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PSCI 453.01: Modern Political Theory

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University of Montana
Political Science Department
Modern Political Theory

PSCI 453 (Co-convening with PSCI 553)

Fall 2017

TTh 12:30pm- 1:50pm

Email: ramona.grey@umontana.edu

Dr. Grey

Office Hrs: TR 11-12;

Tues 2-3pm or by appt.

Office: LA 353

Description of the Course:

This course covers political thinkers from the 16th c., beginning with Thomas Hobbes, to the early 20th century, ending with Marx. 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?

Required Readings:

Grey, R. Political Theory & The Human Predicament: An Introduction to Major Political Thinkers, San Diego, Cognella Press, 2014.**

Robert Tucker, Marx-Engels Reader, New York, Norton, 1978.

*** Note: For writing essays, you will want to use unabridged versions of the assigned authors. All of these major political theory texts, (including Hobbes' Leviathan, Burke's Reflections on the Revolution in France, Rousseau's Social Contract, can be found in our library and on various websites; for example: <http://www.constitution.org>.*

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

1. Recognize general 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 use to assess the value of a theoretical argument or theorist.

3. Present and orally defend (and revise if taken with PSC 400) 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 classical republicanism etc. The goal of the course work, overall, is to encourage students not only to learn about canonical political thinkers, but also to learn how to think theoretically about politics.

Political philosophy. . . “is a complex, imprecise, psychologically demanding, imagination-requiring field of enquiry, in which nothing like certainty can ever be obtained, only, at the most, a high degree of plausibility and coherence and evidence of intellectual power and originality and effectiveness.”

--Isaiah Berlin

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 or 15 pts each)**, not to exceed **four double-spaced pages (or 1,500 words)**. The essays are due *no later* than the class period before you are scheduled to orally defend it. For essay topics and prompts, see below. If you are absent the day we are scheduled to discuss your essay, you will not get credit for it.

In addition, each student will complete a 10-12 page **take-home final (35% of course grade.)** Each student will be graded on class **participation** and attendance** (**10% of course grade.**) Students who attend class, but seldom raise questions or participate in discussion, or are engaged on their laptop rather engaged in class conversation—usually receive between 6-2 pts out of 10.

****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, and military service. Instructor will also excuse absences for reasons of mandatory public service.

Finally since *it does not honor a writer to read him/her without seeking to challenge him/her*, students will be required to submit **two written questions** for the **essays discussed (10% of course grade.)** They should plan on writing questions for all essays distributed in class, and expect to periodically to turn their questions for credit.

- Plus/Minus Grades will be used based on the following:
100-93 = A; 92-90 = A-; 89-87= B+; 86-83 = B; 82-80 = B-; 79-77= C+; 76-73= C; 72-70=C-; 69-67=D+; 66-63=D; 62-60=D-; 59< =F

Substantive and grammatical revisions will be expected. The writing grade will be based upon the following writing guidelines and expectations:

- ## Academic Misconduct

Accessibility and Students with Disabilities

The instructor has attempted to make all course materials accessible. If you find course material that has barriers to accessibility, please notify the instructor as soon as possible so the oversight can be corrected as quickly as possible.

8/31 Introduction to the Course
Political Theory: the Search for Standards: Approaches

3

- 9/7-9/12 *Thomas Hobbes's Natural Man; Social Contract Theory*
Leviathan: The Seat of Power
- 9/14-9/19 Analysis & Discussion of Hobbes' Theory
UG Essays (due 9/12): 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?
- U Essays (due 9/14):** Hobbes apparently believed that there is 'no obligation on any man, which ariseth not from some act of his own; for all men equally, are by nature free." Discuss the implications of this 'free will' for Hobbes' theory of government.
- G Essays (due 9/14): How much are people, according to Hobbes, morally obligated to follow the sovereign?
- 9/21 G Essays (due 9/19): Both Macpherson and Strauss agree that Hobbes is a modern political theorist. According to Macpherson and Strauss, what makes him a distinctly 'modern' thinker? Does Hobbes abandon or transform the notion natural law entirely? Please discuss.
- 9/26-10/3 *Hobbes' Critics & His Constitutionalism*
Read: Grey, Chap. 6 Locke, *Two Treatises On Government*
U Essays (due 9/21): According to Hobbes, where is authority located? Who should exercise it? How should it be exercised?
- UG Essays (due 9/21):** Would you describe Hobbes as a realist? If not, then what is he? If so, then what does it mean to say he is a 'political realist?'
- U Essays (due 9/26):** 'Hobbes does not claim infallibility for Leviathan, but it is hard to see how Leviathan can endure unless its citizens believe that it will do right by them, a belief that must, if it is to be sustained, have some basis in fact.' Discuss.
- Grad Essays (due 9/26): "Hobbes is often defined as an absolutist, a description that is, at best, only partially true."
- 10/5 Locke: the State of Nature & Social Contract Revisited
Read: for those writing Locke essays see *The Second Treatise*, Chaps. 7-10; Chaps. 11-14.
- UG Essays (due 10/3):** 'Both Hobbes and Locke recognize a 'state of nature,' but that doesn't mean that they meant the same thing by it. Discuss

- 10/10 Locke's Liberalism & His Natural Right to Revolution
Read: for those writing the Locke essays, see Chaps. 18-19;

UG Essays (due 10/5): 'All the major assumptions that underlie modern democratic theory can be traced back to John Locke's *Second Treatise of Government*.' How so?
- 10/12- Continued Discussion of Locke
10/17 Read: Grey, Chap. 8 Rousseau, *The Social Contract*
U Essays (due 10/10): "Locke's natural rights-social contract theory provides a justification for anarchy but not a firm basis for government."

UG Essays (due 10/12): Can one defend constitutional government without resorting to 1) a state of nature argument? Or 2, a view of human nature? Or 3, a social contract theory?
- 10/19 Rousseau's Social Contract Theory & General Will
Read: Rousseau, Book III
- 10/24 Rousseau's General Will Reconsidered
Read: Rousseau, Book IV
UG Essays (due 10/19): "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?

Grad Essays (due 10/19): 'What Rousseau's *Social Contract* lacks is a theory of government.' Or does he merely substitute the notion of a General Will for government? Comment.
- 10/26- Rousseau's Democratic Community
10/31 Read: Grey, Chapter 9 Burke's Reflections
U Essay (due 10/24): "What Rousseau contributed to socialism was the general idea that all rights, including those of property, are rights within the community and not against it."

U Essays (due 10/24): "If freedom is so valuable, why should we not, if we could, force people to be free?"

Grad Essays (due 10/26): What kind of freedom, negative or positive, does Rousseau's social contract endorse? And why, according to Berlin, is Rousseau's conception of freedom a danger to freedom itself?
- 11/2 Edmund Burke's Conservatism & Realism reconsidered
Read: Grey, Chapter 10 Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* and *Vindication of the Rights of Men*

- 11/7-
11/9 Burke's Conservatism reconsidered
U Essays (due 11/2): "The lesson, above all, to learn from Burke is this: we must start with the world as it is, not as we should like it to be."
- U Essays (due 11/2):** "If every political theorist is in his heart of hearts a utopian, then Burke is an exception?"
- Grad Essays (due 11/7): Is Burke engaged in 'justice-seeking'? And if so, what kind of justice does he seek to adopt? Why might Burke not fit easily into Gunnell's model of the proto-typical political theorist?
- 11/14-
11/16 Wollstonecraft: Rights, Education & Women's Natural Duties
Read: Grey, Chap 11 *Bentham's Principles of Morals & Legislation*
- U Essays (due 11/9):** On what basis does Wollstonecraft defend the equal rights of women? Is her argument a hybrid of earlier social contract theorist's, like Locke and Rousseau? How so? If not, what makes her theory distinctive?
- U Essays (due 11/9):** 'Labeling Wollstonecraft a feminist, based upon her arguments in *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, is more complicated than one might think. Indeed, one can identify radical, liberal, and conservative notions in her account of women's oppression and its remedy.
- Grad Essays (due 11/14): Can feminist political theory avoid assuming "a privileged epistemological perspective" or a generalized "female" freedom in society? Explain. If not, what are the consequences?
- 11/21 Bentham and James Mill's Utilitarianism reconsidered:
Read: Grey, Chap 12 J.S. Mill's *On Liberty* and *The Subjection of Women*
- * * * * * **Thanksgiving Break November 22nd – 26th** * * * * *
- 11/28 Bentham & Utilitarianism cont.
UG Essays (due 11/21): What would a utilitarian penal system look like? What would constitute "serious" crimes? What would be the purpose of "punishment" or "reform"? What kinds of sentences would be administered under utilitarian system?
- 11/30-
12/5 John Stuart Mill's Liberalism
Read: Grey, Chap 13 Marx's *Economic & Philosophical Manuscripts* and *Manifesto of the Communist Party*; Tucker, *Marx-Engels Reader*, pp.676-717; 203-217; 367-376; 403-417; 579-585.

UG Essays (due 11/28): ‘J.S. Mill is not altogether clear about *why* he wants people to be free, and is simply confused about what freedom is.’ Discuss.

UG Essays (due 11/28): ‘Mills political thought may be a plea for eccentricity, but it is eccentricity of a very predictable kind.’
Comment

UG Essays (due 11/30): Which political theorist — Locke, Wollstonecraft or J.S. Mill, offers the most convincing argument for liberty, and why?

12/7-
12/12 Marx & Engels Radicalism
Read: *Marx-Engels Reader*, 70-105; 133-135; 439-442; 542-555; 725-729.

U Essays (due 12/5) 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."

U Essays (due 12/5): For Marx what does it mean to be alienated? What are the different forms of alienation that Marx describes? Are only workers alienated?

U Essays (due 12/7): "It is only because of the belief in the inevitability of progress that Marx thought it possible to dispense with ethical considerations."

Grad Essays (due 12/7): What are the “positive freedom” ideas/ideals in Marxist theory?

Grad Essays (due 12/7): Marx, in common with many theorists on the left, has a concept of alienation. What is it? Has the concept of alienation become outdated, too blunt as an analytical tool?

Grad Essays (due 12/7): Please describe what constitutes ‘justice’ for Marx, and how and where does he propose we find this justice? Lastly, how does Marx slip between questions of ‘justice-seeking’ and questions of ‘knowledge-seeking?’

*** * * *Final Due * * * *Tuesday December 19th by 12pm * * * * ***

Essay Writing & Grading Guidelines:

1st: Please: put the [essay question/statement](#) on the top of your paper. . .

Thesis & Transitions – 20%

- Clear, thoughtful, and coherent thesis statement that addresses essay question/statement
- Thesis place at end of 1st paragraph
- Stays focused on essay topic

Analysis – 65%

- Strong supporting evidence, drawn from reading material for the **thesis**
- Provides relevant information, clearly presented
- Fully developed, *interesting* arguments and points
- Analysis and conclusions are logical and precise
- Shows that the writer understands the author's argument, logic, and moral reasoning before critiquing or defending his/her argument
- Credit is given to outside sources, where appropriate

Format, Word Choice, Mechanics & Quotations 15%

- Format: 3 typed, double-spaced pages, 10-12 point font
- Grammar: Neatness, spelling, grammar, punctuation, good transition sentences between paragraphs and tight topic organization
- Quotations: Inserted in body with page number, relevant to point, not taken out of context, best summary of thinker's view

Don't editorialize! Give us nothing but your opinion w/no reference to our reading.

Don't give us a book review! No rehashing of lecture notes or quote for the sake of quoting. # (Too much narration/description.)

Don't quote Wikipedia or Dictionary for definitions! Instead provide your own ideas and criteria for the meaning of key political terms.

Some General tips for Good Writing:

1. Good writing stems from good thinking. Clarify your intent & major ideas before you start. Don't expect that your design will materialize during writing. A good outline can help organize your ideas. Sketch out your major points and their logical relationship.
2. Be a master builder. Your building blocks are sentences and paragraphs. Each essay should have a specific theme; each paragraph should have a specific purpose regarding that theme; and each sentence should have a specific purpose in its paragraph.
3. Good writing results from revision. First drafts are almost always lousy writing. Samuel Johnson said, "What is written in haste is read without pleasure." Please note!
4. Become your own best editor. If you are committed to your ideas, you will be willing to revise and revise until they are expressed clearly.

5. "Simplicity, simplicity, simplicity," Henry David Thoreau admonished. His advice applies to composition as well as to life. Use clear-cut syntax and active voice (passive voice tends to distract & obscure.) Avoid unnecessary verbiage, such as "first and foremost" instead of "first." A good writer, said Thomas Jefferson, can use one word instead of three.
6. Be precise in your diction. Avoid a \$100 word when a \$5 word will do. "Never," said George Orwell, "use a foreign phrase, a scientific word, or a jargon word if you can think of an everyday English equivalent."
7. And "if it is possible to cut a word out," Orwell added, "cut it out." Carefully selected nouns and verbs rarely require adjectives and adverbs.
8. Don't be a hedger. If you believe in your purpose and conclusions, be positive and bold. Tentativeness undercuts your credibility. Avoid, for example, "it seems," "perhaps," "somewhat," "it appears," etc. I call these 'chicken words.'
9. Keep your reader in mind. Guide the reader through your train of thought. Keep the reader awake by varying the length and beginning of sentences. Keep the reader involved by providing interesting examples, transitions, and conclusions. Use short and apt quotations and paraphrase the rest.
10. Be technically correct. Grammar and spelling errors tell the reader that you are careless. Read your writing aloud to catch your mistakes.