse on the Origins & Foundations of Inequality, Part I.

*What does Rousseau admire about Geneva?*

*What does Rousseau mean when he says that human beings compare themselves with others, and what are the consequences of this?*

*What is the worst consequence of social, economic and political inequality for Rousseau?*

Wed. March 2 Discourse on Origins of Inequality, Part II. Social Contract, Bks 1 & 2.

Mon. March 7 Social Contract, Bks. 3 & 4.

*What is most appealing about Rousseau's conception of freedom? What is most threatening about it?*

Wed. March 9 **MIDTERM EXAM**

March 12 to March 20 **Spring Recess. No classes.**

Mon. March 21 Edmund Burke, Reflections on the Revolution in France. (excerpt).  
Conservatism: Burke on revolution, social change, and the nature of society.

- Wed. Mar. 23 Mary Wollstonecraft, A Vindication of the Rights of Woman. Criticism of Burke and Rousseau.
- Mon. Mar. 28 J.S. Mill, Essay on Liberty, chs. 1-3. Definition of liberty is **in-classj**. Adam Gopnik, "Right Again: The Passions of John Stuart Mill," The NEW YORKER, Oct. 6, 2008, pp. 85-91. (feature: A Critic at Large). Go online to [www.NewYorker.com](http://www.NewYorker.com)
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- Wed. March 30 J.S. Mill, Essay on Liberty, chs. 4-5.  
*Why, for Mill, is freedom a good thing?*  
*Why, for Mill, is diversity of ideas and ways of life a good thing?*  
*Based on Mill's classic, how would you define liberalism?*
- Mon. April 4 **QUIZ.** J.S. Mill, On the Subjection of Women, Parts 1-2.
- Wed. April 6 On the Subjection of Women, Parts 3 and 4. Mary Lyndon Shanley, "Marital Slavery and Friendship: Mill's The Subjection of Women." Blackboard Course Documents.  
*Why does Mill think that the situation of women in his time is worse than that of slavery in earlier times?*
- Mon. April 11 **KARL MARX AND THE MARXIST LEGACY.** Film: "Inside the Meltdown." PBS Frontline (the Great Recession of 2008, and beyond). Def. of capitalism due.
- Wed. April 13 **MARX AND THE STRUCTURE OF SOCIETY**  
 Marx, The German Ideology, pp. 102-156.  
Theses on Feuerbach, pp. 98-101. Critique of Political Economy, pp. 209-213.  
 Preface to first edition of Capital, pp. 214-219.  
*For Marx, do ideas influence the course of history?*  
*Why is the proletariat different from all previous revolutionary classes, according to Marx?*  
*Why is capitalism doomed to fail, according to Marx?*  
*What does Marx mean by the dictatorship of the proletariat, by communism?*
- Mon. April 18 **MARX AND POLITICS**  
Communist Manifesto, pp. 157-186. Critique of Gotha Programme, pp. 315-332.
- Wed. April 20 **Revolutionary and Evolutionary SOCIALISM**  
 Lenin and the USSR; Mao and China; E. Bernstein and Social Democracy.  
 Terry Eagleton, "Was Marx Right? It's Not Too Late to Ask," Commonweal, Vol. 138, No. 7 (April 8, 2011), pp. 9-12. Accessible online at [www.commonweal.org](http://www.commonweal.org).
- Mon. April 25 Jill Lepore, "The Socialism of Eugene V. Debs," The New Yorker, February 18 & 25, 2019, pp. 88-92. Available at [www.newyorker.com](http://www.newyorker.com)  
 Isaac Chotiner, "How Socialist is Bernie Sanders?" The New Yorker, March 2, 2020. Online, available at [www.newyorker.com](http://www.newyorker.com)

- Wed. April 27                      Can we conclude with polished, refined definitions of Liberalism, Conservatism, Socialism, and Fascism?  
Benito Mussolini (1883-1945) "The Doctrine of Fascism."
- Mon. May 2                         Last Class. Summary & Review.  
Final Exam: we follow the Rutgers University Exam Schedule.

### **Bibliography of Secondary Works on Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, Mill and Marx**

Two books that discuss all of the theorists are George Klosko's *History of Political Theory*, vol. 2, and Ian Hampsher-Monk, *A History of Modern Political Thought*. Another set of commentaries is included in Sheldon Wolin's *Politics and Vision*.

Of particular interest are some feminist commentaries and interpretations of these Western political thinkers. Here is a sampling:

Nancy J. Hirschmann, *Gender, Class, and Freedom in Modern Political Theory* (Princeton, 2008). Contains analyses of Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, Kant, and Mill.

Susan Okin, *Women in Western Political Thought* (chapters on Rousseau & Mill).

Mary L. Shanley & Carole Pateman, eds., *Feminist Interpretations and Political Theory* (Penn State Univ. Press, 1991).

Alice Rossi, ed., *Essays on Sex Equality* (J.S. Mill and Harriet Taylor Mill).

N. Hirschmann & Kirstie McClure, *Feminist Interpretations of John Locke* ( Penn State Univ, Press, 2007).

Note: Required texts in this course (classics of political thought) are in the public domain and are available free online. You would need to go to the websites and print them out. See <http://www.swan.ac.uk/poli/texts>

CLASS MEETING TIMES: Mondays, 2:30 to 3:50 pm.    Wednesdays, 1:00 to 2:20 pm.

Office Hours: I will set up appointments to meet virtually (Online) with everyone. My email address is [segers@newark.rutgers.edu](mailto:segers@newark.rutgers.edu)