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PSCI 553.01: Modern Political Theory - Graduate Seminar

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University of Montana
Political Science
Modern Political Theory:
Graduate Seminar

PSCI 553 (Co-convening with PSCI 453)
Fall 2017
TTR 12:30pm-1:50pm
Email: ramona.grey@umontana.edu

Dr. Grey
Office Hrs: TTR 11-12;
Tues 2-3pm or by appt.
Office #: LA 352

Description of the Course:

This co-convening course covers political thinkers from the 16th c., beginning with Thomas Hobbes, to the early 20th century, ending with Marx. Graduate students will consider a fundamental question: *what is the purpose of political inquiry?* A fundamental question precisely because what people take to be the purpose of political theory determines what they study, who they study, and how they study it. Additionally, we will consider: what is ‘classical’ about classical political thought? What is ‘modern’ about modern political thought? And is there one, two, or more than two *approaches* to reading and writing political theory tracts?

Required prerequisite:

Successful completion of an upper-division political theory course or an instructor approved equivalent course.

Required Readings:

- Leo Strauss, Natural Right & History, 1965.
- B.F. Skinner, Beyond Freedom & Dignity, rpt 2002.
- Isaiah Berlin, Liberty, rpt 2002.
- C.P. Macpherson, The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism, 1961.
- John Gunnell, Political Theory and Interpretation, 1978.
- Mary L Shanley & Carol Pateman, eds Feminist Interpretations and Political Theory, 1977.
- * Quentin Skinner, Visions of Politics, 2002, selected readings (available online)
- * see selected readings under essay assignments

Recommend:

- Grey, R. Political Theory & The Human Predicament: An Introduction to Major Political Thinkers, 2014.
- Robert Tucker, Marx-Engels Reader, New York, Norton, 1978.
- * see other suggested readings under essay assignments

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

1. Distinguish between a normative, a scientific/historical, and an analytical approaches, and recognize how political theorists often combine each of these approaches in their work.
2. Develop concise, analytic essays on the assigned primary and secondary texts. Specifically with regards to an analytic perspective, students will consider their own position with respect to different approaches to studying political theory (for instance, what consequences follow when one emphasizes text over context when studying political theory?)

3. Evaluate a political theory in terms of its analytic, empirical, and normative claims, and its strengths and/or weaknesses.
4. Orally critique an essay in terms of its analytical clarity, accuracy in its interpretation of the readings, and the logic of its conclusion.

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 (Total Points: 150):

This course will be taught as a seminar with some lecturing. Each graduate student will submit and orally defend in class **5 critical essays** (15 pts each), not to exceed 4 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 topics, see below.) If you are absent the day we are scheduled to discuss your essay, you will not get credit for it. Essays assigned to graduate students will presume student has some familiarity with the major political thinkers covered in this co-convening course. Graduate student essays will draw upon both primary theory texts and secondary interpretive literature.

Since *it does not honor a writer to read him/her without seeking to challenge him/her*, graduate students will be required to submit two written questions for each of the essays distributed and discussed (15 pts.)

In addition to completing the above essay assignments, graduate students will submit a **20-25 page professional research paper** (60 pts) in consultation with the professor. This paper should clearly identify and address a question or issue covered by the thinkers (or a thinker) in the course, and reference the appropriate primary & secondary literature to support its thesis.

Graduate students enrolled in the Political Science M.A. degree program will complete a take-home comprehensive field exam in political theory.

To assist with developing an advanced level political theory research paper and preparing for their field exam, graduate students will meet together each month with the professor. Time, date, and place of the meeting will to be determined.

Cautionary note: Graduate students are expected to attend class and participate in the discussions (and not staring at their laptops). 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 and jury duty.

Accessibility and Students with Disabilities

The University of Montana assures equal access to instruction by supporting collaboration between students with disabilities, instructors, and Disability Services for Students. If you have a disability that requires accommodation, please present the instructor with a letter from Disability Services for Students

(DDS), Lommasson Center 154 (243-2243), indicating the existence of a disability and suggested accommodations.

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.

Tentative Course Schedule:

8/31 Introduction to the Course

Political Theory: the Search for Standards: Approaches

Read: Andrew Hacker, "Capital and Carbuncles: The 'Great Books' Reappraised," *American Political Science Review*, (September 1954): 775-786;

Strauss, *Natural Right & History*, Chap1-4

McPherson, *Possessive Individualism*, Chap 1;

Recommend:

Judith N. Shklar's *After Utopia: the Decline of Political Faith*, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1957;

Alfred Cobban, "The Decline of Political Theory," *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 68, no. 3 (September 1953), 321-337;

*9/5 * * * * No Class * * * Please start reading & essay drafting * * **

9/7 Thomas Hobbes's Natural Man; Social Contract Theory

Read: Michael Oakeshott's "Introduction" to Hobbes' *Leviathan*;
Macpherson, *Possessive Individualism*, Chap II Hobbes;
Strauss, *Natural Right & History*, Chap. 5.
Grey, Chap. 5 Hobbes, *Leviathan*

9/12 Leviathan: The Seat of Power

Read: Shanley & Pateman, Chap. 3.

Q. Skinner, *Visions of Politics*, vol 3, Chaps 6-7;

9/14- Analysis & Discussion of Hobbes' Leviathan

9/19 Read: Q. Skinner, "The Ideological Context of Hobbes's Political Thought," *The Historical Journal*, vol. 9, 1966: 286-317;

Q. Skinner, "Meaning & Understanding in the History of Ideas," *History & Theory*, vol. 8, 1969: 3-53.

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?

Grad Essays (due 9/14): How much are people, according to Hobbes, morally obligated to follow the sovereign?

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.

9/21 *Hobbes Analysis Cont.*

Grad Essays (due 9/14): Does Q. Skinner avoid blending his historical approach with justice-seeking into his own studies of Hobbes? What ‘analytical’ problems do you find in his interpretation of Hobbes’ political ideas? (**Make copies only for Grads)

Grad 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 of natural law entirely? Please discuss.

9/26-10/3 *Hobbes' Critics & His Constitutionalism*

Read: review Strauss, Chap. 5;

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 one 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?’

Grad Essays (due 9/26): “Hobbes is often defined as an absolutist, a description that is, at best, only partially true.”

U Essays (due 9/28): ‘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.

10/5 *Locke: the State of Nature & Social Contract Revisited*

Read: Macpherson, Grey, Chap. 6 Locke; Chap. 5; Shanley & Pateman, Chap. 4.

Recommend: for those writing Locke essays see *The Second Treatise*, Chaps. 7-10; Chaps. 11-14. \

UG Grad 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*

Recommend: for those writing the Locke essays, see his *Second Treatise on Government*, 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-
10/17

Locke & Revolution cont.

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?

U Essays (due 10/10): "Locke’s natural rights-social contract theory provides a justification for anarchy but not a firm basis for government."

Grad Essays (due 10/12): Why would a liberal thinker reject Strauss’ notion of “natural right?” (**Make copies only for Grads.)

Grad Essays (due 10/12): Although no one made more frequent use of the words ‘law of nature’ and ‘natural rights’, *classical natural right*, according to Strauss, has no place in Hobbes or Locke’s political philosophy. The words are used, but they are not taken to mean, according to Strauss, what they *should* mean. Discuss (**Make copies for Grads only.)

10/19

Rousseau's Social Contract Theory & General Will

Read: Strauss, Chap. 6;

Shanley & Pateman, Chap. 5.

Recommend: Grey, Chap. 8 Rousseau, *The Social Contract* (see full text on: http://www.constitution.org/jjr/socon_01.htm)

10/24

Rousseau's General Will Reconsidered

Read: review Rousseau, Book IV

Recommend: Maurice Cranston’s “Introduction” to Rousseau’s *Social Contract*.

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-
10/31

Rousseau's Democratic Community

Read: Berlin, *Two Concepts of Liberty*;

Shanley & Pateman, Chap. 5.

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?

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

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."

11/2 *Edmund Burke's Conservatism & Realism reconsidered*
Read: Strauss, Chapter 6; Grey, Chapter 9 Burke;
Gunnell, *Political Theory & Interpretation*

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."

UG 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: Shanley & Pateman, Chap. 6.
Recommend: Grey, Chapter 10 Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* and *Vindication of the Rights of Men*

U Essays (due 10/9): 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 11/9): 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: B.F. Skinner, *Beyond Freedom & Dignity*;
Grey, Chap 11 Bentham; J.S. Krutch, "Ignoble Utopias," *Measure of Man*

* * * * * **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?

Grad Essays (due 11/21): What claims (findings/hypothesis/laws/arguments) does **Skinner** make that may be called scientific? What claims (etc.) does he make that he calls scientific, but are anything but? (**Make copies for Grads only.)

Grad Essays (due 11/21): What might contemporary thinkers find troubling the theories and highly ‘illiberal’ about the respective theories of Bentham and Skinner? (** Make copies for Grads only.)

11/30-
12/5

John Stuart Mill’s Liberalism

Read: Grey, Chap 12; Shanley & Pateman, Chap. 9; J.S. Mill’s *On Liberty* and *The Subjection of Women*; R.P. Anschutz, *The Philosophy of J.S. Mill*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1953.

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): ‘Mill’s 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: Shanley & Pateman, Chap.8; 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; 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?’

Grad Essays (due 12/7): Berlin’s contribution to our understanding of freedom, as many have noted, is to demonstrate the error of assimilating liberty to morality, and of supposing that morality forms ‘a coherent system.’ But while it seems dangerous and paradoxical to attach freedom to a particular ‘moral’ end, yet it seems trivial and hopelessly incomplete to leave it purely negative.

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: **4** 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.

Research Paper & Comprehensive Field Exam Due Tuesday December 19th by 12pm.

