

Modern Political Theory

Professor Anthony Grasso
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Class Time: MW 12:30-1:50
Fine Arts 225
Office Hours: By appointment

This course is a survey of modern political philosophy, ranging from approximately the 17th through 20th centuries. It explores how thinkers like Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and Karl Marx posed revolutionary challenges to classical and medieval political philosophy. The course will explore famous theoretical and philosophical texts written by those scholars and others who critically reflected on long established norms and ideas in political philosophy and articulated new ideas celebrating scientific rationality, individualism, rights, liberty, and secularism in politics.

The course is designed to explore these modern trends in political theory. The course will thus address questions and themes like: What are the intellectual characteristics that designate modern political theory as “modern”? What is the relationship between politics, reason, and science? What is human nature? What is the relationship between the state and the individual? What is power, and how is it politically constructed and deployed? What is the appropriate scope, and what are the appropriate limits, of a citizen’s rights and obligations in modern political society? What do concepts like equality, liberty, freedom, democracy, and justice mean? How do modern political thinkers conceptualize and understand social difference, including along the dimensions of race, class, and gender? And how can canonic modern political theorists help us better understand the political world we live in?

This is a reading-intensive course, and reading political theory can be a challenge for those who are new to it. I encourage you to speak with me if you need help strategizing about to best navigate the course readings.

Course Grading Scale

	Letter Grade	Percentage	Interpretation
Excellent	A	89.5-100	Mastery of concepts. Can clearly and effectively apply concepts to new situations.
Above Average	B+	84.5 – 89.49	Good understanding of concepts. Acceptable foundation for future work.
	B	79.5 – 84.49	
Proficient	C+	74.5 – 79.49	Basic understanding. Limited foundation for future work.
	C	69.5 – 74.49	
Marginal	D	59.5-69.49	Weak understanding and foundation for future work.
Failure	F	<59.5	Clearly failed to demonstrate understanding. Deeply flawed or no foundation for future work.

Course Objectives

1. Learn what designates “modernity” in political theory.
2. Become familiar with the development of liberal political philosophy and other modern traditions in in political philosophy in relation to it.
3. Understand social contract theory, its strengths and limits, and what rights and obligations it imposes on the sovereign and citizen.
4. Use canonical texts in modern political philosophy to shed light on contemporary politics and think through political and social problems in our world.

Course Assignments and Grading

ASSIGNMENT	PERCENTAGE OF GRADE
Attendance/Participation	10%
Reading Journal Entries	15%
Midterm Exam	25%
Paper Proposal	5%
Paper First Draft	15%
Paper Final Draft	30%

Attendance/Participation (10%): The course will be a discussion-driven seminar, so all students are expected to participate in our discussions in ways that reflect a strong understanding of the course material. Come to class ready to provide a summary of the cases and express your opinions and thoughts on them. Know that I grade your participation from 0-10 each day. At the end of the semester I average your daily scores to determine your overall participation score (e.g. an average of 9.4/10 receives a 94%). Each student gets up to 2 unexcused absences free of penalty; all others must be excused. If the quality of our discussion falters, I will resort to alternative mechanisms for testing your comprehension, including more involved writing assignments or reading quizzes to gauge your understanding of the material.

Reading Journal Entries (15%): You will be required to do **TWELVE** low stakes reading journal entries throughout the semester in which you reflect on basic questions I pose to you about the readings for each lesson. I will create the reading journals for you individually on Canvas and will post the reading journal question(s) for each lesson on Canvas ahead of class. Know the following:

- I will post journal prompts for every lesson, but you choose the 12 you want to complete. If you want to do all 12 at the start of the semester, great. If you wait until the final 12 lessons of the term, that’s fine. Twelve entries are about one entry every other class session.
- The entries are due *before* class each day. To get full credit, I need to see the Canvas timestamp showing me that you posted the entry *prior* to class. If you post an entry about material after we cover it in class, you will only receive half credit for the entry.
- These are low-stakes entries, so do not go overboard. A thoughtful 3-sentence post trying to engage with the question and showing me that you read the material, even if you struggled to understand it, will earn 100% just the same as an essay-length entry.

- You can do additional entries to earn extra credit. Each extra post will earn a ½ point on to your overall journal entry score. You can earn up to 5 points max (10 extra posts). Extra credit posts must be submitted prior to class or else they will not count at all.

Midterm Exam 1: (25%): We will have one midterm exam on Wed., Mar. 8.

Final Paper (50%, in parts): Students will be required to submit a paper in which they use or respond to the arguments of philosophers we have read to make an original argument. The paper is submitted in stages, each constituting a portion of your grade:

- **Paper Proposal (5%):** A brief proposal for a paper topic (maximum one paragraph) is due on Monday, February 27.
- **First Draft (15%):** A first (rough) draft of your paper is due on Wednesday, April 12.
- **Final Paper (30%):** A final paper due at the end of the finals period on May 10.

The final paper will be 2,000-2,500 words. The minimum for your first draft is just 1,500 words.

Administrative Standards

Mask Mandate: To protect the health and well-being of all members of the University community, we will abide by any institutionally determined masking policies that may change throughout the semester.

Absences: If you are ill or experiencing symptoms of transmittable disease, please remain home and do not attend in-person class meetings. I just ask that you make a reasonable effort to contact me via email (agrasso@camden.rutgers.edu) if you anticipate missing class or were absent and that you make socially responsible choices if you are feeling ill. Students who are absent will have the opportunity to watch lecture recordings and makeup their quizzes. However, attendance does factor into your grade and is expected if you are healthy. If you miss class, email me and I will send you the recording of class, but this does not mean you can simply take the course online by choice. While I forgive up to 2 unexcused absences, if you are repeatedly absent and make no attempt to contact me or do not provide valid explanation upon request, I will penalize your grade and cease sending you lecture recordings.

Lateness: If you anticipate turning in an assignment late, email me and inform me when you anticipate turning it in. In the absence of extenuating circumstances, you will be deducted ten percent for every 24 hours the assignment is late. However, I am aware that unanticipated events can sometimes slow down progress and I am willing to show flexibility and understanding when it is warranted. I encourage you to speak with me if you need extra time on an assignment, and I will work to accommodate students when it is appropriate and needed.

Lecture Recordings: Lectures will be recorded and available for those who need to miss class. Again, please do not attend in-person classes if you are feeling ill.

Office Hours: Please email me to schedule an office hours visit. My regular office hours are by appointment. Email me ahead of time to schedule a time.

Makeup Exams: Make-up exams will only be offered at the discretion of the instructor and only in the event of a serious illness or major family emergency. It is the responsibility of the student to email the instructor well in advance of the exams to inform the instructor of any problems in taking the exam. While I will be understanding and flexible in understanding general absences, I will require some formal proof to schedule a make-up exam without penalty. If you cannot validate your reason, your make-up exam will be graded with a deduction.

Academic Integrity: All Rutgers students are expected to abide by the University's academic integrity standards. Each student should review the academic integrity standards, available on the Rutgers Academic Integrity website. For this class you may use any generally recognized style manual to format your citations (Chicago Manual of Style, MLA Style Guide, APA Style Guide). It is strongly suggested that you use Rutgers Library's RefWorks platform for citation. See the current Academic Integrity Policy here: <https://policies.rutgers.edu/10213-currentpdf>

Plagiarism: Academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. All source material **MUST** be cited when presenting someone's words or ideas. If you are ever unsure about citations, please speak to me. I would much rather answer your questions ahead of time rather than handle a plagiarism case.

Disabilities: Any student in need of classroom accommodations due to disabilities should contact the Coordinator of Disability Services as soon as possible: (856) 225-6442, Fax: (856) 225-6443 or at the Rutgers-Camden Learning Center, Armitage Hall, Room 231. **No accommodations can be made without the explicit approval of the Office of Disability Service.**

Learning Support: If you are having trouble with this course, I encourage you to reach out to me and to take advantage of the full range of programs and services available at Rutgers Camden to support your learning. Details may be found on the website of the Rutgers Camden Learning Center (<https://learn.camden.rutgers.edu/>).

Writing and Formatting: Format your writing assignments in typed in 12-point sized appropriate fonts. Papers should be double-spaced with standard margins. Citation format is your choice, as long as you remain consistent.

Respect: The foundation of learning is respect for diverse opinions. We may discuss some controversial issues and people throughout the course, and students are welcome to express their views and opinions in the discussion. To foster good discussions, it is essential that we respect each other's opinions and political views. The expectation is that you will listen and learn from each other and treat each other with the respect that you would expect yourself.

Readings and Class Prep: Please have all readings available to you during class meetings. It is very important to do these readings ahead of class and not just rely on me and your classmates to summarize the material. Reading political theory is difficult – please ask me if you need help – *but you can only form a true opinion on a thinker if you read their work yourself.* In this class, I ask you to put aside your own biases and the things you may have heard about these thinkers from secondhand sources before this class. It does not matter to me whether you like or dislike a given thinker, but if you never read them yourself and only feel that way because others have told you to feel that way, you do not have the right to say you have an “opinion” – you are just repeating someone else's.

Course Readings and Required Texts:

The following materials are required reading for the course. They are available at the bookstore and online at Amazon and other websites.

- Foucault, Michel. 1995. *Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Translated by Alan Sheridan. New York: Vintage Books. ISBN 978-0679752554
- Hobbes, Thomas. *Leviathan* (New York: Penguin Classics, 2017). ISBN 978-0141395098
- Locke, John. *Second Treatise on Government* (New York: Hackett Classics, 1980). ISBN 978-0915144860
- Mill, John Stuart. *On Liberty* (New York: Hackett Publishing, 1978). ISBN 978-0915144433
- Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. 2011. *Rousseau: The Basic Political Writings*. Translated by Donald A. Cress. Second Edition. Indianapolis: Hackett. ISBN 978-1603846738

Course Schedule

The course schedule is below. Readings that will be available on Canvas are specified, and others come from required course texts.

Wed., Jan.-18: Introduction

- Syllabus
- Nikki Usher, “How to Read Theory,” <<https://nikkiusher.medium.com/how-to-read-theory-f84cd75eb066>>

Mon., Jan. 23: Hobbes, *Leviathan*, I

- Introduction, Chapters 5-9

Wed., Jan. 25: Hobbes, *Leviathan*, II

- Chapters 13-16

Mon., Jan. 30: Hobbes, *Leviathan*, III

- Chapters 17-21

Wed., Feb. 1: Hobbes, *Leviathan*, IV

- Chapters 26-28, 30

Mon., Feb. 6: Locke, *Second Treatise*, I

- Chapters 1-6

Wed., Feb. 8: Locke, *Second Treatise*, II

- Chapters 7-13

Mon. Feb. 13: Locke, *Second Treatise*, III

- Chapters 14-19

Wed., Feb. 15: Rousseau, *The Second Discourse*, I

- Dedication, Preface, and Part I, 27-69

Mon., Feb. 20: Rousseau, *The Second Discourse*, II

- Part II, Notes, 69-120

Wed., Feb. 22: Rousseau, *On the Social Contract*

- Book I, 153-191

Mon. Feb. 27: Kant Enlightenment

- Immanuel Kant, “What Is Enlightenment?” **[Canvas]**
- Immanuel Kant, “Idea for a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Point of View” **[Canvas]**
- **Paper Proposal Due.**

Wed., Mar. 1: Marx I

- “Economic and Philosophic Principles,” (1844), selections [Canvas]

Mon., Mar. 6: Marx II

- *The Communist Manifesto* (1848) [Canvas]

Wed., Mar. 8: Midterm Exam

Mar. 13 and Mar. 15: No Class, Spring Break.

Mon., Mar. 20: Mill I

- *On Liberty* (1859), chapters 1-2

Wed., Mar 22: Mill II

- *On Liberty* (1859), chapters 3-5

Mon., Mar. 27: Race and Political Thought

- W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, forethought, chapter 1, 4-5 [Canvas]

Wed., Mar. 29: Sex and Political Thought

- Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, introduction, conclusion [Canvas]

Mon., Apr. 3: Contemporary Liberalism

- John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, pp. 3-17, 60-83, 136-142 [Canvas]

Wed., Apr. 5: Critiquing Modern Liberalism I

- Carole Pateman, *The Sexual Contract*, chapters 1-2 [Canvas]

Mon., Apr. 10: Critiquing Modern Liberalism II

- Charles Mills, *The Racial Contract*, Introduction and chapter 1 [Canvas]

Wed., Apr. 12: Rough Drafts Due. No Class.

Mon., Apr. 17: Foucault I, Torture

- *Discipline and Punish*, Part I, chapter 1, pp. 3-69

Wed., Apr. 19: Foucault II, Docile Bodies and the Means of Correct Training

- *Discipline and Punish*, Part III, chapter 1, pp. 135-194

Mon., Apr. 24: Foucault III, Panopticism

- *Discipline and Punish*, Part III, chapter 3, pp. 195-230

Wed., Apr. 26: **Paper Workshop.**

Mon., May 1: Course Conclusion.