

Political Science 603
Modern Political Thought
Winter 2004

<https://coursetools.ummu.umich.edu/2004/winter/polsci/603/001.nsf>

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Office hours:
W 3–4
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Description

This seminar covers the three centuries which political theorist (unlike, say, artists or architects) 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* (how she thinks we know anything) 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. The assignments in the seminar also emulate the sorts of things professional political theorists do in terms of writing and presenting.

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 can be based on one of the two short papers. At least one of the short papers must be written before the spring break.

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

Short papers	30%
Term paper	40%
Participation	20%
Presentation	10%

Readings

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

Hobbes, Thomas. *Leviathan*. Hackett
 Locke, John. *Letter Concerning Toleration*. Hackett
 Locke, John. *Second Treatise of Government*. Hackett
 Montesquieu. *Persian Letters*. Hackett
 Rousseau, J.-J. *The Basic Political Writings*. Hackett
 Hume, David, *Political Writings*, Hackett
 Kant, Immanuel. *Perpetual Peace and Other Essays*. Hackett
 Hegel, G.W.F. *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*. Cambridge
 Marx, Karl. *Selected Writings*. Hackett
 Mill, John Stuart, *The Subjection of Women*, 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, in the folder for graduate course readings (by Lili Kivisto's office).

Course Calendar

This is the calendar for the semester. You will need to read the whole text if no selection is specified, but I'll flag sections to focus on (**particularly important ones will be bold**).

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 available 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, as long as at least one of them is before the spring break. The paper is due on the Wednesday 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.

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*) or, e.g., *Political Theory*.

1/7/04: Introduction

No reading.

1/14/04: Hobbes: the conventional story

Reading: *Leviathan*, parts I and II

Focus on: 5–6, **13–21**, 29

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.

1/21/04: Hobbes: the neglected story

Reading: *Leviathan*, parts III and IV, Latin Appendices

Focus on: 32, 33, 37, first dozen or so pages of 42, **46, 47, R & C**

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.

1/28/04: Locke: Argument for toleration

Reading: *A Letter Concerning Toleration*

Focus on the whole darn thing.

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?

2/4/04: Locke's social contract

Reading: *The Second Treatise of Government*

Focus on: **chs. 1–9, 16–19**

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? Make sure you explain what it would mean to defend democracy on epistemic grounds.

2/11/04: Montesquieu

Reading: *Persian Letters*

Read my handout on Montesquieu for instructions on how to read the *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?

2/18/04: Hume

Reading: Pages 1–97, 101–111, 157–181, 230–240

Focus on pp. 1–20, 47–51, 80–97, 157–181

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 does Hume think are humans' motives for action? What should they be?
3. What are the political implications of Hume's critique of social contract theory?

2/25/04: “Spring” Break

No meeting.

3/3/04: Rousseau's diagnosis of modernity

Reading: *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*

Focus on the whole darn thing.

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?

3/10/04: Rousseau's good social contract

Reading: *On The Social Contract*

Focus on Bks. I–II, Bk. III.1

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?

3/17/04: Kant

Reading: “An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?”
“Perpetual Peace”

Paper topics:

1. Discuss the political function of the freedom of thought and discussion. Why is that particular freedom so important?

2. Kant seems to think obedience to an existing regime and freedom are, in some way, complementary. Why?
3. What is the relationship between republicanism and peace?

3/24/04: Hegel

Reading: *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* (pp. 9–186 [Preface, §§1–141])

Each section generally has a relatively short main point, which is then elaborated on in various notes that follow; those are either indented in the text or in small font. Read at least all the main points and, when things either seem important or the main point leaves you too confused, go on to the additional notes.

Paper topics:

1. In his introduction, 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.)
2. What is the relationship between personhood and property for Hegel?
3. “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?

3/31/04: Hegel

Reading: *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* (pp. 187–380 [§§142–360])

See last week for how to read the text. In addition, focus on the discussions of civil society and the state.

Paper topics:

1. Why is “the system of needs” (§§189ff) so important for Hegel in general.
2. Hegel has been read as an apologist for the oppressive state. Is that a reasonable interpretation?
3. Hegel’s conception of “civil society” has become important for later political inquiry. Why is his a useful conception?

4/7/04: 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*.

4/14/04: Mill

Reading: *The Subjection of Women*

Focus on the whole darn thing.

Paper topics:

1. Mill's argument against the subordination of women is fundamentally an *epistemic* one. Describe the argument.
2. Mill's feminism is commonly interpreted to be a powerful application of his more general *liberal* theory. In what ways?
3. In chapter two of *The Subjection of Women*, Mill says: "In an otherwise just state of things, it is not, therefore, I think, a desirable custom, that the wife should contribute by her labour to the income of the family" (p. 51). Can you reconcile this claim with what seems to be the overall argument of *The Subjection of Women*? Why or why not?

4/21/04: Nietzsche

Reading: *On the Genealogy of Morality*

Focus on the whole darn thing.

Paper topics:

1. What is "truth" for Nietzsche?
2. Why genealogy? (And what is it?)
3. Why is Nietzsche's account politically relevant?