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PSC 453E.01: Modern Political Theory

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University of Montana
Political Science Department

PSC 453E
FallXX

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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 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 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 also 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 or 15pts each), not to exceed three double-spaced pages. The essays (see note for those taking this course to fulfill writing requirement) 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.

In addition, each student will complete a take-home final (35% of course grade.) Each student will be graded on class attendance and *participation* (10% of course grade.) Finally, *since it does not honor a writer ...to read him without seeking to challenge him . . . or her*, each student will submit two written questions on each essay discussed in class (10% of grade).

Note: If taking this course to ***fulfill writing requirement***, then student will be expected to revise and resubmit at least two of their essays. Substantial revisions may be expected.

Graduate Students, in addition to completing the above assignments, will submit a 10-15 page research paper that incorporates the secondary literature on a particular thinker &/or theoretical issue in consultation with the professor. This paper will include an introduction that clearly identifies a question or issue and its significance to modern political thought, and will use the appropriate primary & secondary literature to support the paper's thesis.

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.

- 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

Required Texts:

Hobbes, *Leviathan*

Locke, *Second Treatise On Government*
Rousseau, *The Social Contract*
Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*
J.S. Mill, *On Liberty*
Ed. Robert Tucker, *The Marx-Engels Reader*

Course Schedule:

- 8/29 *Introduction to the Course*
Political Theory: the Search for Standards, Rules and Laws
Read for next time: Hobbes, *Leviathan*, "Dedication of Godolphin," "Introduction"; Part I (Chaps. I-IV); Part I (Chaps. XI-XVI)
- 8/31 *Thomas Hobbes's Natural Man*
Read: *Leviathan*, Part I
- 9/5 *Hobbes & Social Contract Theory*
Read: *Leviathan*, Part II
Essays (due 8/31): 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?
- Or **Essays (due 8/31):** 'It's his clear-cut individualism that makes Hobbes' philosophy the most revolutionary of his age.'
- 9/7- *Leviathan: The Seat of Power*
9/12 Read: *Leviathan*, Part II
Essays (due 9/5): 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.
Essays (due 9/7): 'Hobbes denied the independent existence of ethics.'
- 9/14- *Hobbes' Critics & His Constitutionalism*
9/19 Read for next hour: Locke, *Second Treatise On Government*, Chaps. 1-6.
Essays (due 9/12): "Hobbes is often defined as an absolutist, a description that is, at best, only partially true."

Or

Essays (due 9/12) '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.

9/21

Locke: the State of Nature & Social Contract Revisited

Read: Locke, Chaps. 7-10; Locke, Chaps. 11-14

Essays (due 9/19): 'Both Hobbes and Locke recognize laws of nature, but that doesn't mean that they meant the same thing by them.'

Or

Essays (due 9/19): 'All the major assumptions that underlie modern democratic theory can be traced back to John Locke's *Second Treatise of Government*.'

9/26-

Locke's Liberalism & His Natural Right to Revolution

9/28

Read: Locke, Chaps. 18-19; Read for next hour: Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, Books I & II

Essays (due 9/21): "The natural rights-social contract theory provides a justification for anarchy but not a firm basis for government."

or

Essays (due 9/26): 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?

10/3-

Rousseau's Social Contract Theory & General Will

*10/5

Read: Rousseau, Book III

10/10-

Rousseau's General Will Reconsidered

10/12

Read: Book IV

Essays (due 10/5): "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?

* Last day to drop course with \$10 fee: October 9th.

Essay (due 10/10): "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."

10/17-
10/19

Rousseau's Democratic Community
Read for next hour: J.S. Mill, *On Liberty*

Essays (due 10/12): 'Rousseau and Locke differed considerably over what makes a polity democratic, yet both may be right.'

Or

Essays (due 10/12): "If Rousseau is a democrat, so much the worst for democracy."

Or

Essays (due 10/17): "If freedom is so valuable, why should we not, if we could, force people to be free?"

10/24-
10/26

John Stuart Mill's Liberalism
Read: : For next hour read: Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, pp. 83-167.

Essays (due 10/19): "Mill's is not so much a defense of liberty, as a defense of *politics*."

Or

Essays (due 10/24): 'Mills political thought may be a plea for eccentricity, but it is eccentricity of a very predictable kind.' Comment.

10/31

Edmund Burke's Conservatism
Read: Burke, pp. 167-253; pp. 253-377.

11/2

Burke's Conservatism cont.

Essays (due 10/31): 'To Rousseau's cry that man is born free, the conservative counters, he is not born free, and there are seldom, if ever, enough chains.'

* * * * * *November 7th Tuesday Election Day . . . no class*****

11/9

Burke cont.

11/14-

Burke's Political Realism Considered

11/21

Read for next hour: *Marx-Engels Reader*, pp.676-717; 203-217; 367-376; 403-417; 579-585.

Essays (due 11/9): "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."

Or

Essays (due 11/9): Examine critically Burke's views about political change.

Essays (due 11/14): "If every political theorist is in his heart of hearts a utopian, then Burke is that rare exception."

Or

Essays (due 11/16): What would Marx and Engels find wrong and right with the conservative's analysis of history?

***** Thanksgiving Break November 22-26th * * * * ***

11/28-
11/30

Marx & Engels Radicalism

Read: 70-105; 133-135; 439-442; 542-555; 725-729.

Essays (due 11/21): Marxism is only comprehensible as a critique of Liberalism. Comment

Or

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."

12/5-
12/7

Marx, Engels & Modernity

Essays (due 11/30): What are the 'modern' elements of Marxist theory?

Or

Essays (due 11/30): "It is only because of the belief in the inevitability of progress that Marx thought it possible to dispense with ethical considerations."

Or

Essays (due 12/5): Marx asserts that although men make history, they do not always make it in the way they wish to make it. How does Marx deal with this problem? What are the implications of this problem in regard to Marx's own thought?

*** * * * * Final Due Friday, XXXX*****