Description

This seminar covers the three centuries which political theorist think of as the modern period: we begin with Thomas Hobbes’s *Leviathan* (1651) and end with Friedrich Nietzsche’s *On the Genealogy of Morality* (1888). Making sense of and coming to terms with the rapidly changing world, particularly social and political diversity, were central preoccupations of modern political theorists. We will try to understand their different approaches and answers to these questions. We will assume that all political theory aims to persuade its audience in some way and that a theorist’s epistemological commitments inform her attempts at persuasion.

Because this seminar also serves a “professionalizing” function, we will read and address some contemporary secondary literature on our theorists.

Seminar mechanics

Each student must participate actively in seminar discussions. Furthermore, each student will have to do a presentation based on secondary material on a given week’s topic once during the semester. Students will write two short papers (ca. 1,000 words each) as well as a 3,500–4,000-word term paper (with a required draft). The term paper should ideally be based on one of the two short papers.

People need to come to seminar meetings prepared. There will be a lot of reading, but the study questions/paper topics below will help focus your reading a bit. Attendance is mandatory, and unexplained absences are not allowed. One unexplained absence will result in an E for participation, two will result in failure in the course.

There will no incompletes except in cases of documented medical emergencies.

Grading

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Weight</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Short papers</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Term paper</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presentation</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Readings

The following books have been ordered through Shaman Drum Bookshop. Make sure you get the edition specified.

- Rousseau, J-J. *The Basic Political Writings*. Hackett
- Wollstonecraft, Mary. *The Vindications*. Broadview
- Kant, Immanuel. *Perpetual Peace and Other Essays*. Hackett
- Hegel, G.W.F. *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*. Cambridge
- Marx, Karl. *Selected Writings*. Hackett
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. *On the Genealogy of Morality*. Hackett

The secondary readings for each week will be listed at the course website. Some of the readings are in electronic format; the website will have links to them. Some are only available as hard copies; they will be at the political science department (at a location TBD).

Course Calendar

This is the calendar for the semester. You will need to read the whole text if no selection is specified. One student will be responsible for reading the secondary texts for each week (on the basis of a schedule to be determined) and making a presentation on them. A number of paper topics are assigned for each week. You will need to write two 1,000-word papers during the semester, but you can decide when you want to write them. The paper is due on the Monday the material is discussed. You may not write on an earlier week’s topics. The paper topics should also serve as study questions and help you focus your reading even when you are not writing on one of them.

1/6/03: Introduction.

No reading.

1/13/03: Hobbes: the conventional story

Reading: *Leviathan*, parts I and II

Paper topics:
1. Briefly describe the method Hobbes claims to employ in his treatise.
2. What is Hobbes’s response to the fool in chapter xv?
3. Explain ¶36 in chapter xv.
1/20/03: MLK Day
No meeting.

1/27/03: Hobbes: the neglected story
Reading: Leviathan, parts III and IV (you may want to read the Latin Appendices as well)

Paper topics:
1. What is the epistemic status of religious revelation?
2. Speculate (briefly) on why Hobbes is so concerned to undermine scholastic philosophy and theology.
3. Offer one argument which suggests parts III and IV are a defense of religious toleration.

2/3/03: Locke: Argument for toleration
Reading: A Letter Concerning Toleration

Paper topics:
1. What is Locke’s argument for the division of labor between political and religious authority?
2. Why should atheists and Catholics not be tolerated?
3. Is Locke’s conception of the nature of belief plausible?

2/10/03: Locke’s social contract
Reading: The Second Treatise of Government

Paper topics:
1. Provide one counterargument against Locke’s theory of property.
2. How do we find out what laws of nature are? How are Locke’s laws of nature different from Hobbes’s?
3. Democracy is sometimes defended on epistemic grounds. Is there such an argument in Locke, and if so, what is it?

2/17/03: Montesquieu
Reading: Persian Letters

Paper topics:
1. Some readers see the Troglodyte story as a critique of Hobbes. Explain why that interpretation might be plausible.
2. What does Persian Letters tell us about Montesquieu’s epistemology?
3. Is Persian Letters a feminist text?

2/24/03: “Spring” Break
No meeting.

3/3/03: Rousseau’s diagnosis of modernity
Reading: Discourse on the Origin of Inequality
Paper topics:
1. What is the relationship between simple self-love, self-esteem, pride and vanity?
2. Why does Rousseau think Hobbes makes an epistemic error?
3. On what grounds should we find Rousseau’s account compelling?

3/10/03: Rousseau’s good social contract

Reading: *On The Social Contract*

Paper topics:
1. How is it possible that people can be “forced to be free”?
2. Explain Rousseau's argument for the difference between general will and “the will of all.”
3. Why would some people interpret Rousseau as an anti-liberal?

3/17/03: Wollstonecraft

Reading: *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, chs. I–V, IX, XIII

Paper topics:
1. How does Wollstonecraft understand the sex/gender distinction?
2. “Men will not become moral when they only build airy castles in a future world to compensate for the disappointments which they meet with in this” (p. 242). Discuss.
3. Discuss one way in which Wollstonecraft’s and Locke’s conceptions of rights differ.

3/24/03: Kant

Reading: “An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?”
“Speculative Beginning of Human History”
“On the Proverb: That May be True in Theory…”
“Perpetual Peace”

Paper topics:
1. Kant was in many ways influenced by Rousseau but, at the same time, rejected many of Rousseau's conclusions. Describe one such instance from the reading.
2. Discuss the political function of the freedom of thought and discussion. Why is that particular freedom so important?
3. Kant seems to think obedience to an existing regime and freedom are, in some way, complementary. Why?

3/31/03: Hegel

Reading: *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*

Paper topics:
1. Hegel has been read as an apologist for the oppressive state. Is that a reasonable interpretation?
2. “The owl of Minerva begins its flight only at the onset of dusk,” Hegel says at the end of the Preface, describing his conception of the proper role of political philosophy. Does Hegel live up to his own pronouncement?
3. Hegel’s conception of “civil society” has become important for later political inquiry. Why is his a useful conception?
4/7/03: Marx

Reading: The German Ideology (selections), pp. 102–156
Preface to A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy”, pp. 209–213
Capital (selections), pp. 220–294

Paper topics:
1. Marx’s famous 11th thesis on Feuerbach reads: “The philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is, to change it.” Explain this in light of our readings.
2. An enduring debate about Marx is the question of economic determinism. Some argue Marx’s view is that social and political “superstructures” are purely epiphenomenal; others claim Marx does think of them as having their own causal efficacy. Is either interpretation preferable to the other in light of our readings?
3. Focus on and describe some one aspect of Marx’s theory that seems to change between The German Ideology and the Capital.

4/14/03: Nietzsche

Reading: On the Genealogy of Morality
The Twilight of the Idols

Paper topics:
1. What is “truth” for Nietzsche?
2. Why genealogy? (And what is it?)
3. Why is Nietzsche’s account politically relevant?