

POLSC 202 – Fall 2013
John McMahon
M/W, 19:00-20:15, Room HW 706

Office: HW 1730A
Hours: Mon., 5:30-6:30pm and by appt.
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MODERN POLITICAL THOUGHT

Course Syllabus

“Then I just think, ok, what would it mean if we lived in a world in which no one held out for the possibility of substantial political equality, or for a full cessation of colonial practices - if no one held out for those things because they were impossible?”

[...] In fact in politics, sometimes the thing that will never happen actually starts to happen. And there have to be people who hold out for that, and who accept that they are idealists and that they are operating on principle as opposed to realpolitik. If there were no such ideals then our entire political sensibility would be corrupted by this process.

And maybe one of the jobs of theory or philosophy is to elevate principles that seem impossible, or that have the status of the impossible, to stand by them and will them, even when it looks highly unlikely that they'll ever be realised. But that's ok, it's a service.

What would happen if we lived in a world where there were no people who did that? It would be an impoverished world.” – Judith Butler, [interview with Open Democracy](#)

Course Description:

This course is a survey of Modern Political Thought (16th century-19th century). We will closely engage five political thinkers, Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, Marx and Nietzsche, along with 19th century British liberal theorists, to ask how their work bears on the following questions: What is power and how is it deployed? How do knowledge and power interact and work together? What is the nature of freedom and how does it relate to the nature of the state? What is human nature? How do foundational assumptions about the human, the body, rationality, and emotion constitute certain notions of social and political life, and of political subjects? How does the idea of the social contract shape conceptions of political legitimacy? What are rights and do they authorize political resistance? What are the core modern political values and how do modern political theorists grapple with their implementation? Does modernity signify *an age of progress* in terms of knowledge about the world and freedom for human beings? Or do modern technological, political and social developments actually constitute *a new kind of prison*? How do modern political thinkers conceptualize or fail to conceptualize race and gender? In what ways can modern political thought animate thinking about contemporary politics?

Simultaneously, we seek to critically engage with these classic texts about politics, political subjects, and political life in two ways. First, we will question what “modern” or “modernity” means historically and theoretically; in doing so, we will interrogate practices and theories of exclusion and violence that seek to grant only some subjects and collectivities access to the presumed progress of “modernity.” Second, and in a related vein, we will analyze these texts for the discourses of race and gender they produce, both explicitly and tacitly. We pursue these objectives by examining contemporary readings of this time period and of the theorists upon whom we will focus.

This is a writing-intensive course. This class will primarily be a discussion format, with the occasional lecture. Therefore regular attendance, careful preparation, and active participation are essential. You must prepare for every class by doing the reading, reflecting upon the course texts, and bringing to class issues, questions, and passages for discussion. **Bring the relevant text to class, always!**

Learning Objectives:

- Understanding the modern theoretical-political tradition
- Improving skills in reading and comprehending theoretical and historical texts
- Writing clear, well-argued expository analysis dealing with political questions and concepts
- Thinking critically and inquisitively, and developing a sense of the political theory “canon” as a terrain of contested interpretation
- Becoming interested in controversy over ideas, in different historical and cultural contexts, as worthy of serious and deep exploration in its own right but also acutely relevant to the political controversies of today
- Improving your ability to engage in dialogue and debate through discussions in class and various modes of writing for class
- Thinking more systematically and analytically about one’s own political beliefs

Grading: Your grade in the course will be based on the following forms of work:

1. **Attendance and Participation (20%):** consisting of regular attendance (after two unexcused absences, your participation grade drops by one letter for each absence), conscientious reading of all assignments, and informed participation in class discussion; visiting my office hours also counts as participation.
2. **Discussion Board (Blackboard) (25%):** You must submit one short post responding to the readings for the day (minimum 250-300 words) and one to two discussion questions for one class session per week. Responding to/commenting on/discussing your colleagues’ responses is encouraged (and may result in a bit of extra credit!), but is not required. You do not need write a response for the weeks when a take-home essay is due, but you may do so for extra credit.
3. **Take-Home Essays (2 essays; 15% each, 30%total):** two take-home essays in response to questions handed out in advance
4. **Final Project (25%):** the primary form of the final project is an 8-10 page paper on a topic you will choose in consultation with me – this can take the form of a more thorough exploration of an issue from class, an independent question, etc. Alternatively, I am open to different forms of final projects – performance, short film, documentary, creative writing, artwork, etc. related to themes and questions from the class, if you receive my approval. If you choose an alternative project, you will be still be required to write a short paper connecting your work to course themes and objectives. I will work with all students on developing a topic/project, and we will use the semester to build up to the final assignment.

Course Policies

- Classroom philosophy and discussion: I proceed from the belief that all of us come to this class as learners and thinkers. None of us, myself included, have the singular correct answer

for any of the complex, important problems we will be discussing. Instead, we all have valuable claims, arguments, thoughts, questions, and experiences to bring to our efforts together. We seek, thus, to work collaboratively through these questions and issues in a critical, dialogical manner. This means that our course will be focused on discussion and debate; this course is a speaking-intensive class. If this is to work, physical presence in the classroom is not an end in itself. Students should be in class to interact with their fellow students in a community of learning. Most importantly, this also means that our classroom will be an **open and respectful space for all**. Some of the issues covered in this course may be closely intertwined with deep-seated beliefs. I enjoy and encourage a lively classroom discussion, but it must always be conducted in a respectful manner, free of invective, and conscious of what may be profound differences of opinion and experience.

- Online discussion board: You are required to submit a short post responding to the readings for the day (minimum 250-300 words) + 1-2 discussion questions for the class **once per week**, on Blackboard's Discussion Board under the forum for that week. You may choose which class session you submit for each week. You may also choose which reading or readings to investigate. The response can involve a critique of the reading and/or its argument, putting the reading(s) in conversation with previous reading(s), applying historical texts to contemporary situations, personal reflections, etc. The discussion question(s) can include confusing passages or ideas, critical questions, broader thematic questions, etc. **Both the response and the question(s)** are due by **7:00 a.m. of the morning of the class session** for which you are writing, on that day's readings.
- Office Hours: I strongly encourage everyone to meet with me during my office hours. If you're having difficulty with the class; if you don't understand the concepts and need help; if you want to clarify my expectations for an assignment; if you want to discuss the results of an assignment or an exam; if you want to express a concern of any kind; if you want to talk politics or just talk about life, meet with me!
- Email and Blackboard: I will be sending out updates and information via email and Blackboard. Furthermore, you are responsible for all information and material on the course Blackboard site. Thus it is very important for you to (a) check Blackboard regularly and (b) make sure that the email address that Blackboard has registered for you is an email address you check regularly. If it isn't, change your email address on Blackboard by clicking "Update Email" on the upper left-hand tools menu.
- We will be using TurnItIn.com for both the exam and the final project. You will receive instructions on accessing our course TurnItIn page. *Note that for both take-home essays and for the final project, you must turn in BOTH a paper copy in class and an electronic copy to TurnItIn.*
- You may provide documentation to excuse an absence. In all other cases, absences will be unexcused and negatively affect your grade (after two unexcused absences).
- Even if you are absent on the days that a written assignment is due, you are still responsible for turning in the assignment on-time.
- It is your right to expect that your work be thoughtfully and fairly graded. I am happy to answer questions regarding grading and discuss your work with you.
- Credit/No-Credit Grading: College rules specify that to be eligible for credit/no credit, students must complete all course requirements.

Office of AccessABILITY

In compliance with the ADA and with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, Hunter College is committed to ensuring educational access and accommodations for all its registered students. Hunter College's students with disabilities and medical conditions are encouraged to register with the Office of AccessABILITY for assistance and accommodation. For information and appointment contact the Office of AccessABILITY located in Room E1214 or call (212) 772-4857 or TTY (212) 650-3230

If needed, please be sure to make any necessary academic arrangements in advance of due dates so that I can best assist you.

Academic Integrity and Plagiarism

Hunter College regards acts of academic dishonesty (e.g., plagiarism, cheating on examinations, obtaining unfair advantage, and falsification of records and official documents) as serious offenses against the values of intellectual honesty. The College is committed to enforcing the CUNY Policy on Academic Integrity and will pursue cases of academic dishonesty according to the Hunter College Academic Integrity Procedures.

If online submissions, exams, or the paper is found to have been plagiarized, disciplinary action will result. A grade of F for the assignment and/or course will be given, and, if necessary, the case will be submitted for further action at the level of the Department Chair and/or the Dean of Students.

For the take-home essay exams, in-text citations (Author, Page number) can be used to reference class texts. For the final project, you are required to use Chicago-style citations; I will circulate information and guidelines with the paper assignment. For a guide to what constitutes plagiarism, please consult <http://www.lib.usm.edu/legacy/plag/plagiarismtutorial.php>; of course, discuss with me any questions you may have.

Course Materials

You should purchase the following paperback books available at Shakespeare's Bookstore on Lexington Ave. or online, where you can find used copies for only a few dollars or less. If you buy them online, please purchase the same version (search Amazon by the ISBN numbers listed below), so that we're all working from the same version in class. We will read them in the order listed:

- Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Oxford Word Classics (ISBN: 0199537283)
- John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, Hackett (ISBN: 0915144867)
- Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Basic Political Writings* (ISBN: 0872200477)
- Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Marx-Engels Reader*, Norton 2nd ed. (ISBN: 039309040X)
- Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, Cambridge Revised ed. (ISBN: 052169163X)

All readings not in these texts will be available freely online or on the course E-Reserve page through the library. While not required, it is suggested that you bring printed copies of electronic readings to class. We will be directly engaging with the day's readings in class, so do be sure to have it with you in some form.

Reading Schedule

I. Introduction

August 28 – Welcome, Introductions, Brainstorming

September 2 – NO CLASS (Labor Day)

September 4 – NO CLASS (Rosh Hashanah)

September 9 – What is modern(ity)?

- Chandan Reddy, “Modern,” in *Keywords for American Cultural Studies* (E-Res)
- Marshall Berman, “Modernity – Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow” (read pp. 15-23), in *All That is Solid Melts Into Air* (E-Res)
- Lisa Lowe, “The Intimacies of the Four Continents,” in *Haunted by Empire*, ed. Stoler (E-Res)

II. Social Contracts, Natural Rights, and Liberalism(s)

September 11 – Hobbes I

- *Leviathan*, Introduction (pp. 7-8), Ch. 5, 6, 13, 46 (paras. 1-21 only)

September 16 – Hobbes II

- *Leviathan*, Ch. 14-18

September 18 – Hobbes III

- *Leviathan* Ch. 19 (paras. 1-8 only), 20 (paras. 1-15 only), 21, 29, 30

September 23 – Contemporary Responses to Hobbes

- Michel Foucault, *Society Must be Defended*, pp. 89-99 and 110-111 (E-Res)
- Su Fang Ng, “Hobbes and the Bestial Body of Sovereignty” in *Feminist Interpretations of Thomas Hobbes* (E-Res)
- Carole Pateman, *The Sexual Contract*, pp. 43-50 (E-Res)

September 25 – Locke I

- *Second Treatise*, Ch. I, II, III, IV

September 30 – Locke II

- *Second Treatise*, Ch. V, VI, VII
- *First Treatise*, Ch. 5 all and Ch. 6 § 54-55, 61-67, 72 (E-Res)

October 2 – Locke III

- *Second Treatise*, Ch. VIII, IX, X, XI, XII, XIII (§149-50 only), XIV

October 7 – Locke IV

- *Second Treatise* Ch. XVIII, XIX
- Start on October 9 reading

October 9 – Contemporary Responses to Locke

- Uday Singh Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire*, Ch. 2, “Liberal Conventions and Imperial Inclusions” (read pp. 46-64); Ch. 4, “Liberalism, Empire, and Territory” (read pp. 124-132) (E-Res)
- Carole Pateman, *The Sexual Contract*, Ch. 1 pp. 1-7, 16-18; Ch. 4, pp. 88-103 (E-Res)

October 14 – NO CLASS (Columbus Day)

October 15 – (Classes follow Monday schedule)

Take-Home Paper I Due

- In-class workshop

October 16 – Rousseau I

- *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*, Letter (all), Preface (all), Part I (pp. 37-48; bottom of 51-60), and Notes (note 9 all, note 10 p. 99, notes 11 and 12 all)

October 21 – Rousseau II

- *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*, Part II
- Rousseau, *Emile*, excerpts from Chap. 5 (E-Res)

October 23 – Rousseau III

- *Social Contract*, Book I (all); Book II (chap. 1-4, 6, 11)

October 28 – Rousseau IV

- *Social Contract*, Book III (chap. 1, 4, 8, 11-13, 15-16); Book IV (chap. 1, 2, 8, 9)

October 30 – Contemporary Responses to Rousseau

- Charles Mills, “Rousseau, the Master's Tools, and Anti-Contractarian Contractarianism,” in *The CLR James Journal* 15 (1): 2009 (E-Res)
- Leah Bradshaw, “Rousseau on Civic Virtue, Male Autonomy, and the Construction of the Divided Female,” in *Feminist Interpretations of Rousseau*, ed. Lange (E-Res)

November 4 – 19th Century Liberalism I

- John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*, chap. 1, 2, 4 (http://files.libertyfund.org/files/347/0159_Bk.pdf)

November 6 – 19th Century Liberalism II

- Mary Wollstonecraft, *Vindication of the Rights of Women*, selections (E-Res)

III. Modernity's Internal Critics

November 11 – Slavery, Metaphysical and Actual

- G.W.F. Hegel, “Lordship and Bondage” in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, read para. 175-196 (E-Res)
- Frederick Douglass, “Letter to His Former Master” (E-Res)
- Susan Buck-Morss, “Hegel and Haiti” in *Critical Inquiry* 26 (2000) (excerpt; E-Res)

November 13 – Marx I: Critique of Liberalism

- Letter to Arnold Ruge, (*M-ER*, “For a Ruthless Criticism of Everything Existing,” 12-16)
- “On the Jewish Question” (*M-ER*, read 26-46)
- “Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s *Philosophy of Right*,” (*M-ER*, read 16-23)

November 18 – Marx II: Historical Materialism

- Preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (*M-ER* “Marx on the History of His Opinions,” 3-6)
- “Theses on Feuerbach” (*M-ER* 143-145)
- “German Ideology Pt. I,” (*M-ER*, read 146-165)
- *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, “Estranged Labor” (*M-ER*, read 70-79)

November 20 – Marx III: Revolution and Politics

- “The Communist Manifesto” (*M-ER* 469-500)
- “The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte” (*M-ER* 594-617)

November 25 – Marx IV: Critique of Capital

- *Capital Vol. I* (*ME-R*, read: “Preface to 1st German Edition,” 294-8; “Afterword to the Second German Edition,” 299-302; “Commodities,” 302-12; “The Fetishism of Commodities and the Secret Thereof,” 319-328; “Buying and Selling of Labour Power,” 336-43; “...Exploitation,” 367-376; “Relative Surplus-Population or Industrial Reserve Army,” 422-31)
- *Capital Vol. III* (*ME-R* 439-442)

November 27 – **NO CLASS (classes follow Friday schedule)**

December 2 – Contemporary Responses to Marx

Take Home Essay 2 Due in-class and to TurnItIn

- Dipesh Chakrabarty, “Two Histories of Capital” in *Provincializing Europe* (E-Res)

December 4 – Nietzsche I

- *Genealogy of Morals*, “Preface” and “First Essay: ‘Good and Evil,’ ‘Good and Bad’”

December 9 – Nietzsche II

- *Genealogy of Morals*, “Second Essay: ‘Guilt,’ ‘Bad Conscience,’ and related matters”

December 11 – Endings

- Closing discussion: Modern(ity) again
- In-class peer review of final projects

Paper due: TBA