Political Science 603

MODERN POLITICAL THOUGHT

Winter 2007

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Office Hours:
2–3 Mondays
2–3 Thursdays
& by appointment

Description

This seminar serves three different functions. It is, in a loose sense, a sequel to PS 602, which covers the ancient and medieval periods of the Western political thought. It also fills out some of the gaps left in the canon of modern political thought in last year's iteration of PS 603. And it is a freestanding introduction to some central themes, texts and thinkers of what political theorists (unlike, say, artists or architects) consider the modern period: seventeenth through the nineteenth centuries. The seminar will be accessible even to participants with little or no theory background.

This term, we begin in the early eighteenth century with Montesquieu's *Persian Letters* (1721) and end with Friedrich Nietzsche's *On the Genealogy of Morality* (1888). Last year's seminar focused on the heavy hitters, on the Top 40, on the supposed don't-leave-home-without-these-books list: the social contract theorists, the textbook liberals, and the Marxist alternative. Our thinkers this term are equally important and influential, sometimes, at least arguably, more interesting. They are harder to place politically and intellectually (Montesquieu and Hume have been called both liberals and conservatives), and their approaches are more varied. Our thinkers are, in short, not Salieri against last year's Mozart, but Tom Waits against last year's Bruce Springsteen: geniuses of a slightly different sort, but geniuses all the same.

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 the thinkers' 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* (how she thinks we know anything) inform her

attempts at persuasion. One of the things we will see forming in the texts we study are the philosophical and even methodological foundations of the modern scientific worldview — and also early critiques of that worldview.

Our selection sacrifices breadth for (a modicum of) depth. What you'll learn, I hope, by our focus on the five thinkers is the ability to read difficult primary texts carefully, to understand some of the main themes, and to engage theories in an intelligent, even original way. You'll have to do that on your own with the other modern thinkers we now sidestep. (You *really* will have to do that if you hope to take a prelim in political theory.)

This is a seminar in which we engage in inquiry. Texts are our object; for our method, consider the following statement:

> I always took for granted that the writers we were studying were much smarter than I was. If they were not, why was I wasting my time and the students' time by studying them? If I saw a mistake in their arguments, I supposed those writers saw it too and must have dealt with it. But where? I looked for their way out, not mine. Sometimes their way out was historical; in their day the question need not be raised, or wouldn't arise and so couldn't then be fruitfully discussed. Or there was a part of the text I had overlooked, or had not read. I assumed there were never plain mistakes, not ones that mattered, anyway.[1]

Since the person speaking is John Rawls, who was undoubtedly smarter than any of us, we'll take his word for it and use a *principle of charity* as our primary interpretive approach: generations of scholars, politicians, and intellectuals have considered these texts central to the study of politics. Our task is to figure out why.

[1] Quoted in Barbara Herman, "Editor's Introduction" in John Rawls, *Lectures on the History of Moral Philosophy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), xvi–xvii.

Seminar mechanics

- Everybody needs to come to seminar meetings prepared. There will be a lot of reading, but there will be study questions which 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.
- Registered students will write two short papers (one 300–400-word response paper and one 1,000-word paper) as well as a 3,500–4,000-word term paper (with a required draft). The term paper can be based on one of the two short papers. There will be a separate handout on the term paper details.
- The response paper will be circulated to all seminar participants before the seminar; we will schedule those assignments during the first two weeks of the seminar. The person who writes the response paper will also spend about five minutes talking about it at the beginning of the seminar.
- All written work — that is, ***all*** written work — must conform to the guidelines of the *Chicago Manual of Style*, 15th edition, and use American style. The course website has a link to a brief online explanation of the 14th-edition styles, and they are pretty much the same as the 15th.
- Please turn in all work electronically. E-mail me your papers as attachments, preferably as Microsoft Word or RTF files.
- There will *no* incompletes except in cases of documented medical emergencies, provided that at least half of the work has been completed.

Grading

Short papers	30%
Term paper	50%
Participation	20%

Readings

The following books have been ordered through Shaman Drum Bookshop. *You should have the edition specified.*

G.W.F. Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* (Cambridge UP).
David Hume, *Political Writings* (Hackett).
Immanuel Kant, *Toward Perpetual Peace and Other Writings* (Yale UP).
Montesquieu, *Persian Letters* (Hackett).
Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws* (Cambridge UP).
Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality* (Hackett)
Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols* (Hackett). **OPTIONAL**

Calendar

Below is the calendar for the semester. A number of **paper topics** are available for each week. They will also serve as study questions, to orient you to the issues we may want to focus on in class discussion. The paper is due on the Tuesday the material is discussed if it is the 1,000-word paper; if it is a response paper you are scheduled to circulate, it is due on Monday evening by 8 p.m. 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. On most occasions, the length limit is a serious constraint on what you could say; I am fully aware of that. The papers have to be brief and can serve as first-stab think pieces into broader topics.

In addition to the topics listed below, you may also write a **book review** on the reading for the day. For examples on what book reviews in political theory look like, consult the *APSR* (or its new incarnation, *Perspectives on Politics*) or, e.g., *Political Theory*.

Week 1
January 9

Introduction. No reading.

Week 2
January 16

Montesquieu, *Persian Letters*, Introduction, letters 1–84.

Read my handout "How to Read the *Persian Letters*," available in the resources on the course website.

Paper topics:

1. Discuss the political significance of the Troglodyte story.
2. What is the epistemological significance of letters 17–18?
3. What motivates humans in the *Persian Letters*?

Week 3
January 23

Montesquieu, *Persian Letters*, rest.

Paper topics:

1. The "Enlightenment" is taken to promote "universalist" political values. Is the *Persian Letters* universalist? In what way, if it is?
2. Where do we find happiness in the world of the *Persian Letters*? What do we make of it?
3. Is the *Persian Letters* a feminist text?

Week 4
January 30

Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*, Part 1, bks. 1–5, 8. Part 2, bk. 12

Paper topics:

1. Discuss one the of motives in Montesquieu's political psychology and contrast it to its corresponding regime type.
2. Focus on some theme that appears both in the *Persian Letters* and the *Spirit* and discuss whether you detect changes in Montequieu's views.
3. What is the political significance of *moderation* as a virtue?

Week 5
February 6

Montesquieu, *The Spirit,* Parts 3–4.

Paper topics:

1. Montesquieu's "climate theory" is often taken to be one of the key foundations of modern western racialism and racism. Do you agree or disagree?
2. The *Persian Letters* uses irony frequently. Does the *Spirit*?
3. On what grounds might one reasonably describe Montesquieu as "the founder of social science"?

Week 6
February 13

David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Bk. III, Part II. (Pp. 1–97 in *Political Writings*).

Paper topics:

1. "Humean circumstances of justice" is a concept used to indicate the circumstances in which it can become meaningful to talk of *politics*. Describe what those circumstances are and why politics can only arise under them.
2. What motivates people, according to Hume?
3. Describe Hume's theory of property.

Week 7
February 20

Hume, *Political Writings*, pp. 101–111, 157–181, 184–189, 230–240.

Paper topics:

1. What is the problem with social contract theories, according to Hume?
2. In the eighteenth century, "enthusiasm" counted as a pathological condition. Why? What is the political significance of that?
3. Some commentators treat Hume as a conservative, some as a liberal, some as both. How about you? Why?

February 27 **Spring break**

Week 8
March 6

Immanuel Kant,

"What is Enlightenment?"
"Conjectural Beginning of Human History"
"Theory and Practice," §§2–3

Paper topics:

1. Kant is one of the leading theorists of *autonomy*. How does he understand autonomy, and what is its political significance?
2. What does Kant mean by "public use of reason"?
3. Why are revolutions illegitimate?

Week 9
March 13

Kant, *Perpetual Peace*

Paper topics:

1. Why doesn't a world government follow as a consequence of Kant's argument in *Perpetual Peace*?
2. *Perpetual Peace* is the source of the famous "democratic peace" thesis. Explain Kant's argument.
3. *Perpetual Peace* outlines Kant's general theory of legitimacy, one might argue. How?

Week 10
March 21

G.W.F. Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, Preface & Introduction, Part I, §§1–71.

Paper topics:

1. "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. What does he mean?
2. Some commentators read Hegel as a conservative. In what way might the Preface and Introduction motivate such a reading?
3. What is the relationship between personhood and private property?

Week 11
March 27

Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, Part III, §§142–256.

Paper topics:

1. What is the purpose of the family?
2. How does Hegel understand the private/public distinction?
3. How is Hegel's civil society different from what we understand by the concept? What is the significance?

Week 12
April 3

Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, Part III, §§257–360.

Paper topics:

1. What is the purpose of the state?
2. Describe one of the ways in which Hegel's state is different from a modern liberal-democratic state.
3. In his introduction to the *Philosophy of Right*, Allen Wood distinguishes between "freedom in the ordinary sense" and Hegel's conception of freedom. What is the latter? (Write your paper using *Hegel*, not Wood's intro.)

Week 13
April 10

Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, Preface, First and Second Treatise.

Paper topics:

1. Why genealogy? And what is it?
2. What is the slave revolt in morality?
3. What, briefly, is the genealogy of "bad conscience"?

Week 14
April 17

Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, Third Treatise.

Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, "'Reason' in Philosophy," "How the 'True World' Finally Became a Fiction" [**optional**].

Paper topics:

1. Does Nietzsche have a *political* epistemology?
2. What's wrong with ascetism?
3. What does Nietzsche want?

Recommended Readings

Below are recommended secondary readings. I don't expect you to do the readings, and we likely will never discuss them in the seminar. But you may find them helpful as guides into the texts, on the one hand, and as examples of how contemporary scholars engage these texts. They represent just a small part of the possible literatures; I have tried to choose texts that reflect different approaches to these texts.

Montesquieu

Althusser, Louis. 1972. *Politics and History: Montesquieu, Rousseau, Hegel and Marx*. Translated by B. Brewster. London: NLB.

Behdad, Ali. 1989. The Eroticized Orient: Images of the Harem in Montesquieu and His Precursors. *Stanford French Review* 8 (2-3):109-126.

Hulliung, Mark. 1974. Patriarchalism and Its Early Enemies. *Political Theory* 2 (4):410-419.

———. 1976. *Montesquieu and the Old Regime*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press.

Keohane, Nannerl O. 1980. *Philosophy and the State in France: The Renaissance to the Enlightenment*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Krause, Sharon. 2002. *Liberalism with Honor*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

Mosher, Michael A. 1994. The Judgmental Gaze of European Women: Gender, Sexuality and the Critique of Republican Rule. *Political Theory* 22 (1):25-44.

Muthu, Sankar. 2003. *Enlightenment Against Empire*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Robin, Corey. 2000. Reflections on Fear: Montesquieu in Retrieval. *American Political Science Review* 94 (2):347-360.

Shackleton, Robert. 1961. *Montesquieu: A Critical Biography*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

———. 1988. *Essays on Montesquieu and on the Enlightenment*. Edited by D. Gilson and M. Smith. Oxford: The Voltaire Foundation.

Shklar, Judith. 1987. *Montesquieu*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Todorov, Tzvetan. 1993. *On human Diversity: Nationalism, Racism, and Exoticism in French Thought*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

Yack, Bernard. 1992. *The Longing for Total Revolution: Philosophic Sources of Social Discontent from Rousseau to Marx and Nietzsche*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.

Hume

Baier, Annette. 1991. *A Progress of Sentiments*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

Blackburn, Simon. 1998. *Ruling Passions*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Forbes, Duncan. 1975. *Hume's Philosophical Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Herzog, Don. 1985. *Without Foundations*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Laursen, John Christian. 1992. *The Politics of Skepticism in the Ancients, Montaigne, Hume, and Kant*. Leiden: Brill.

Miller, David. 1981. *Philosophy and Ideology in Hume's Political Thought*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Pinch, Adela. 1996. *Strange Fits of Passion*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Stewart, John B. 1992. *Opinion and Reform in Hume's Political Philosophy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Whelan, Fredrick G. 1985. *Order and Artifice in Hume's Political Philosophy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Wolin, Sheldon S. 1954. Hume and Conservatism. *American Political Science Review* 48:4.

Kant

Allison, Henry E. 1990. *Kant's Theory of Freedom*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Arendt, Hannah. 1992. *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*. Edited by R. Beiner. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Beiser, Frederick C. 1987. *The Fate of Reason: German Philosophy from Kant to Fichte*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

Cassirer, Ernst. 1991. *Rousseau, Kant, Goethe*. Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag.

Ellis, Elisabeth. 2005. *Kant's Politics: A Provisional Theory for an Uncertain World*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Habermas, Jürgen. 1989. *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*. Translated by T. Burger. Edited by T. McCarthy, *Studies in Contemporary German Social Thought*. Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press.

Henrich, Dieter. 1993. On the Meaning of Rational Action in the State. In *Kant & Political Philosophy: The Contemporary Legacy*, edited by R. Beiner and W. J. Booth. New Haven & London: Yale University Press.

Herman, Barbara. 1997. A Cosmopolitan Kingdom of Ends. In *Reclaiming the History of Ethics: Essays for John Rawls*, edited by A. Reath, B. Herman and C. M. Korsgaard. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Kuehn, Manfred. 2001. *Kant: A Biography*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Laursen, John Christian. 1996. The Subversive Kant: The Vocabulary of 'Public' and 'Publicity'. In *What is Enlightenment? Eighteenth-Century Answers and Twentieth-Century Questions*, edited by J. Schmidt. Berkeley: University of California Press.

LaVaque-Manty, Mika. 2002. Liberalism Grown Pale & Königsbergian. In *Arguments and Fists*. New York: Routledge.

O'Neill, Onora. 1989. *Constructions of Reason*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

———. 1992. Vindicating Reason. In *The Cambridge Companion to Kant*, edited by P. Guyer. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Rawls, John. 2000. *Lectures on the History of Moral Philosophy*. Edited by B. Herman. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Reath, Andrews. 1997. Legislating for a Realm of Ends: The Social Dimension of Autonomy. In *Reclaiming the History of Ethics: Essays for John Rawls*, edited by A. Reath, B. Herman and C. M. Korsgaard. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Schmidt, James. 1989. The Question of Enlightenment: Kant, Mendelsson, and the *Mittwochgesellschaft*. *Journal of the History of Ideas* 50:269-291.

Schneewind, J.B. 1992. Autonomy, obligation, and virtue: An overview of Kant's moral philosophy. In *The Cambridge Companion to Kant*, edited by P. Guyer. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Yack, Bernard. 1992. *The Longing for Total Revolution: Philosophic Sources of Social Discontent from Rousseau to Marx and Nietzsche*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.

Yovel, Yirmiahu. 1980. *Kant and the Philosophy of History*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Hegel

Althusser, Louis. 1972. *Politics and History: Montesquieu, Rousseau, Hegel and Marx*. Translated by B. Brewster. London: NLB.

Barber, Benjamin. 1988. Spirit's Phoenix and History's Owl or the Incoherence of Dialectics in Hegel's Account of Women. *Political Theory* 16:1.

Beiser, Frederick C. 1993. *The Cambridge Companion to Hegel*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Franco, Paul. 1997. Hegel and Liberalism. *Review of Politics* 59:4.

Pinkard, Terry. 2001. *Hegel: A Biography*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Rawls, John. 2000. *Lectures on the History of Moral Philosophy*. Edited by B. Herman. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Smith, Stephen B. 1989. What is 'Right' in Hegel's Philosophy of Right? *American Political Science Review* 83:1.

Taylor, Charles. 2006. *Hegel*. New edition. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

———. 2003. *Hegel and Modern Society*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Yack, Bernard. 1992. *The Longing for Total Revolution: Philosophic Sources of Social Discontent from Rousseau to Marx and Nietzsche*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.

Nietzsche

Ansell-Pearson, Keith. 1994. *An Introduction to Nietzsche as Political Thinker*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Deleuze, Gilles. 1983. *Nietzsche and Philosophy*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Leiter, Brian. 1997. Nietzsche and the Morality Critics. *Ethics* 107:2.

Strong, Tracy. 1999. *Nietzsche and the Politics of Transfiguration*. Expanded edition. Champaign, Ill.: The University of Illinois Press.

———. 1985. Texts and Pretexts. *Political Theory* 13:2.

Thiele, Leslie Paul. 1990. *Friedrich Nietzsche and the Politics of the Soul: A Study of Heroic Individualism*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Warren, Mark. 1985. Nietzsche and Political Philosophy. *Political Theory* 13:2.

Yack, Bernard. 1992. *The Longing for Total Revolution: Philosophic Sources of Social Discontent from Rousseau to Marx and Nietzsche*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.