Course Objectives

1. To understand and critically assess significant political writings of modern political thought, including key concepts and debates since the seventeenth century.
2. To be able to use these concepts and debates in considering enduring political questions and understand their relevance for contemporary politics.
3. Develop critical thinking skills used in reading, writing, and discussion.

Course Description

Modern political thought understands itself as the product of a radical break with the past: with custom, 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 the authority of 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 issues forth from such revolutionary reason? Does equality between rich and poor, men and women, colonizer and colonized require that we strip away our social and political identities and practices and start over? What are the costs of turning a blind eye to political history, economic inequality, social identities such as race and gender, and shared cultural practices? In response to these questions, we will consider the various meanings of political freedom and equality given by theorists of the social contract tradition (Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau) their critics (Hume, Wollstonecraft, Burke), and their heirs 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 and at Mary Jane Books (corner of Western Avenue and Quail Street):

David Wootton, ed., *Modern Political Thought* (Hackett, 2008)

This course is an intensive reading-based course that requires regular attendance in lecture and active participation in class activities and discussion. Successful completion of the course will require that you **read actively and carefully**. Active reading means more than passing your eyes over the text. It requires considering the text in relation to the other readings in the course and questioning how the author uses key terms, e.g. freedom, equality, revolution, in unique or familiar ways. Active reading always requires **rereading**. You should expect to read difficult passages 2-3 times before the end of the course. The goal is to either understand their meaning or formulate a question about the source of confusion for class or office hours. Rereading is essential to writing papers and preparing for exams. All forms of evaluation in this course assume your willingness to read carefully and thoughtfully.
**Course Requirements**
As a student in this course, you are required to:
- Attend class.
- Arrive on time.
- Complete all readings by the assigned date.
- Bring assigned texts to class with you.
- Come to class prepared to participate actively in discussions on the assigned readings.

**The use of laptops in class is strongly discouraged.**

**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 identifications and an in-class essay.
Identifications will require you to identify 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 test you on material from readings and lectures from the entire semester. No make-up examinations, early examinations, or incomplete grades will be given, except in the event of serious personal or family illness or other extraordinary circumstances for which appropriate documentation must be provided.

**Paper**
A short paper (5 pages) will give you the opportunity to develop an argument based on a careful analysis of political theory text(s). You will be asked to respond to a question (out of a choice of at least two) and support your argument through evidence from assigned readings. You must be sure to cite (through page numbers in the body of the essay) all of the passages or ideas taken from other authors. The paper is meant as a means of evaluating your skills in reading and interpretation, so 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](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 classes, lateness, or arriving unprepared to lecture will guarantee a grade of a 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**
In order to make up an exam or to remove an absence or missed in-class assignment, please bring in a note from the dean of undergraduate studies (Lecture Center 30 Phone: 518-442-3950) who is responsible for excused absence certification. Without such a note any absence from section or missed exams will count against you.

**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 (http://www.albany.edu/studentlife/dss/Accommodation.html).”

If you wish to discuss academic accommodations for this course please also inform the instructor as soon as possible. In addition, the instructor will make every effort to accommodate difficulties arising from religious observance. You are asked to bring any possible conflicts to the instructor's attention as soon as possible. Reasonable accommodations are generally established well in advance and are rarely granted after retroactively.

**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

**Improvement**
In cases where you have shown marked improvement over the term, I will take this into consideration in computing final course grades.
## Schedule of Readings and Assignments

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

### I. Introduction: Reason, Resistance, and Revolution

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Reading</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>January 22</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
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### II. The Authority of Reason: The Social Contract Tradition

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Reading</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>January 27</td>
<td>Thomas Hobbes, <em>Leviathan</em>, part I, chs. i-ix</td>
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<tr>
<td>January 29</td>
<td>Hobbes, <em>Leviathan</em>, part I, chs. x-xvi</td>
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<tr>
<td>February 3</td>
<td>Hobbes, <em>Leviathan</em>, part II, chs. xvii-xxiv</td>
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<tr>
<td>February 5</td>
<td>Hobbes, <em>Leviathan</em>, part II, chs. xxv-xxxi</td>
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<tr>
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<td><strong>Paper topics handed out</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>February 17–19</td>
<td>Winter Break</td>
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<tr>
<td>February 24</td>
<td>Locke, <em>Second Treatise of Government</em>, Bks. XIII-XIX</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Paper due</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>March 5</td>
<td>Rousseau, <em>The Social Contract</em>, Bk. 1</td>
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<tr>
<td>March 12</td>
<td>Rousseau, <em>The Social Contract</em>, Bk. 4</td>
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| March 17   | *Declaration of the Rights of Man* (Blackboard)  
            | *Declaration of Independence* (Blackboard)   |
| March 19   | No Class                                   |

### III. Resistance and the Empire of Reason

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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Reading</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>March 24</td>
<td>Mary Wollstonecraft, <em>Vindication of the Rights of Woman</em>, introduction, ch. 1</td>
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</table>
| March 26   | Mary Wollstonecraft, *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, ch. 2  
            | Olympe de Gouges, *Declaration of the Rights of Woman* (Blackboard) |
March 31 **Midterm Exam**


April 7 John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*

April 9 Spring Break: No class

April 14 Mill, *On Liberty*, continued
*The Subjection of Women*. Chapter 1

IV. Revolutionary Reasoning

April 16 Karl Marx, Alienated Labor, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*

April 21 Marx, *The German Ideology* (selections)

April 23 Marx, *The Communist Manifesto*

April 28 Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution*, ch. 4

April 30 Arendt, *On Revolution*, ch. 5-6

May 5 Arendt, *On Revolution*, continued

**Final Exam: Wednesday, May 13, 8:00am – 10:00am**