

Selections in Modern Political Thought

PS 432R
Fall 2013
Thursday 9.00am-12.00pm
GSL (400) Encina West

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OH: by appointment

Course Description

This graduate-level seminar will explore selections from the canon of Western political thought from the late fifteenth through nineteenth centuries. Throughout the course, we will engage in close textual readings of individual thinkers and consider some of the larger questions raised by political modernity. The readings in this offering of the course will expose students to a range of historical articulations of proto-liberal and liberal arguments before considering a selection of modern critiques of liberalism. The thinkers covered will include: Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, John Stuart Mill, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Edmund Burke, and Karl Marx.

Course Mechanics

Students will be evaluated on a research paper (20 pages) due at the end of the quarter (60%), one (4-6 page) memo on the reading for a given week (15%), and one (10 or 20 minute, see below) oral discussion of another student's memo (10%). General participation will count for the remaining 15% of the final grade. We will begin each session with the oral discussion of the weekly memo. Memo writers can engage one of the weekly reading questions or write on a question of their own. When writing your memo, please avoid unnecessary summary and feel free to be contentious. Memos should be sent to the entire class and me by no later than 10.00 am on the Tuesday before the seminar. Oral discussion should also avoid summary and instead pose a series of textually-supported critical questions—related to the argument and themes of the memo—to provoke a broader discussion. This discussion may take one of two forms: (1) a more formal oral presentation (no more than 10 minutes) that engages the themes of the memo and poses a series of questions for discussion or (2) a mini-seminar led by the presenter (no more than 20 minutes) on the issues and questions raised by the memo. Presenters should let me know of their choice of format no later than 5.00pm on the Tuesday before the seminar. Presenters are welcome to bring handouts (no more than one double-sided page) to supplement their oral remarks, though this is not required. A sign-up sheet for both presentations and oral discussions will be available in the first week of class.

Students With Disabilities

Students who may need an academic accommodation based on the impact of a disability must initiate the request with the Student Disability Resource Center (SDRC) located within the Office of Accessible Education (OAE). SDRC staff will evaluate the request with required documentation, recommend reasonable accommodations, and prepare an Accommodation Letter for faculty dated in the current quarter in which the request is being made. Students should contact the SDRC as soon as possible since timely notice is needed to coordinate accommodations. The OAE is located at 563 Salvatierra Walk, phone (650) 723-1066.

Readings

The following books are available for purchase at the Stanford bookstore. Most of them are also available new and used at substantial discounts at various online retailers. An additional required reading for the first week will be posted on Coursework [C]. Students are responsible for tracking down supplemental readings.

Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (Hackett, 1994). ISBN: 0872201775.

John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government* (Hackett, 1980). ISBN: 0915144867.

John Locke, *A Letter Concerning Toleration* (Hackett, 1983). ISBN: 091514560X.

John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty and Other Essays* (Oxford University Press, 2008). ISBN: 0199535736.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Discourses and Other Early Political Writings* (Cambridge University Press, 1997). ISBN: 0521424453.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract and Other Later Political Writings* (Cambridge University Press, 1997). ISBN: 0521424461.

Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (Hackett, 1987). ISBN: 0872200205.

Karl Marx, *Selected Writings* (Hackett, 1994). ISBN: 0872202186.

Useful reference books: Students wanting a broad introduction to the specific thinkers covered in the course and/or the history of political thought in general might consider purchasing Alan Ryan's *On Politics: A History of Political Thought* (New York: Liveright, 2012). Those wanting more than a general introduction might consider one or both of the following: John Rawls, *Lectures on the History of Political Philosophy* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap/Harvard, 2007); Sheldon S. Wolin, *Politics and Vision: Continuity and Innovation in Western Political Thought*, expanded edition (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004).

A note on the weekly readings: From Week 2 onward, the focus of our class discussions will always be on primary texts (i.e. Hobbes, Locke, Mill, Rousseau, Burke, Marx). The supplemental readings (e.g. Skinner, Waldron, etc.) are not required as weekly reading, nor would it be feasible to do them on a weekly basis. They are there to point you to some important interpretive debates and conceptual issues in the primary texts and will therefore be useful starting points for your final papers.

Week 1

09/26: Introduction

Read: Alan Ryan, "Liberalism" [C]

Week 2

03/10: Hobbes, *Leviathan*

Read: Hobbes, *Leviathan*, TBA.

Reading questions:

1. Hobbes describes the argument that the state of nature is a state of war as an "inference, made from the passions." What does he mean by this? Which passion(s) in particular make(s) the state of nature a state of war? In what other ways (i.e. apart from this inference) does Hobbes support this conclusion? Can the argument stand without this inference?

2. What is Hobbes' conception of freedom? What role does this conception play in his political argument? What do you make of this conception of freedom? Discuss at least one argument in its favor and one against.
3. Consider the arguments that Hobbes makes in the assigned portions of Parts III and IV of *Leviathan*. To what extent can Hobbes be read as a defender of religious toleration? Discuss one argument in favor of this reading and one against.

Supplemental reading:

David Gauthier, *The Logic of Leviathan: The Moral and Political Theory of Thomas Hobbes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969).

Alan Ryan, "Hobbes, Toleration, and the Inner Life," in *The Nature of Political Theory*, eds. L. Siedentop and D. Miller (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), 197-218.

Quentin Skinner, *Visions of Politics*, vol. 3: Hobbes and Civil Science (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

Leo Strauss, *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes: Its Basis and Its Genesis* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952).

Week 3

10/10: Locke, *Second Treatise*

Read: Locke, *Second Treatise*, all.

Reading notes: Focus on ch. 1-9, 16-19 of *Second Treatise*.

Reading questions:

1. Locke argues that though the state of nature be a "state of liberty, yet it is not a state of licence...The state of nature has a law of nature to govern it." How do we apprehend what the laws of nature are? What barriers does Locke think exist to the apprehension and execution of the laws of nature? Critically evaluate Locke's answers to these questions.
2. Locke begins his argument on property with the premise (A) "God gave the world to men in common" and concludes that (B) vastly unequal property holdings are morally justified. How does he get from (A) to (B)? Critically evaluate Locke's argument on property and outline one objection to it.
3. Locke gives us an account of political obligation founded on consent. In the course of this argument, he draws a distinction between express and tacit consent. What counts as tacit consent, according to Locke? Why? What work is the concept of tacit consent doing in Locke's argument? Outline at least one objection to Locke's argument on tacit consent.

Supplemental reading:

David Armitage, "John Locke, Carolina, and the Two Treatises of Government," *Political Theory* 32, no. 5 (2004): 602-627.

Richard Ashcraft, *Revolutionary Politics and Locke's Two Treatises of Government* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986).

C.B. Macpherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism: Hobbes to Locke* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962), 194-262.

Jeremy Waldron, *God, Locke, and Equality: Christian Foundations in Locke's Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

Week 4**17/10: Locke, *Letter Concerning Toleration***

Read: John Locke, *Letter Concerning Toleration*, all.

Reading questions:

1. Locke's argument for toleration relies on a series of distinctions between the jurisdiction of, means available to, and effects of political and religious authority. What are these distinctions? What implications do they have for the exercise of political and religious power? Critically evaluate Locke's answers to these questions.
2. According to Locke, why do the bounds of toleration not extend to atheists or (quite likely) Catholics? Critically assess Locke's reasoning on these points.
3. Jeremy Waldron contends that a crucial part of Locke's case for toleration "depended on the Protestant importance he attached to sincere belief." What is Locke's understanding of the nature of belief? Is it plausible? [If you decide to tackle this question, it would be a good idea to have a look at the Waldron piece].

Supplemental reading:

Wendy Brown, *Regulating Aversion: Tolerance in the Age of Identity and Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 1-47.

Iris Creppell, "Locke on Toleration: The Transformation of Constraint," *Political Theory* 24, no. 2 (1996): 200-40.

Kirstie McClure, "Difference, Diversity, and the Limits of Toleration," *Political Theory* 18, no. 3 (1990): 361-391.

James Tully, "Introduction" to Hackett edition of *Letter Concerning Toleration*.

Jeremy Waldron, "Locke: toleration and the rationality of persecution," in *Justifying Toleration: Conceptual and Historical Perspectives*, ed. Susan Mendus (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 61-86.

Week 5**24/10: Mill, *On Liberty***

Read: John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*, all.

Reading questions:

1. Mill draws a sharp distinction between self-regarding and other-regarding acts. What is the essence of the distinction? What role does it play in the broader argument of *On Liberty*? Is the distinction sustainable? Clearly explain your reasoning.
2. Which kinds of speech does Mill suggest would be prohibited with the application of the harm principle (the "one very simple principle" *On Liberty* asserts and defends)? Which kinds of speech would be permitted? In your considered view, does the harm principle reach far enough in the area of speech?
3. Clearly lay out what you take to be Mill's account of human flourishing. What is required for human flourishing? What social and political conditions must be in place to allow for human flourishing? Critically evaluate Mill's answers to these questions.

Supplemental reading:

Elizabeth S. Anderson, "John Stuart Mill and Experiments in Living," *Ethics* 102, no. 1 (1991): 4-26.

J.M. Coetzee, "Taking Offense," in *Giving Offense: Essays on Censorship* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 1-33.

Joel Feinberg, "Profound Offense," in *Mill's On Liberty: Critical Essays*, ed. Gerald Dworkin (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 1997), 137-66.

Uday Singh Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire: A Study in Nineteenth-Century British Liberal Thought* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 46-114.

Alan Ryan, "Mill in a Liberal Landscape," in *The Cambridge Companion to Mill*, ed. John Skorupski (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997): 497-541.

James Fitzjames Stephen, *Liberty, Equality, Fraternity* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1993).

Week 6**31/10: Rousseau, *Discourse on the Origins of Inequality***

Read: Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*, all.

Reading notes: If you have time, it would be a good idea to start some of next week's reading this week.

Reading questions:

1. In the course of his discussion of natural pity, Rousseau observes: "It is reason that engenders amour proper, and reflection that reinforces it; reason that turns man back upon himself; reason that separates him from everything that troubles and afflicts him: It is Philosophy that isolates him; by means of Philosophy he secretly says, at the sight of a suffering man, perish if you wish, I am safe." Consider this statement in light of the rest of *Discourse on Inequality*. Is Rousseau an opponent of Enlightenment reason and rational thought? Clearly explain the basis for your assessment.
2. Rousseau begins the second part of *Discourse on Inequality* with this striking statement: "the first man who, having enclosed a piece of ground, to whom it occurred to say *this is mine*, and found people sufficiently simple to believe him, was the true founder of civil society." In what ways can Rousseau's argument be read as a critique of Locke's arguments about the moral foundations of property and/or political authority? Is this critique persuasive? Why or why not?
3. At an early stage in Rousseau's narrative, he refers to the conveniences procured during man's leisure time as "the first yoke which, without thinking of it, they imposed on themselves." What does Rousseau mean by this? And, more broadly, what are the connections he sees between inequality and freedom? Critically evaluate Rousseau's arguments on these points.

Supplemental reading:

Joshua Cohen, *Rousseau: A Free Community of Equals* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 97-130.

Frederick Neuhouser, *Rousseau's Theodicy of Self-Love: Evil, Rationality, and the Drive for Recognition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

John Rawls, *Lectures on the History of Political Philosophy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 191-213.

Week 7

07/11: Rousseau, *Social Contract*

Read: Rousseau, *Social Contract*, all.

Reading notes: Focus on bks. I-III, and bk. IV, ch. 1-2, 8 of *Social Contract*.

Reading questions:

1. Over the course of the *Social Contract*, Rousseau gives us several formulations of the general will. Outline three of these formulations and assess their consistency with one another. Defend what you take to be the most plausible formulation in light of Rousseau's broader project in the *Social Contract*.
2. Rousseau famously declares: "whoever refuses to obey the general will shall be constrained to do so by the entire body: which means nothing other than that he shall be forced to be free." What does Rousseau mean here? What does this statement reveal about his conception of political freedom? Outline one objection to this conception.
3. In Book 2, chapter 7, Rousseau introduces the figure of the legislator, who has "recourse to an authority of a different order, which might be able to rally without violence and persuade without convincing." What problems is the legislator meant to solve? What problems (if any) does this figure create, given Rousseau's broader project in the *Social Contract*?

Supplemental reading:

Joshua Cohen, *Rousseau: A Free Community of Equals* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 97-130.

Bonnie Honig, "Between Decision and Deliberation: Political Paradox and Democratic Theory," *American Political Science Review* 101, no. 1 (2007): 1-17.

Frederick Neuhouser, "Freedom, Dependence, and the General Will," *Philosophical Review* 102 (1993): 363-95.

John Rawls, *Lectures on the History of Political Philosophy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 214-250.

Week 8

14/11: Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*

Read: Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, 3-92, 147-51, 216-8.

Reading questions:

1. Burke declares that "government is not made in virtue of natural rights." Critical remarks about natural rights are peppered throughout *Reflections*. What do you take to be at the heart of Burke's critique of natural rights? Is his critique plausible?
2. We are now familiar with three versions of the social contract. Burke gives us an account of the social contract that is entirely different from those of Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau. Outline what you take to be the important features of the Burkean social contract. In what

ways can Burke's account be read as a critique of Locke and Rousseau in particular? Is this critique plausible?

3. Burke claims that the "barbarous philosophy" that inspired the French Revolutionaries leaves nothing "which engages the affections on the part of the commonwealth." What does he mean here? What role do the "affections" play in Burke's larger analysis? What (if anything) is gained by this attention to political affections?

Supplemental reading:

Don Herzog, "Puzzling Through Burke," *Political Theory* 19, no. 3 (1991): 336-363.

Connor Cruise O'Brien, *The Great Melody: A Thematic Biography of Edmund Burke* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

Daniel O'Neill, *The Burke-Wollstonecraft Debate: Savagery, Civilization, and Democracy* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007).

J.G.A. Pocock, "Introduction" to Hackett edition of *Reflections on the Revolution in France*.

Stephen K. White, *Edmund Burke: Modernity, Politics, and Aesthetics* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2002).

Weeks 9 and 10

21/11, 05/12: Marx, *Selected Writings*

Read: Karl Marx, *Selected Writings*, 1-26 ("On the Jewish Question"), 58-67 ("Alienated Labor"), 102-186 (selections from Part 1 of *The German Ideology*; *The Communist Manifesto*), 209-13 (Preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*), and 315-332 ("Critique of the Gotha Program").

Reading questions:

1. Do a close reading of the Preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*. What does the preface suggest about Marx's theory of history? What drives historical change? Clearly outline one way in which this account diverges from and one way in which it affirms those offered in *The German Ideology* and/or *The Communist Manifesto*.
2. Marx argues that the ideas that dominate in a given historical epoch "are nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relationships grasped as ideas, hence of the relationships which make the one class the ruling one and therefore the ideas of its domination." Why, according to Marx, is this the case? Critically assess his reasoning and consider the kinds of evidence that might be marshaled for and against his argument.
3. In "On the Jewish Question," Marx draws a contrast between political emancipation and human emancipation. What does he mean by these terms? What is his critique of political emancipation? Evaluate the persuasiveness of the critique.
4. To what extent can Marx be considered a normative theorist? Present and interpret textual evidence that may point to Marx's own normative commitments. Present and interpret textual evidence that may point to Marx's wariness about normative arguments. Evaluate the evidence on both sides of the question and indicate where you come down on the issue.
5. Consider Marx's remarks on labor and alienation in "Alienated Labor" and *The Communist Manifesto* in light of Locke's property argument from chapter 5 of the *Second Treatise*. On what do Locke and Marx agree? Where and why do they part company? Evaluate this divergence. Is Marx's position warranted? Why or why not?

Supplemental reading:

Shlomo Avineri, *The Social and Political Thought of Karl Marx* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968).

G.A. Cohen, *Karl Marx's Theory of History: A Defence*, expanded edition (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

Jon Elster, *Making Sense of Marx* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

Jonathan Wolff, *Why Read Marx Today?* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).

Allen W. Wood, *Karl Marx* (New York: Routledge, 2004).