

MODERN CLASSICS IN POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

Graduate Center
Dept. of Political Science
CUNY
(Fall 2014)
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Office Hours: Tuesday, 2-4
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This course is an introduction to the study of modern Western political philosophy. The course is organized around five classic texts, which will be considered chronologically. The focus of the course will be primarily textual and not contextual. We will be concerned with the broad structure and the details of the arguments made in these texts regarding the basis of political society, the authority of government and the rights of citizens. Some of the recurring questions that inform these works are the following: What do the various philosophers take to be the original motivation underlying the formation of political society? How do these motivations conform to the normative prescriptions and institutional arrangements that are proposed? What are the limits of legitimate political authority, and what are the philosophical justifications for these limits? What are the justifications underlying the various proposed institutional arrangements and under what conditions can these arrangements be legitimately suspended? Finally, does the organizing of political life do violence to other conceptions of human potentiality and social order?

REQUIRED BOOKS:

T. Hobbes, *Leviathan*

John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*

J.S. Mill, *On Liberty and Other Essays*

G. F. Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*

All the books are readily available. It does not much matter which edition you decide to use.

I have made some suggestions for additional background readings for each of these thinkers.

Organization and Requirements:

Students will be expected to write **one paper of approximately 7000-7500 words**. It will be due at the end of term. The paper should engage with at least two of the thinkers considered in this course. It is essential that students meet with me and discuss the topic they wish to write their paper on. I am prepared to read and comment on (but NOT grade) drafts of papers till a week prior to the due date.

IT IS ESSENTIAL FOR STUDENTS TO BRING THE RELEVANT TEXT TO CLASS BECAUSE CONSTANT REFERENCE WILL BE MADE TO THE TEXTS DURING THE SEMINAR SESSIONS.

Schedule of Lectures and Readings:

I. THOMAS HOBBS

September 3, 10, 17 and October 1:

Leviathan

Since it is not possible to give appropriate attention to the entire *Leviathan* in the available time, please read the following chapters carefully: Introduction, 5, 6, 10, 11, 13-19, 21, 26-27, and 28-30.

C.B. Macpherson, in the Penguin edition of the *Leviathan*, has a good introduction. Well worth reading. Michael Oakeshott also has a very thoughtful introduction to Hobbes that is reprinted in many places.

II. JOHN LOCKE

October 8, 15, 22:

Second Treatise on Government, (complete)

Peter Laslett has a long introduction to the *Treatises*, in the standard (Cambridge) edition. It gives important details about the history of the text itself and other contextual matters.

III. J.S. Mill

October 29, November 5 and 12:

Utilitarianism chapters 1-3

On Liberty (complete)

Isaiah Berlin has a good essay on Mill and his times in his book *Four Essays on Liberty*

IV. G. F. Hegel

November 19 and 26, December 3 and 10:

Philosophy of Right (selections)

Charles Taylor has two fine books on Hegel. The shorter of these will give you a sense of Hegel's political and broader philosophical concerns.