

POLS 012: Modern Political Thought

Jonny Thakkar

**Fall 2017
MWF 11:30-12:20
Trotter 303**

**Office Hours: Mondays 4:00-6:00 in Trotter 319
jthakka1@swarthmore.edu**

Course Description

This course provides an introduction to some of the most important political philosophy of the last four hundred years or so. Most of the thinkers we will be studying wrote in times that were significantly different from our own, but they made arguments of such brilliance and force that they continue to shine a light on contemporary political life. Our goal will be to assess those arguments, and to bring them to bear on our own lives, without slipping into anachronism. With that in mind we will pay attention to the historical context of each work while also throwing its arguments into relief by considering them in light of later works that respond or react to them in fruitful ways. Topics to be considered include the nature of freedom, authority, equality, community and power; whether government should be limited and whether history has a direction; and how we should understand racial, sexual and class oppression. You should be aware that the readings for this course are often fairly long, and will sometimes be hard to comprehend on a first reading, whether linguistically or conceptually.

Course Objectives

The promise of political philosophy is to free us from received wisdom and open us up to a genuinely examined life. This course will help you develop your ability to make and evaluate arguments, both in writing and in conversation, and thereby help you think clearly and critically about politics and society. Like all historical courses, it will also orient you towards the contemporary world by giving you a better sense of how we got here—why our institutions are the way they are, for instance, and what role philosophical ideas played in that. Finally, the course will introduce you to a range of political positions-- from authoritarianism to libertarianism, socialism to conservatism, and so on—that will present powerful challenges to your existing beliefs and thereby force you to consider what you really believe and why.

Course Evaluation

| | |
|---------------|-----|
| Participation | 10% |
| 2 Papers | 60% |
| Final Exam | 30% |

Papers

Each student is required to write two papers of 8-10 pages (double-spaced, 12-point Times New Roman). You should hand in a printed copy of each paper at the start of class on the relevant day. Late work will be marked down by one full grade per day late, with the first day beginning immediately after the deadline, unless there is documentary evidence of an emergency or prior arrangements have been made due to exceptional circumstances. Please note that foreseeable workload crises due to midterms, sporting competitions, theatrical productions and so on do not count as exceptional circumstances at Swarthmore.

Final Exam

Each student is required to take the final examination, which is designed to test your comprehension of the material covered in class and in the readings. It will consist of a combination of short commentaries and essay questions.

Other Requirements

You should arrive at class having read and annotated the material, ready to ask at least one clearly formulated question and point to at least one problematic passage if called upon. During class you should take notes by hand, and at the end of each class you should make a note of anything that remains unclear to you. Please refrain from using mobile phones, computers and other gadgets during class. If you have any questions or concerns about the way class is being conducted, or if you would like to discuss the material further, please come to my office hours. Finally, please note that students found to have plagiarized work or otherwise cheated will fail the course. If you have any doubt as to what constitutes academic misconduct, please check with me or consult the College's guidelines.

Disability Accommodations

If you believe that you need accommodations for a disability, please contact the Office of Student Disability Services (Parrish 113W) or email studentdisabilityservices@swarthmore.edu to arrange an appointment to discuss your needs. As appropriate, the Office will issue students with documented disabilities a formal Accommodations Letter. Since accommodations require early planning and are not retroactive, please contact the Office of Student Disability Services as soon as possible. For details about the accommodations process, visit the Student Disability Service Website at <http://www.swarthmore.edu/academic-advising-support/welcome-to-student-disability-service>. You are also welcome to contact me privately to discuss your academic needs. However, all disability-related accommodations must be arranged through the Office of Student Disability Services.

Required Texts

Please bring a physical copy of the relevant readings to each class. Some readings (marked on the schedule with an asterisk) will be uploaded to Moodle, but most will be found in books. If at all possible, please buy the editions listed below. The College Bookstore should have them in stock.

Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (Hackett)
Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political* (University of Chicago Press)
John Locke, *The Second Treatise of Government* (Hackett)
Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (Oxford World's Classics)
Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Basic Political Writings* (Hackett)
Carol Pateman, *The Sexual Contract* (Stanford University Press)
Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents* (Norton)
Immanuel Kant, *Political Writings* (Cambridge)
G. W. F. Hegel, *Introduction to the Philosophy of History* (Hackett)
Richard Tucker (ed.), *The Marx-Engels Reader* (Norton)
W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (Amazon Classics)
Friedrich Nietzsche, *On The Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life* (Hackett)

Schedule

Part One: Freedom and Authority

- 9/4 Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, "Letter Dedicatory"; "The Introduction"; chs. 1-6
- 9/6 Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, chs. 10-16
- 9/8 RECAP/DISCUSSION
- 9/11 Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, chs. 17-21; 31, 32, 47; 'Review and Conclusion'
- 9/13 Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*; Leo Strauss, "Notes on Carl Schmitt"
- 9/15 RECAP/DISCUSSION
- 9/18 Isaiah Berlin, "Two Concepts of Liberty"*; Philip Pettit, "The Instability of Freedom as Non-Interference: The Case of Isaiah Berlin"*; Judith Shklar, "The Liberalism of Fear"*

Part Two: The Limits of Government

- 9/20 John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, chs. 1-5; David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, III.2.1-4*
- 9/22 RECAP/DISCUSSION
- 9/25 John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, chs. 6-10; David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, III.2.5-11*
- 9/27 John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, chs. 11-15; Alexander Hamilton and James Madison, *The Federalist Papers*, 9, 10, 47-51*; Letters of Centinel (1)*; Constitution of the United States of America*
- 9/29 RECAP/DISCUSSION
- 10/2 John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, chs. 16-19; John Rawls, "Civil Disobedience"*
- 10/4 Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State and Utopia*, ch.7 section 1 *; J.S. Mill, *Principles of Political Economy*, Book II, chs. 1-2*; PAPER TOPICS
- 10/6 RECAP/DISCUSSION (Student-led)
- 10/9 NO CLASS
- 10/11 Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, pp. 3-35, 43-56; 60-70
- 10/13 Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, pp. 73-99, 146-151, 217-218 & **FIRST PAPER DUE**

FALL BREAK

Part Three: Equality and Community

- 10/23 Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discourse on the Origins of Inequality*, Part One
- 10/25 Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discourse on the Origins of Inequality*, Part Two
- 10/27 RECAP/DISCUSSION
- 10/30 Carol Pateman, *The Sexual Contract*, chs. 1, 2, 8
- 11/1 Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*

- 11/3 RECAP/DISCUSSION
- 11/6 Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *On The Social Contract*, Books I-II
- 11/8 Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *On The Social Contract*, Books III-IV
- 11/10 RECAP/DISCUSSION
- 11/13 Immanuel Kant, “On The Proverb: That May Be True In Theory, But Is Of No Practical Use”, Section II, and “The Metaphysics of Morals”
- 11/15 John Rawls, “Justice as Fairness”*
- 11/17 RECAP/DISCUSSION

Part Four: History and Power

- 11/20 G. W. F. Hegel, *Introduction to the Philosophy of History*, 12-40
- 11/22 G. W. F. Hegel, *Introduction to the Philosophy of History*, 40-56
- 11/24 THANKSGIVING BREAK
- 11/27 Karl Marx, “Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts” (MER 70-101) and “On The Jewish Question” (26-52)
- 11/29 Karl Marx & Friedrich Engels, “The German Ideology” (MER 147-175; 189-200) and “Manifesto of the Communist Party” (MER 473-491)
- 12/1 RECAP/DISCUSSION & PAPER TOPICS
- 12/4 W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, Forethought & chs. 1-6
- 12/6 W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, chs. 10-14
- 12/8 RECAP/DISCUSSION
- 12/11 Friedrich Nietzsche, *On The Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life* & **SECOND PAPER DUE**
- TBA FINAL EXAM**