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PSC 353E.01: Modern Political Theory

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**University of Montana
Political Science Department**

PSC 353E
Fall 1999
MWF 2:10-3

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Modern Political Theory

Course Description:

This semester we will examine the following questions with regard to several political theorists.

(1) What is "classical" about classical political thought? What is "modern" about modern political thought? Is there one, two, or more traditions of political thought?

(2) What difficulties are involved in making a view of human nature the basis of a political theory?

(3) Should political theory concern itself with establishing standards of human conduct?

(4) Does labeling a political argument or theorist (say, "conservative," "liberal," or "radical") help us to understand it or him?

This course will be conducted as a seminar with some lecturing.

Course Objectives: upon successfully completing the course work, the student should be able to:

1. Recognize the differences between modern and classical theory regarding the purpose of political inquiry, the origins of the state, and nature of a "good life."
2. Identify and assess the various tests or criteria (such as relevance, significance, or ethical considerations) that can be used to establish the value of a theoretical argument or theorist.
3. Present and orally defend (and if necessary revise) a series of interpretive, analytical essays which examine a thinker's ideas about human nature, justice, social obligation, and political legitimacy.
4. Orally critique an essay in terms of its analytical clarity, accuracy in its interpretation of the readings, and the logic of its conclusion.
5. Develop a coherent position with regards to ethical idealism and political realism, elitism and democratic doctrine, individualism and communitarianism etc. The goal of the course work, overall, is to encourage students not only to learn about modern thinkers, but to learn how to think theoretically about politics.

To achieve the above objectives— Course Grading:

This course will be taught as a seminar. Each student will submit and orally defend in class 3 critical essays (45% of course grade), not to exceed four double-spaced pages. The essays will be assigned weekly and are due *no later* than the class period before you are scheduled to orally defend it. (For topics, see below.) If you are absent the day we are scheduled to discuss your essay, you will not get credit for it. At least one essay will be revised and resubmitted. In addition, each student will complete a take-home final (45% of course grade.) Finally, each student will be graded on class *participation* and attendance (10% of course grade.) This includes being prepared on a *daily* basis to discuss the readings and the essays. *It does not honor a writer ...to read him or her without seeking to challenge him or her.*

Cautionary note: if you are absent more than 3xs, three attendance points will be deducted for every absence thereafter. Excused absences require a medical note for illness, injury, family emergency, or letter from instructor for field trips, ASUM service, music/drama performances, intercollegiate athletics, military service. Instructor will also excuse absences for reasons of mandatory public service.

Required Texts:

Hobbes, *Leviathan*
Locke, *Second Treatise On Government*
Rousseau, *The Social Contract*
Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*
James Mill, *An Essay on Government* (see packet)
J.S. Mill, *On Liberty*
Mark and Engles, *The Communist Manifesto* & Masc. works (see packet)

Course Schedule:

8/30- Introduction to the Course
9/3 Political Theory: the Search for Standards, Rules and Laws
Read: Hobbes, Leviathan, "Dedication of Godolphin,"
"Introduction"

9/6 Labor Day- No Class

9/8 Thomas Hobbes's View of Human Nature
Read: Hobbes, Leviathan, Part I (Chaps. I-IV)

9/10 Hobbes' Social Contract Theory
Read: Leviathan, Part I (Chaps. XI-RVI)

- 9/12 **Hobbes & the "Natural Man"**
Essays (due 9/10): Consider Hobbes' analysis of human nature—
is it brutish man or brutish conditions? How does an
emphasis on one or the other affect the theorist's vision of
the predicament?
- 9/15 **Leviathan: The Seat of Power**
Read: Leviathan, Part II
- 9/17 **Hobbes & Constitutionalism**
Essays (due 9/15): Does Hobbes' theory of constitutionalism
rest upon a "moralist" or a "realist" view of law? Or both?
- 9/20 **Hobbes' Critics**
Read: Leviathan, Part II
- 9/22-
9/24 **Hobbes' Science**
Essays (due 9/20): Social contract theorists pose questions of
value as if they were questions of fact. Discuss with
reference to Hobbes.
- 9/27 **Hobbes v. Locke: the State of Nature Revisited**
Read: Locke, *Second Treatise On Government*, Chaps. 1-6.
- 9/29 **John Locke: Natural Rights & Social Contract Theory**
Read: Locke, Chaps. 7-10
- 10/1-
10/4 **Locke's Liberalism & His Natural Right to Revolution**
Read: Locke, Chaps. 11-14
Essays (due 9/27): "The natural rights-social contract theory
provides a justification for anarchy but not a firm
basis for government."

or
"A natural right to revolution: common sense or
nonsense?"
- 10/4 **Locke's Defense of Private Property**
Read: Locke, Chaps. 18-19
- 10/6 **Locke's Case for "Private Property" Rights Reconsidered**
Essays (due 10/4): Is private property really "private?" Can
one defend private property without appealing to
"natural rights"?
- 10/8-
10/13 **Rousseau's Social Contract Theory**
Read: Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, Books I & II

- 10/15** **Rousseau's "Natural Man"**
Essays (due 10/13): "Man was born free, and he is everywhere in chains." What does Rousseau mean by this famous observation? What implications does it have for his social contract theory?
- 10/18** **Rousseau's General Will**
Read: Rousseau, Book III
- 10/20** **Rousseau's Politics**
Essay (due 10/18): In what sense might Rousseau's political theory be described as "romantic idealism."
- 10/22** **Rousseau's Democratic Community**
Read: Rousseau, Book IV
Essays (due 10/29): "If Rousseau is a democrat, so much the worst for democracy."
- 10/25-10/27** **Bentham & James Mill's Utilitarianism**
Read: James Mill, *On Government* (Packet)
- 10/29** **Utilitarians & Philosophical Radicalism**
Essays (due 10/27): "Benthamite psychological assumptions afford no firm basis for a political theory."
- 11/1** **James Mill: Leadership of the Middle Rank cont.**
- 11/1-11/5** **John Stuart Mill & Liberty**
Read: On Liberty, Chaps. 1-2
Essay (11/3): "Mill's opposition to unbridled majority rule, far from being anti-democratic, is of the very essence of democracy."
- 11/8** **John Stuart Mill's Liberalism**
Read: On Liberty, Chaps. 3-4
Essays (due 11/5): "Mill's is not so much a defense of liberty, as a defense of politics." (2)
- 11/10-11/12** **Edmund Burke's Conservatism**
Read: Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, pp. 83-167.

11/15 **Read: Burke, pp. 167-253.**
Essays (due 11/12): "Burke's attack on abstractions (such as the 'rights of man') leads him to defend what is most expedient (or against what is 'right') or to conjure up other abstractions to stand for those he rejects." (2)

11/17 **Burke cont.**
Read: Burke, pp. 253-377.
Essays (due 11/15): "If every political theorist is in his heart of hearts a utopian, then Burke is that rare exception."

11/19- **Socialism Bkgd; Marx's Critique of Conservatism**
11/22 **Read: Marx's *Communist Manifesto* (Packet)**
Essays (due 11/19): What would Marx find wrong with the conservative's analysis of history?

November 24-28th Thanksgiving Break

11/29- **Marx's Social Criticism & Dialectics**
12/1 **Read: Marx & Engels selections (Packet)**

12/3 **Marx & Engels' Theory of Revolution**
Read: Marx & Engels selections (Packet)

12/6 **Marx & Engels Radicalism**
Essays (due 12/3): "It is only because of the belief in the inevitability of progress that Marx thought it possible to dispense with ethical considerations."

12/8 **"What is to be done?"**
Neo-Marxism: Classical & Revisionism
Read: * Kautsky, Bernstein, Luxemburg (on reserve under PSC 150)
Essays (due 12/6): "The validity of Marxism as a political doctrine stands or falls on its assertion that the proletariat is the historical force which will bring about socialism."

12/10 **End of Political Theory?**
Essays (due 12/8): Does labeling a political argument or theorist ("conservative," "liberal," or "radical") help us to understand it or him?

*******Final Due December 13th by 5 p.m.*****