

POLITICAL THOUGHT IN THE MODERN WORLD

POLITICAL SCIENCE 3011: SPRING 2019
CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, STANISLAUS

Instructor: Alena Wolflink

Class: Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays 11:00-11:50, Demergasso-Bava Hall 100

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This course offers a thematic introduction to the study of modern political theory and its historical foundations. As a study of the modern, this course explores the relationship between some of the key concepts of modern political theory—namely the individual, the state, and the economy. We will consider diverse imaginations of human nature, power, the state, and society. We will ask why the image of the individual and the state of nature are so integral to classical liberal philosophy, and what a move away from these formulations of what it means to be human might enable. We will look at the philosophical and theological origins of and justifications for property, and ideas about rights, production, poverty, sex and gender difference, needs and luxury, morality, procreation, and markets from the 16th century through the beginning of the 21st century. We will focus on how people have articulated relations among these objects and others as foundations or manifestations of power before some of these topics were widely seen as integral and systematic parts of contemporary political discourse. Finally, we will consider the implications of these matters for rethinking systems of material and social interdependence and relations of power today.

Learning Objectives

My objectives for student learning in this course include both knowledge and skills. By the end of the quarter, you will:

- Be familiar with the arguments and ideas presented in the readings, in lectures, and in classroom discussions.
- Understand some main theoretical debates in modern political thought and be familiar with examples from the political world to which the debates speak.
- Thoughtfully read complex texts and analyze arguments.
- Communicate your own ideas and arguments, verbally and in writing.

Requirements

I expect you to attend all class meetings, and to thoughtfully read all course materials. Your course grade will include the following components:

1. Attendance – 20%
2. Presentation – 5%
3. Five short papers (2-3 pages each), 10% each – 50%
4. Take-home final exam – 25%

Extensions and incompletes are only for emergency cases. Contact me immediately – and in advance of any due dates – should urgent, unavoidable, and unforeseen circumstances interfere with your completion of the requirements.

Expectations

Readings:

The readings are the foundation of the course. Much of the reading is dense and difficult, and full of unfamiliar ideas. You must give sufficient time to actively **read and re-read** the materials slowly, carefully, and thoughtfully. You should plan to spend a number of hours a week reading and re-reading the course materials and preparing for class discussion.

There are no textbooks for the course and all readings are available online.

Class Discussions:

Discussions provide an opportunity for more in-depth discussion and analysis of the material. Attendance and participation is required, and you are expected to be an active and consistent contributor. You must come to class prepared to analyze and reflect on the readings—this means you must complete the assigned readings prior to class. Come to class on time, and bring a copy of the readings with you.

You will be expected to raise questions related to the material, share perspectives on and interpretations of the readings and discussion topics, and engage in respectful and thoughtful debate.

Writing:

I take the responsibility of grading your work seriously and will always strive to be fair and accurate in my evaluations. I will use the following standards for the evaluating written work in this course:

- A: Excellent work, with clear, challenging, original ideas supported by sufficient, appropriate, logically interpreted evidence. The essay should engage the reader in the inquiry, convincingly answer opposing views, be well organized, and free of significant flaws. An ‘A’ paper should be not just good but outstanding in ideas and presentation.
- B: Good to very good work, with a clear thesis supported by sufficient, appropriate evidence, organized and interpreted logically. The ‘B’ paper may have some outstanding qualities but be marked by significant flaws which keep it from being an ‘A’; or it may be all-around good work, free of major problems but lacking the deeper insight necessary for excellence.
- C: Satisfactory work, but not yet good. The ‘C’ paper meets the basic requirements of a thesis supported by interpretation of specific evidence, but it needs work in thinking and/or presentation. There may be a lack of clarity, the evidence may not always be sufficient and appropriate, or the interpretation may have logical flaws. The essay may have organizational or mechanical problems that keep it from being good. The ‘C’ paper may be good in some respects but poor in others, or it may simply be adequate but not noteworthy overall.
- D: Barely passing work that shows effort but is so marred by serious problems that it cannot be considered a satisfactory paper.

F: Failing work—for example, a hasty, sloppy paper that shows little or no thought, effort, or familiarity with the text.

Some Classroom Practices and Policies

- Your curiosity and participation are essential to your learning success in this course. Please feel free to raise your hand during lectures if you have a question—every question brings something of value to the class.
- Bring your readings to every class.
- I have a strict **no internet** policy in my classrooms (computers, tablets, etc). The evidence is conclusive that use of the internet in the classroom inhibits student focus and learning, both for the student using the device and for others nearby.
- If you require accommodations because of a disability, please submit necessary paperwork from the Disability Resource Services office to me ASAP.
- Be on time. Do not leave midway through class except during break or in case of emergency.

Note: Any form of academic dishonesty or plagiarism will be met with a failing grade and referral to the university for further discipline.

Reading Schedule

PART ONE: The Individual and the State

January 28 & 30, March 1

Introductions

Poe, "Modernity"

February 4, 6, 8

Thoreau, "Civil Disobedience"

Ellison, *Invisible Man*, "Prologue"

February 11, 13, 15

Machiavelli, *The Prince* (Chapters 5, 8, 9, 10, 12, 15-17, 19, and 21)

February 18, 20, & 22

Hobbes, *Leviathan* chapters 5, 13-15, 17, 20, and p.101

February 25 & 27, March 1

Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, Chapters 1, 2, 3, 8 & 9

March 4, 6, 8

Rousseau, *Social Contract* and *Origins of Inequality*

March 11, 13, 15

Montaigne, "Of the Cannibals"

Bernal, *Beyond Origins* (chapters 1 and 7)

PART TWO: The Economy

March 25, 27, & 29

Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, paragraphs 1-51, 85; *First Treatise of Government*, paragraphs 1-10, 40-43; *Second Treatise of Government*, review paragraphs 1-51, 85; read paragraphs 95-104, 119-131

April 3 & 5

Mandeville, The Grumbling Hive; Fable of the Bees, Remarks B, D, F, G, K, final paragraph of Q, and Y.

April 8

Smith, Theory of Moral Sentiments, Part IV, Ch. 1

April 10, 12, 15

Smith, Wealth of Nations p. 11-25, 31-52

April 17-19

No class, I'm away at a conference

PART THREE: Re-Thinking Modernity

April 22, 24, 26

Fanon, "Concerning Violence" in *The Wretched of the Earth*

April 29, May 1 & 3

Rancière, *Dis-agreement* (chapter 1)

May 6 & 8 (May 10th is Warrior Day)

Rancière, *Dis-agreement* (chapter 2)

May 13 & 15

Concluding Thoughts

Take-home final due via Blackboard on Friday, May 17th at 1pm