Political Science 302: History of Modern Political Thought (4034)
Spring 2012

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Tues/Thurs: 1:15-2:35
ES 245
Office Hours: HU B16
Tues/Thurs 11:35-12:35

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 and Mary Jane Books (corner of Western Avenue and Quail Street). Additional readings made available on-line through Blackboard (as indicated by ** below)

Hannah Arendt, On Revolution (Penguin)
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)
Mary Wollstonecraft, A Vindication of the Rights of Woman (Penguin)
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.

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 a final examination. Exams and quizzes will consist of identifications and in-class essays. 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 approved by the dean of undergraduate studies.

Paper: A short paper (5 pages) will give you the opportunity to develop an argument based on a careful analysis of a political theory text. 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 (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 textual 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.

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 two (2) 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**

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 ([http://www.albany.edu/studentlife/dss/Accommodation.html](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**

You will be required to complete the library’s on-line tutorial on plagiarism for this course. 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)

**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**

Jan 19  
Introduction: What is Political Theory? What is Modernity?

II. **The Authority of Reason: The Social Contract Tradition**

Jan 24  

Jan 26  

Jan 31  
**Paper Topics handed out**

Feb 2  

Feb 7  
John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, chs. 1-5 (261-286)

Feb 9  
John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, chs. 6-8 (286-324)

Feb 14  
John Locke, *Second Treatise*, chs. 9-12 (324-337)  
*Paper due*

Feb 16  

Feb 21  
David Hume, *On the Original Contract**

Feb 23  
David Hume, *On the Original Contract**

Feb 28  
Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discourse on the Origin and Foundations of Inequality Among Men* (25-60)

Mar 1  
Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discourse on Inequality* (60-81)

Mar 6  

Mar 8  

Mar 13:  
No Class (Spring break)

Mar 15:  
No Class (Spring Break)

Mar 20  
Mar 22:  *On-line assignment*

No Class Meeting
*Declaration of the Rights of Man***
*Declaration of Independence***
Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, intro

### III. Rethinking Reason and Revolution

**Mar 27:**  **On-line assignment due in class**

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

**Mar 29:**  **Midterm Exam**

**Apr 3:**  Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (selections)***

**Apr 5:**  Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France***

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

**Apr 10:**  Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, chs. 1-2

**Apr 12:**  John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*

**Apr 17:**  John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*

**Apr 19:**  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 24:**  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 26:**  Karl Marx, *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (203-228)

**May 1:**  Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution*, ch. 4

**May 3:**  Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution*, ch. 5-6

**May 8:**  Summary and Review

**Final Exam: Tuesday, May 15 10:30 – 12:30**