

MODERN POLITICAL THEORY

Fall 2018

Professor Segers
21:790:372

Office: 729 Hill Hall
Monday 5, Wednesday 4

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 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries and they developed the liberal, conservative, and socialist/communist 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, 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? Does life, does history, have meaning or purpose?

This semester, we shall focus especially on truth and politics (what is the difference between "fake news" and "real news"?), and on the influence of the Western tradition on American political thought and vice-versa.

Required Readings: Books available from Barnes & Noble Bookstore on Halsey Street.

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

John Locke, Selected Political Writings, Sigmund, ed. (Norton Critical 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, or on library reserve **online** for this course.

Course Requirements

Midterm Exam and Final Exams.

A short quiz in class on the readings---one each in Sept, Oct, Nov.

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

Oral Presentation (see below).

Participation (see below).

Presentations: Each student will make one short presentation to the class (5 minutes max), showing how the assigned reading for the day casts light on some 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*, *Weekly Standard*, *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 and topic for the presentation.

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 15% of the grade – this includes both individual presentation and general participation in class discussion. This means that students who do not attend or regularly participate knowledgeably in class are forfeiting 15% of their grade.

Grades will be based on:

Midterm 25%

Final 30%

Quizzes and Definitions: 30%

Participation 15% [includes short oral presentation as well as comments in class discussions].

Note: Makeup exams and quizzes will not be given. Written work (for example, definitions) will not be accepted after the class when they are due. 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, 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.

Two particular topics to think about this semester:

The influence of the Western political tradition on American political thought (Locke and Rousseau, for example)---and the impact of American political thought and practice on other countries (e.g., the United States declared independence from the British Empire in 1776, setting an example for other revolutionary and national liberation movements in later years).

Truth and Politics – This has become increasingly important in American politics, as evident in the following remarks: “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**. (An example: the administration’s denial of hard-won empirical evidence of climate change).

Course Outline/Schedule

- Wed. Sept. 5 Introduction. *Blueprint for Political Theory*. What is political theory?
And why study the classics of Western political thought?
- Mon. Sept. 10 Historical context of Hobbes' political theory: the English Civil War,
1640-1649.
- Wed. Sept. 12 One-page definitions of *power* and *authority* due. Thomas Hobbes,
Leviathan, Part I - Of Man, Ch. 6-16.
- Mon. Sept. 17 Leviathan, Part II – Of Commonwealth, Chs. 17-21, 24, 27-29.
- Wed. Sept. 19 **QUIZ I** - Complete discussion of Hobbes theory and influence.
- Mon. Sept. 24 One-page definition of *consent* due.
Historical context of Locke's political theory – The Revolution of 1688
The Second Treatise of Civil Government, Chs. I to VII.
- Wed. Sept. 26. Locke, Second Treatise (continued), chs. VIII to XIV (property, slavery).
James Farr, "Slavery in Locke's Political Thought," pp. 373-379.
- Mon. Oct. 1 Locke, Second Treatise, chs. XV – XIX. (on tyranny and revolution).
The impact of Locke in American political thought.
- Wed. Oct. 3 Film, "The Supreme Court's Holy Battles," on religious freedom and
Toleration in the U.S.
- Mon. Oct. 8 John Locke, Essay on Toleration (all). What is toleration? How does Locke
Justify it? Are there limits to toleration, according to Locke? Short film:
"Kim Davis: Religious Freedom Fighter or Civil Rights Denier?"
- Wed., Oct. 10 **MIDTERM EXAM**

- Mon. Oct 15 Definition of *equality* due. Jean-Jacques Rousseau & the Enlightenment. Short Essay: Immanuel Kant, “What is Enlightenment?” Library reserve online.
- Wed. Oct. 17 Rousseau, Discourse on the Origins & Foundation of Inequality, Part I.
- Mon. Oct. 22 Rousseau, Discourse on Origins of Inequality, Part II. Possibly a short Film, “35 UP.”
- Wed. Oct. 24 **QUIZ II.** Rousseau, On the Social Contract, Books I, II, and III.
- Mon. Oct. 29 Finish Rousseau’s Social Contract (Book IV). Discussion of the French Revolution and the “Declaration on the Rights of Man” (1789). Brief look at Edmund Burke and philosophical conservatism, on representation and revolution.
- Wed. Oct.31 Definition of *liberty* due. John Stuart Mill and the politics of 19th century England. Adam Gopnik. “Right Again: The Passions of John Stuart Mill,” The New Yorker, October 6, 2008, pp. 85-91. Available online.
- Mon. Nov. 5 JOHN STUART MILL, *Essay on Liberty*, chs 1-3. Possible film in class: selections from “Citizenfour.”
- Wed. Nov. 7 Mill, *On Liberty* (continued), chs. 4 and 5. Mill, On the Subjection Of Women, Parts 1 and 2.
- Mon. Nov. 12 Mill, On Subjection of Women, selections from parts 3 and 4. Mary Lyndon Shanley, “Marital Slavery and Friendship: Mill’s The Subjection of Women, online reserve in Dana Library.
- Wed. Nov. 14 **QUIZ III.** Discussion of Mill continued.
- Mon. Nov. 19 KARL MARX AND THE MARXIST LEGACY. Film: “Inside the Meltdown: What Happened to the Economy,” PBS Frontline (the Great Recession of 2008 and beyond).
- Mon. Nov. 26 One-page definition of *capitalism* is due. Preface to A Contribution To the Critique of Political Economy, pp. 209-213. The Communist Manifesto, pp. 157-186 (in Simon edition).

- Wed. Nov. 28 Marx, Capital, “Preface to the First Edition, pp. 216-219.
Capital, ch. 32, “The Historical Tendency of Capitalist Accumulation.”
Possible film: “Red Metal: The Copper Country Strike of 1913,” one of
the most important events in American labor history.
- Mon. Dec. 3 Marx, Critique of the Gotha Programme, in Simon, pp. 315-332.
- Wed. Dec. 5 Marx, discussion continued. Film excerpts: “The Roosevelts: A History”
(Ken Burns, PBS): FDR, the Great Depression, and the New Deal.
- Mon. Dec. 10 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.
- Wed. Dec. 12 LAST CLASS. Summary and Review.
Final Exam: we follow the Rutgers University exam schedule.

Library Reserve (Electronic): Includes the following short essays:

Mary Shanley, “Marital Slavery and Friendship: John Stuart Mill’s “The Subjection of Women.”
Immanuel Kant, “What is Enlightenment?”

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 Iain 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).

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).

Jean Bethke Elshtain, *Public Man & Private Woman: Women in Social & Political Thought*.

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>

[N.B. Class does not meet Wednesday, Nov. 21st. Rutgers follows Friday schedule this day.](#)