Political Science 302: History of Modern Political Thought
Spring 2015

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Milne 320
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Tues/Thurs: 11:45-1:05
PH 123
Office Hours: HU B16
Tues/Thurs 4:05-4:45
& Tues 12:30-1:10

Course Objectives
1. To understand and critically assess significant political writings of the modern era (17th – 20th centuries), including key concepts and debates.
2. To understand the historical context that gave rise to these concepts and debates.
3. To analyze their relevance and value for contemporary politics.
4. Develop critical thinking skills to be applied in reading, writing, and discussion.

Course Description
Modern political thought understands itself as the product of a radical break with the past: with tradition and a natural order for social and political relations. For the social contract tradition, such a radical break meant inventing political authority anew based on human reason. We inherit from this tradition a new understanding of revolution and political resistance that echoes today in the language of constitutions, human rights, and the rule of law.

What kind of political freedom is inaugurated by such revolutionary reasoning? Does equality between rich and poor, men and women, colonizer and colonized require that we strip away our social and political identities and cultural traditions in order to start fresh? What are the costs of turning a blind eye to political history, economic inequality, or identity differences such as race, culture, and gender? In response to these questions, we will consider the various meanings of political freedom and equality offered by theorists of the social contract tradition (Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau), their critics (Hume, Wollstonecraft, Burke), and the heirs to these debates who seek to consider political rationality and freedom anew (Mill, Marx, Arendt).

Required Texts
The following texts are required for this course and are available for purchase at the University bookstore. Additional readings made available on-line through Blackboard (as indicated by ** below)

Thomas Hobbes, Leviathan (Hackett)
John Locke, Political Writings (Hackett)
Karl Marx, The Portable Karl Marx (Penguin)
John Stuart Mill, On Liberty (Hackett)
Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Basic Political Writings (Hackett)
Course Requirements
As a student in this course, you are required to:

• Attend class and arrive on time.
• Complete all readings by the assigned date.
• Come to class prepared to participate actively in discussions of assigned readings.
• Bring assigned texts to class with you.

** The use of laptops in class is strongly discouraged. Talk to me if there are extenuating circumstances requiring the use of a computer in class.

Reading Questions
To help you understand the required readings for each week, there are reading questions for each text, found at the end of this syllabus. These questions will help you to identify important points and themes in the readings. They are not exhaustive – these questions are a beginning not an end. Sometimes the answer will be simple, but sometimes lecture will help in answering more difficult questions. Feel free to bring up these questions in class or office hours. As you will see, most if not all of these questions will relate to lecture and class discussion. Answers to reading questions are for your use only and are not submitted for grading.

Evaluation
Students will be assessed in the course based on the following criteria:
Midterm: 25%; Paper 25%; Participation: 20%; Final Exam: 30%

Exams: Your ability to understand and critically analyze the course material will be assessed through a midterm and final examination. Exams will consist of identification and essay questions. Identifications will require you to indicate the source (author and text) of a passage from the assigned readings, interpret its meaning, and explain its significance. In-class essays ask you to formulate an argument in response to a question and defend it using evidence from readings and lectures. The final exam will be cumulative. No make-up examinations or incomplete grades will be given, except in the event of serious personal or family illness or other extraordinary circumstances approved by the dean of undergraduate studies.

Paper: In a short paper, you will develop an argument based on a careful analysis of a political theory text. You must respond to a question and support your argument through evidence from assigned readings. You must cite all of the passages or ideas taken from other authors. The paper tests your skills in textual interpretation. Therefore, no research beyond the assigned texts is required. Citing non-academic sources, especially from the internet, is strongly discouraged and will likely result in a lower grade.

You will be required to submit two copies of your paper: 1) on paper at the beginning of class on the due date; and 2) electronically through Blackboard’s Safe Assign, a program that evaluates the originality of written work. The purpose of SafeAssign is to guard against academic dishonesty by judging whether essays draw from sources without citation. For more information on SafeAssign, see http://www.albany.edu/its/bls/safe_assign.htm.
Participation: Worth 20% of the course grade, participation is highly valued in this course and is essential for your success. The greater the quality and quantity of your participation, the more rewarding the class will be for everyone. You should always walk into class prepared with some contribution: a question, an interesting observation about the text, and/or an opinion on the readings. When the material is particularly difficult is the best time to bring questions about particular passages or key terms. The participation grade is based on three components:

1) Attendance: Attendance will be taken each week, but attendance alone is insufficient to receive full credit for participation. Missing more than four (4) classes, repeated late arrivals, or arriving unprepared to lecture will guarantee a grade of C or lower.

2) Class Discussion: Each student is expected to regularly make an active and thoughtful contribution to class discussions. This includes asking questions, offering observations about the readings and formulating opinions. You are particularly encouraged to respectfully respond to your fellow students’ thoughts and opinions.

3) In-class assignments: In-class assignments will consist of writing a short piece, one page or less, that will be used to test your understanding of the reading. **In-class assignments will be given without notice periodically throughout the semester.** There will be no opportunity to make up missed in-class assignments. Missed assignments will be disregarded in the case of documented, excused absences.

Excused Absences
Students who are sick are strongly encouraged to stay home as necessary. For this reason, two absences will **not** be counted against your grade. This policy DOES NOT APPLY TO EXAM DATES. If you must miss an exam or more than two normal classes, you must have documentation from the dean of undergraduate studies (Lecture Center 30 Phone: 518-442-3950) or your grade will be adversely affected.

Reasonable accommodation
“Reasonable accommodations will be provided for students with documented physical, sensory, systemic, cognitive, learning and psychiatric disabilities. If you believe you have a disability requiring accommodation in this class, please notify the Director of Disabled Student Services (Campus Center 137, 442-5490). That office will provide the course instructor with verification of your disability, and will recommend appropriate accommodations.” Please see: [http://www.albany.edu/disability/current.shtml](http://www.albany.edu/disability/current.shtml)

Speak with me in the first two weeks of the semester about any foreseeable accommodations. Reasonable accommodations are generally established well in advance and rarely granted retroactively. They include issues relating to religious practice, university activities (e.g. sports teams), among other predictable conflicts.

Cheating and Plagiarism
Cheating on an exam or plagiarizing written work will result in failure in the course and referral of the case to a university committee. For more information, please see the undergraduate bulletin: [http://www.albany.edu/undergraduate_bulletin/regulations.html](http://www.albany.edu/undergraduate_bulletin/regulations.html)
Schedule of Readings and Assignments

**This schedule is subject to change. All changes will be announced in class.**

I. The Authority of Reason: The Social Contract Tradition

Jan 22  Introduction: What is Political Theory? What is Modernity?


No class meeting


**Paper Topics handed out**

Feb 12  John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, chs. 1-5 (261-286)

Feb 17  John Locke, *Second Treatise*, chs. 6-8 (286-324)

Feb 19  John Locke, *Second Treatise*, chs. 9-12, 14, 18-19 (324-337, 344-49, 363-387)

Feb 24  David Hume, *On the Original Contract**

Feb 26  David Hume, *On the Original Contract* **

*Paper due*

Mar 3   Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discourse on the Origin and Foundations of Inequality Among Men* (27-69)

Mar 5   Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discourse on Inequality* (69-92)


Mar 17-19  Spring Break – Classes Suspended

Mar 24  Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, introduction

Olympe de Gouges, *Declaration of the Rights of Woman* **

Mar 31  *On-line assignment*
*Declaration of the Rights of Man**
*Declaration of Independence**

Apr 2  Discussion of online assignment and review

Apr 7  **Midterm**

II. **Rethinking Reason and Revolution**

Apr 9  Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (selections) **

Apr 14  Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (selections) **

Apr 16  John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*

Apr 21  John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*

Apr 23  Karl Marx, *The German Ideology*: Preface (162-3),
*“The Materialist Conception of History”* (163-71)
*“Communism as the End of History”* (189-95)
*Theses on Feuerbach* (155-58)

Apr 28  Karl Marx, *1844 Manuscripts*: “Alienated Labour” (131- 146),
*German Ideology*: “Consciousness and the Division of Labour” (173-83),
*“Law and the Materialist Conception of History”* (183-6),
*Capital*: “Commodities” (437-61)

Apr 30  Karl Marx, *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (203-228)

May 5  Review

**Final Exam Thursday, May 14, 1:00 – 3:00**
Reading Questions for RPOS 302: History of Modern Political Thought (Fall 2013)

**Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan***

**Part I**
1. Leviathan is a metaphor. What images and associations does it raise? What does it stand for?
2. Where does human knowledge come from? On what basis do we know if something is true or false?
3. How does Hobbes explain human behavior? What are the most powerful motivations for human actions and ideas?
4. How does Hobbes understand human nature? Is it gentle, violent, predictable, dangerous, basically good or bad?
5. Hobbes defines many kinds of human passions. Like emotions, the passions can strongly influence us. Which passions are the most important for Hobbes and why?
6. How does Hobbes describe the state of nature?
7. What kind of laws or rules apply in the state of nature, if any?
8. What are the shortcomings of the state of nature? Why isn’t it a desirable condition to live in?

**Part 2**
1. How is civil society created?
2. How does the creation of civil society change life from the state of nature?
3. Why is civil society more peaceful, orderly, and predictable? What wouldn’t people rebel against the sovereign’s power?
4. What is the role of the sovereign in Hobbes’ account of civil society?
5. Are there limits to the sovereign’s power? Can the sovereign lose its/his power? If so, under what conditions?
6. Are there protections for political subjects? Must laws be fair and rewards/punishments handed out evenly? Can subjects appeal the sovereign’s decision under the law? Why or why not?
7. What happens if there is a difference of interpretation of the law? How is a dispute over the meaning of the law settled?

**John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government***
1. What does Locke mean by the “state of nature”? How does he describe it?
2. What is the law of nature? Where do we find it? How do we know its content?
3. What natural rights does each person have?
4. Is life in Locke’s state of nature sustainable (can it last)? Why or why not?
5. What is the “state of war”? What is the difference, if any, between the state of nature and the state of war?
6. What is Locke’s definition of slavery?
7. Why does civil society form?
8. How does civil society form?
9. What rights does each individual give up when they enter civil society? Which rights do individuals keep?
10. What is Locke’s understanding of property? On what basis can a person claim to own something? How does it differ (or not) in the various conditions in which
humans may live: state of nature and civil society? What innovations and practices have changed the nature of property-holding?
11. Can people be held as property? Why or why not?
12. What is the purpose of government, according to Locke?
13. Locke describes at least two different kinds of authority – one enjoyed by fathers and another enjoyed by political leaders (monarchs, e.g.). In what ways are they similar or different?
14. Must every individual consent to the form of government or is a majority sufficient?
15. Does Locke promote a particular type of regime? Would Locke support a democracy? A communist society? A monarchy? Why or why not?
16. In what situations is it legitimate for people to resist their rulers?
17. Do you think Locke is a revolutionary? Do you think he defends a traditional conception of authority? Why?

David Hume, *On the Original Contract*
1. How does Hume describe the origins of most polities?
2. How does time change our perspective on these origins?
3. What is the significance of political origins for the wielding of political power in the present?
4. What does Hume think about the right of resistance?
5. Does Hume find innovation to be politically desirable? If so, what kind of innovation does he envision?
6. What are the two kinds of moral duties Hume describes? Which of these is most important to understanding political obligation and authority?
7. How does Hume understand promising differently than Locke or Hobbes?
8. Would you label Hume a ‘consent theorist’? Why or why not?

Jean-Jacques Rousseau, “Discourse on Inequality”
1. What do we learn about Rousseau from the preface? What facts does he reveal about himself? What hopes or desires does he articulate?
2. How does Rousseau describe natural man?
3. How does natural man change in society?
4. What is the story of human ‘progress’ that Rousseau tells? What innovations does he describe? What are the effects of those innovations? Are they positive or negative effects?
5. How does Rousseau’s understanding of humans in nature differ from Hobbes or Locke?
6. Does Rousseau’s understanding of the individual’s relationship to the community resemble Hume or Locke more? Why?
7. What elements of society is Rousseau questioning with his account of the origins of inequality? Does he want to affirm society as he understands it? What does he want to change?
8. How does Rousseau explain the origins of private property? How is this different than Locke or Hobbes?
9. What does Rousseau say about the family? How does this compare with Locke or Hobbes?
Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract*

1. How does a people come to be a ‘people’ and not just a collection of individuals for Rousseau?
2. What is Rousseau’s view of majority rule?
3. What do you give up in joining political community?
4. What rights, if any, do you retain in political community?
5. What is the general will? How is it different from public opinion?
6. How does Rousseau’s understanding of sovereignty compare with Locke and Rousseau’s account?
7. What does Rousseau mean when he writes that we must be “forced to be free”? What gives us moral freedom according to Rousseau?
8. If the character of a people is formed through their laws – good laws produce a good people and bad laws instill bad habits – how are good laws instituted? Which comes first?

Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*

1. Does Burke concur with the claim, “All men are created equal”? What are the consequences of claims such as these, according to him?
2. What are the advantages and disadvantages of aristocratic rule?
3. What images and feelings does Burke evoke when describing: 1) the king; 2) the queen; and 3) the revolutionaries in his depiction of the events of 1790?
4. What makes political institutions and authority legitimate? Why do they incur the respect of the people?
5. What is Burke’s view of property? In what ways does he agree or disagree with Locke on this question?
6. What kind of political change would Burke like to see, if any? Why or why not?
7. What is Burke’s view of the French Revolution? What are the triumphs or losses that he registers?

Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*

1. How does Wollstonecraft describe the condition of women in her day? Does she approve of the values and capacities of the women she sees or is she critical?
2. How does the state of women in Wollstonecraft’s day impact society as a whole? In other words, why is this situation not only bad for women, but for others too?
3. What is Wollstonecraft’s central disagreement with Rousseau? How does she defend her position and refute his?
4. What does Wollstonecraft believe that women are capable of? How does she think her ideals could be achieved?
5. Why is education so important to Wollstonecraft? Why does it matter for political theory?
6. What is Wollstonecraft’s view of the institution of the family, especially marriage and motherhood? How strong is her critique? Is she trying to transform or salvage these institutions?
7. Do you think Wollstonecraft seeks to radically change her society or are her goals more modest reform?
John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*

1. What kind of loss of liberty is Mill most concerned about?
2. How do Mill’s fears about threats to liberty differ (or not) from other theorists we have read, e.g. Locke, Rousseau, and Wollstonecraft?
3. What kind of requirements does Mill issue for securing liberty?
4. What values does Mill hold as most important to cultivate in society?
5. What is the role of truth and seeking truth in Mill’s theory?
6. Does Mill advance an isolated individualism or does he require interdependence among members of society?
7. Do you think Mill’s theory is a necessary part of democratic society or is his liberal vision potentially less than democratic?

Karl Marx, Selected Readings

1. What does Marx mean when he says we are alienated from our labor?
2. What does Marx mean by ‘species being’?
3. What does it mean when Marx writes: “In every epoch the ideas of the ruling class are the ruling ideas, that is, the class that is the ruling *material* power of society is also its ruling *intellectual* power”?
4. Why does Marx describe the bourgeoisie as a ‘revolutionary class’?
5. Does Marx see the state as an instrument for gaining freedom for the working class? Why or why not?
6. What would Marx say about the natural rights defended by Locke?
7. What will bring about the end of the bourgeoisie?
8. What is commodity fetishism? What does it obscure about the source of value in capitalist economies?