

History of Western Political Thought

PSCI 2004 ~~~~~ Spring 2008

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Course Description:

This course introduces students to the history of Western political philosophy through selected readings from a few canonical authors. Political philosophy is a branch of moral philosophy dealing with arguments about the proper goals and limits of government. By the end of this course, students should have some familiarity with a few of the major historical figures in the history of political thought and should also have a deeper appreciation of what it means to construct, criticize and defend philosophical arguments. This course will be drawn on several lines. First, the course juxtaposes authors along the line of the theory versus the practice of politics. Second, it examines different conceptions of utopias versus disutopias. Finally, it asks critical questions about the extent to which freedom, as an absolute value, plays a role in theory/practice and utopia/disutopia.

Part I of the course deals with ancient Greek thought. We begin with Plato's *Republic*, which emphasizes the importance of personal and civic virtue in rulers. The course then touches on Aristotle's critique of Plato and his further writings on the nature of politics and the best regime. We then turn to Machiavelli's challenge to the classical Greek and Christian emphasis on virtue. Machiavelli argues that although people are not political by nature, politics nevertheless represents the earthly salvation of sinful human beings. Yet to be politically effective, a ruler must know how to use violence and cruelty when necessary. Finally, we examine Thomas More's attempt to steer a course between Platonic disengagement from politics and Machiavellian *realpolitik*. We also briefly consider More's Christian reworking of Plato's ideal state or utopia.

Part II of the course shifts focus from the ancient problem of "taming the Prince" to the early modern problem of establishing or founding a strong, unified modern state. This part of the course concentrates on the development of the modern "social contract" tradition in the writings of Thomas Hobbes, John Locke and Jean Jacques Rousseau and culminates with Immanuel Kant. In particular, we consider the philosophical problem of finding a form of government that can reconcile the conflicting demands of freedom and authority. We will then look at how social contract themes (together with older notions of virtue) are deployed in early American political thought. More specifically, we will look

to the *Federalist Papers* and the American experiment as an attempt to encapsulate theory and practice.

Part III examines the idea of liberty or freedom, particularly in late modern political thought. We start with Constant's classification of freedom and then move to Isaiah Berlin's taxonomy of freedom. However, we will be particularly interested in how these themes are worked out in later modern mass society, in particular within Marxism and utilitarianism, two major, 19th century alternatives to the social contract tradition. We will focus on some early writings of Marx, and Hannah Arendt's critique of Marx's theory of labor. We will then move on to J.S. Mill's *On Liberty*, which presents a classic defense of individuality against the dangers of social conformity. Finally we end with Hannah Arendt's essay "What is Freedom" as a way of examining the role of freedom throughout the history of Western political thought and the questions that still remain about this difficult concept.

Grading Scale

Exam 1	20%
Exam 2	20%
Final	25%
Attendance/Participation	5%
Paper 1	15%
Paper 2	15%

Required Texts:

Plato. *Republic*. 2nd Edition, Trns. G.M.A. Grube & C.D.C. Reeve (Hackett Publishing Co, 1992)

Locke, John. *Second Treatise on Government*, Ed. C.B. MacPherson (Hackett Publishing Co.,1980).

Rousseau, Jean Jacques. *Social Contract*, Trns. Donald Cress (Hackett Publishing Co., 1988).

Mill, John Stuart. *On Liberty*, Ed. Elizabeth Rapaport (Hackett Publishing Co., 1978)

More, St. Thomas. *Utopia*, Trns. David Wooton (Hackett Publishing Co., 1999)

Machiavelli, Niccolo. *The Prince*, Trns. Harvey C. Mansfield (University of Chicago Press, 1998)

Reading Schedule

Mon. Jan. 14: First Day of Classes

Introduction

Classical Political Thought: Plato vs. Aristotle

Wed. Jan. 16: Justice and Self- Interest

Plato, *Republic*, Bk 1, lines 327-354c, 27 pages

Total: 27 pages, tells a story, but Plato's arguments are not easy; read carefully

Fri. Jan. 18: Justice in the City and the Soul

Plato, *Republic*, Bk 2, lines 357-369b, 9 pages (stop at top of p. 44 in on-line copy)

Plato, *Republic*, Bk. 2 , lines 369b-376d, 6 pages (stop at top of page 52 in on-line copy);

Plato, *Republic*, Bk. 3, lines 414- 417b 3 pages

Total: 18 pages

January 21 – NO CLASS – MLK Day

Wed. Jan. 23 The Three Waves of Criticism

Plato, *Republic* Bk. 4 419-436d; lines 439c-445e, 22 pages

Plato, *Republic*, Bk.5, lines 449-476d, 22 pages

Reeve, "Naked Women in the Palestra," ("[Reeve.pdf](#)"), 4 pages , easy

Total: 48 pages

Fri. Jan. 25 Plato's Parable of the Cave & Plato's Critique of Democracy

Plato, *Republic*, Bk 7, lines 514-521c, 5 pages

Plato, *Republic* Bk 8, lines 557-567d, 7 pages

Total: 12 pages

Mon. Jan. 28: Aristotle: Regimes Said by Others to be the Best

Aristotle: Politics, Bk 2: chapters 1-5 (1260b27-1264b24); 12 (1273b27-12-74b26)
 (“[Aristotle Bk 2.pdf](#)”)

Total: 13 pages, deceptively easy

Wed. Jan. 30: Aristotle: Types of Regimes – a Taxonomy

Aristotle, Politics, Bk 3; chapters 1-2 (1274b32-1275b34); 4-9 (1276b16-1281a2)
 (“[Aristotle Bk 3.pdf](#)”)

Total: 16 pages, deceptively easy

Fri. Feb. 1: Aristotle: The Best Regime

Aristotle, Politics, Bk 4: chapters 4-9 (1325b33-1329a34); 13-15 (1331b24-1334b17)
 (“[Aristotle Bk 4.pdf](#)”)

Total: 16 pages, deceptively easy

A New Political Thought Emerges: Machiavelli vs. More

Mon. Feb. 4: Machiavelli's Critique of Classical Political Thought

Machiavelli, *The Prince*, Chapters 1-3, 5-6, 8-9,

Total: 20, but very easy and short chapters

Wed. Feb. 6:

Machiavelli, *The Prince*, Chapters 15-18, 25-26

Total: 20, but very easy and short chapters

Fri. Feb. 8: Thomas More: The Christian Humanist Reply to Machiavelli

More, *Utopia*, "Gilles's Letter," Bk. 1

Ackroyd, *Life of Thomas More* excerpt ("[More/Life.pdf](#)"), 4 pages, easy

Total: 43

Mon. Feb. 11: EXAM 1

Early Modern Political Thought – The “Modern” State & Social Contract Theory

Wed. Feb. 13: Hobbes: The Skepticism and a Theory of Politics

Richard Tuck, "Thomas Hobbes: the skeptical state" ("[Tuck/Hobbes.pdf](#)").

Total: 12 pages, easy

Fri. Feb. 15: The State of Nature, "Solitary, Poor, Nasty, Brutish and Short"

Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Chapt. 13, Chapt. 14 (paragraphs 1-8, 18-20, 23-33), Chapt. 15 (1-3, 35-41) ("[Hobbes1.pdf](#)"), 16 pages, difficult.

Total: 16 pages

Texts of *Leviathan* also available:

<http://search.oregonstate.edu/web/?query=Leviathan&Search=Search+OSU>

Mon. Feb. 18: Hobbes: The Social Contract and the Absolute State -- **PAPER NUMBER 1 DUE**

Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Chapt. 17 (1-2, 6-7, 12-15); Chapt 18 (1-10, 16, 20); Chapt 19 (1-2, 4-7); Chapt. 20 (1-3); Chapt. 21 (1-18, 21-22); Chapt. 29 (1-10); Chapt. 30 (1-4).

All in "[Hobbes2.pdf](#)" and also can be found on website above. 24 pages, difficult

Total: 24 pages

Wed. Feb. 20: John Locke: A Kinder, Gentler State of Nature

Dunn, "John Locke: The Politics of Trust" ("[Dunn.pdf](#)"), 10 short pages, easy

Locke, *Second Treatise of Government* (note that Locke's work is organized by numbered **sections** and that the following are section, **not** page numbers. I repeat: are **not** page numbers.): Sections 4-24, 87-92.

Total: 23

Fri. Feb. 22: John Locke: The Establishment, Limits and Dissolution of Government

Locke, *Second Treatise of Government* (note that Locke's work is organized by numbered **sections** and that the following are section, **not** page numbers. I repeat: are **not** page numbers.): 95-100, 123-142, 211-228, 240-243

Total: 20 pages

[Mon. Feb. 25: Locke on Property](#)

Second Treatise, Sections 25-51 (12 pages, read carefully)

Robert Nozick, "The Lockean Theory of Acquisition," "The Proviso" ("[Nozick.pdf](#)"), 9 pages

Total: 21 pages

[Wed. Feb. 27: Tacit Consent and the Right of Revolution](#)

Second Treatise, Sections 117-122, 168, 199,201,207-210.

Hume, excerpts from "Of the Original Contract" 3 pages ([Hume.pdf](#))

Total: 13 pages

[Fri. Feb. 29: Rousseau: The General Will or How to Reconcile Freedom and Authority](#)

Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, Bk 1

Total: 12 pages

[Mon. March 3: Rousseau: The General Will & Sovereignty](#)

Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, Bk 2, Bk 3 (chapters 1-2; 8-18)

Total: 41 pages

[Wed. March 5: The Critique of Representative Government and the Civil Religion](#)

Rousseau *The Social Contract*, Bk 4 (skip chapters 4 and 5)

Total: 18 pages

[Fri. March 7: Rousseau in Practice: The Constitution of Poland](#)

Rousseau *The Constitution of Poland*, introduction – selections ("[Rousseau Poland.pdf](#)")

Total: 20

[Mon. March 10: Kant: Theory v. Practice](#)

Kant, Immanuel. "On the Common Saying: 'This May be True in Theory, but it does not Apply in Practice'" 61-63; 73-92 (PDF TO COME)

Total: 21 pages, difficult

Wed. March 12: Kant: The Kantian State

Kant, Immanuel. "Public Right" in the *Metaphysics of Morals*: 136-151; 162-164 (PDF TO COME)

Total: 17 pages, difficult

Optional:

Riley, Patrick. Chpt. 5 "On Kant as the Most Adequate of the Social Contract Theorists" in *Will and Political Legitimacy* (Harvard University Press, 1982): 125-162.

Fri. March 14: Implementation: Hamilton, Madison and the American Experiment

Federalist Papers, numbers 10, 48-51 ("[Federalist.pdf](#)"). Scroll through pdf. to find these numbered essays.

Optional: 41, 47

Total: 22 pages, difficult

Also available <http://www.law.ou.edu/hist/federalist>

Mon. March 17: Hannah Arendt on the American Founding

Arendt, Hannah. "The Revolutionary Tradition and its Lost Treasure" in *On Revolution* ("[Arendt_Revolution.pdf](#)")

Total: 25

Wed. March 19: EXAM 2

Friday March 21: Movie – Liberty! The American Revolution

Mon. March 24- Friday March 28 – SPRING BREAK

Emancipation & Freedom (Late Modern Political Thought)

Mon. March 31: Berlin: Two Concepts of Freedom

PAPER 2 DUE

Isaiah Berlin, "Two Concepts of Freedom" ([Berlin2CS.pdf](#)) Read p. 118 - 141 and 162 - 172. To put it another way, only sections 1,2,3, 7 and 8 are required (sections 4,5,6 optional).

Total: 33 pages, difficult

Wed. April 2: Constant: The Liberty of the Ancients vs. the Liberty of the Moderns

Constant, Benjamin. "Liberty of the Ancients Compared with that of the Moderns" 1816

Available online: <http://www.uark.edu/depts/comminfo/cambridge/ancients.html>

Total: 11 pages, slightly difficult

Fri. April 4: Marx: Class Struggle

Terrell Carver, "Karl Marx: Gravedigger of the Capitalist Class," 12 short pages
([Carver.pdf](#))

Marx, "Preface to the Critique of Political Economy" 1 page ("Preface.pdf")

Total: 13 pages

Mon. April 7: Marx: Labor, Alienation and Species Being

Marx, "Estranged Labor," 11 pgs; "Private Property & Communism" 12 pgs
([Marx_Labor.pdf](#))

Total: 23 pages, difficult

Wed. April 9: Critique of Marx

Arendt, Hannah. "Labor" in *The Human Condition* (University of Chicago Press, 1958):
79-101 ([Arendt_Labor.pdf](#))

Total: 20 slightly difficult

Fri. April 11: Critique of Marx Continued

Arendt, Hannah. "Labor" in *The Human Condition* (University of Chicago Press, 1958):
101-135

Total: 34 slightly difficult

Mon. April 14: The History of Liberty, Social Tyranny, and the Harm Principle

John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*, Chapter 1 and Chapter 3.

Total: 35 pages, difficult

Wed. April 16: Freedom of Thought and Expression

Mill, *On Liberty*, Book 2, approx. 20 pages

Total: 20 pages, difficult

Fri. April 18: Freedom of Thought and Expression

Mill, *On Liberty*, Book 2, approx. 20 pages

Total: 20 pages, difficult

Mon. April 21: Liberty of Action

Mill, *On Liberty*, Book 4

Total: 20 pages, difficult

Wed. April 23: Liberty of Action: more applications

Mill, *On Liberty*, Book 5, 22 pages, difficult

Feinberg, "A Ride on the Bus" ("[Ride.pdf](#)"), 2 pages, easy

Total: 24 pages

Fri. April 25: Critique of Mill:

Stephen, James Fitzjames. "The Doctrine of Liberty in its Application to Morals" ("[Stephen Doc. of Lib.pdf](#)")

Total: 10, somewhat difficult

Mon. April 28: Critique of Mill:

Feinberg, Joel. "Profound Offense" ("[Profound.pdf](#)")

Total: 27 pages, difficult

Wed. April 30: Arendt – "What is Freedom?"

Arendt, Hannah. "What is Freedom" in *Between Past and Future* (Penguin, 1968): 143-156. ("[Arendt Freedom.pdf](#)")

Total: 13, slightly difficult

Fri. May 2 – Arendt – “What is Freedom?”

Arendt, Hannah. “What is Freedom” in *Between Past and Future* (Penguin, 1968): 156-171

Total: 15, a bit more difficult