

Political Philosophy: Hobbes to Nietzsche

This course will examine several leading works of political philosophy that have fundamentally influenced modern views regarding authority, legitimacy and justice. Our examination of these texts will focus on several key questions relating to the legitimacy of government institutions. A central theme of the course is the role of consent in justifying authority. Why should we believe that the legitimacy of political power does derive from the consent of the governed? Is the average citizen, in fact, well qualified to evaluate the design and operations of political institutions? And what counts as consent? Has anyone alive today consented to the authority of the U.S. Constitution? Should persons or groups opposed to a constitutional amendment be considered to consent to the provision if it is adopted despite their opposition? Finally, are political acts by definition illegitimate if we can demonstrate that the governed would not have consented to those acts? Does this mean that unpopular Supreme Court decisions lack legitimacy?

The course will focus on key texts of the social contract tradition: the major works of Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau. Social contract theory, which argues for the centrality of consent in constituting legitimate government, significantly influenced the thought of the American founders and the drafters of the Constitution. After examining the classic texts of social contract theory, we will discuss two influential critiques. The Marxist critique attempts to replace traditional concerns regarding political legitimacy with a focus on political economy, while Nietzsche's critique rejects the view that political institutions are appropriately viewed as legitimate or rational.

These texts are available at the University Bookstore:

Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. Edwin Curley (Hackett)

John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, ed. Peter Laslett (Cambridge University Press)

Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *First and Second Discourses*, ed. Roger D. Masters (St. Martin's Press)

Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *On the Social Contract*, ed. Roger D. Masters (St. Martin's Press)

Karl Marx, *Selected Writings*, ed. Lawrence H. Simon (Hackett)

Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, ed. Keith Ansell-Pearson (Cambridge University Press)

Assignments

I. Hobbes

Tuesday, August 18
Introduction

Thursday, August 20
Leviathan: pp.1-11; 27-37 (Letter Dedicatory, Introduction, chapters 1, 2, 6, 7)

Tuesday, August 25
Leviathan: pp. 47-63 (skim 64-74) (chapters 9-13)

What are the political implications of Hobbes' claim that "no discourse whatsoever can end in absolute knowledge of fact" (p. 35)? Does the study of political philosophy produce absolute or conditional knowledge? Does Hobbes' account of human inclinations (ch. xi) suggest that "living together in peace and unity" (p. 57) is a feasible goal? What is the purpose of religion in Hobbesian society?

Thursday, August 27
Leviathan: 74-100 (chapters 14-16)

What are the social consequences of a state of war? If the "pleasures of the mind" include benevolence (p. 30), can Hobbes be justified in claiming that men "without a common power to keep them in awe" (p. 76) must necessarily be in a condition of war? What could motivate Hobbesian agents to renounce natural rights in order to achieve collective security? If it is "impossible that the same things should always cause in [man] the same appetites and aversions" (p. 28), how generally can Hobbes' general precepts of reason apply? What is Hobbes' response to the fool (p. 90)? Is this response persuasive?

Tuesday, September 1
Leviathan: 101-118, 127-136 (skim 118-127) (chapters 16-19)

Why can't the sovereign forfeit power? Why is sovereignty acquired by force legitimate? Why is the king whose power is limited "not sovereign" (p. 123)? How are liberty and necessity consistent?

Thursday, September 3
Leviathan: 136-145, 210-233 (chapters 21, 29, 30)

Why does Hobbes argue that "nothing the sovereign representative can do to the subject...can properly be called injustice" (p. 138)? Why is a member of a commonwealth obligated to obey civil law? What is the status of a law of nature in an established commonwealth? Is Hobbes persuasive in arguing that the exercise of independent moral judgment by the individual

necessarily weakens a commonwealth? How conducive to social stability is Hobbes' requirement that the sovereign must be exempt from civil law?

Tuesday, September 8

Leviathan: 219-233 (chapter 30)

What is the overriding duty of the sovereign? Why does Hobbes argue that the laws must be administered equally to all members of society (p. 226)? What is Hobbes's view of taxation? Why does Hobbes argue that the poor should be provided for by the laws of the commonwealth (p. 228)?

Thursday, September 10

Leviathan: 233-244, 489-498, (skin 435-477) (chapter 31, *Review and Conclusion*) (skim chapters 45-46)

Does Hobbes justify the claim that the sovereign must possess final authority over the content of religious doctrine (see pp. 242-243)? How can Hobbes justify the claim that "every man is bound by nature...to protect in war the authority" of the sovereign (p. 490)? (Remember that no person can surrender her right of self-preservation. See p. 82.)

II. *Locke*

Tuesday, September 15

Introduction to Locke

Thursday, September 17

Second Treatise: 137-139, 267-285, Preface, Treatise II: chapters 1-4

How does Locke define political power? How would Locke respond to Hobbes's argument that the power of the sovereign must be absolute? Does self-preservation follow from rational choice, inclination, or moral judgment? Why does Locke argue that absolute monarchy is inconsistent with civil society?

Tuesday, September 22

Review

Thursday, September 24—FIRST PAPER DUE

Second Treatise: 285-302, chapter 5

What motivates the state of war in Locke's state of nature? Do Hobbes and Locke agree or disagree on this issue (the motivation that leads to war in nature)? How do their respective views on this issue affect their accounts of the sovereign whose purpose is to resolve the problems found in the state of nature?

Tuesday, September 29

Second Treatise: 318-335, 345-349 (skim 335-345), chapters 7-8, (skim paragraphs 103-112)

Suppose that "there are no instances to be found...[of men] that met together...and set up a government." (S100, p. 333) Is this an interesting objection to Locke's argument? If not, does Locke's response explain why not?

Thursday, October 1

Second Treatise: 350-374, chapters 9-13

What is the basis of the people's right "to remove or alter the legislative [branch of government]" (S149)? What is the political significance of the king's authority to assemble and dismiss the legislature (Ch. XIII)? What justifies the executive's unilateral authority (prerogative) "to mitigate the severity of the law" (p. 375)?

Tuesday, October 6

Second Treatise: 384-405, chapters 16-18

What power does a successful conqueror have over the subdued? Can a conqueror gain absolute power by conquest? Is Locke more persuasive than Hobbes on this issue?

Thursday, October 8

Second Treatise: 406-428, chapter 19

When is a government dissolved? What powers do the people exercise when the government does dissolve?

III. Rousseau

Tuesday, October 13

Second Discourse: 91-7, 101-31

What is the purpose of Rousseau's hypothetical history of human development? Is Rousseau's claim that "progress of the mind has been precisely proportioned to the needs that peoples had received from nature" (2nd Disc 116) consistent with the arguments of the *First Discourse*?

Thursday, October 15

Second Discourse: 131-134, 141-150, (156-161), 168-181

Does Rousseau believe (with Hobbes) that notions of justice and injustice are merely socially constructed? Does Rousseau believe that men are unequal by nature? What is the significance

of Rousseau's speculations about a body politic established "as a true contract between the people and the chiefs it chooses for itself" (pp. 168-171)? Could such a body politic possibly exist in the social world Rousseau has described?

Tuesday, October 20
Social Contract: 46-77

Does Rousseau still believe that progress has merely corrupted man? When is man "truly" free (see 56)? How can Rousseau argue against total alienation of rights to a king, but in favor of total alienation of rights to "the whole community"? How does Rousseau's account of sovereignty assure freedom of the subjects? What standard must just legislation satisfy? What forms of sovereignty can be legitimate?

Thursday, October 22
Social Contract: 78-112

Why does Rousseau's account of legitimate government require a "legislator"? What is the difference between the will of all and the general will? Why is Rousseau opposed to "true democracy"? How does he characterize his own account of legitimate government?

Tuesday, October 27
Social Contract: 78-112, 121-132

What is the most serious defect of dictatorship? How do holdovers from Rousseau's moral psychology in the *Second Discourse* help to explain Rousseau's problematic arguments about censorship and civil religion?

IV. Marx

Thursday, October 29
The Communist Manifesto: 158-86

What is Marx's principal criticism of the bourgeois economy? Is Marx entirely critical of capitalism? What historical mechanism enabled capitalism to displace feudalism? What historical mechanism will enable communism to displace capitalism? Does Marx view capitalism as an efficient form of economic activity?

Tuesday, November 3
The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte: 188-208
Critique of the Gotha Program: 316-32

Why does the failure of the 1848 Paris revolution concern Marx? Why, according to Marx, did

the revolution fail? Why did the rural proletariat support Louis Bonaparte? Why did the bourgeois and the aristocrats abandon Louis Philippe? What, according to Marx, was the principal failing of the SDAP program (see 329)? How does this argument contradict traditional understandings of Marx?

V. Kant

Thursday, November 5
Handout

What is the distinction between analytic and synthetic judgments? Between *a priori* and *a posteriori* judgments? What does it mean to say that a moral judgment is a synthetic *a priori* judgment?

Tuesday, November 10
Review

Thursday, November 12—SECOND PAPER DUE
Handout

Why does Kant argue that a moral judgment must be independent of the inclinations? What does it mean to say that a moral judgment must have the form of law? When, according to Kant, is a judgment free?

V. Nietzsche

Tuesday, November 17
On the Genealogy of Morality: 3-37

Who are “[t]hese English psychologists” (p. 11)? What do they argue, and why are their views relevant to a genealogy of morals? What is the principal defect of their views (pp. 12-13)? What is “unhealthy” about “the clerical caste” (16-18)? Is their influence always unhealthy (see 18)? What motivation grounds “the slaves’ revolt”? Against whom are they revolting? What is the chief danger associated with “the stunting and levelling of European man” (p. 27)? Is nihilism an unqualified evil?

Thursday, November 19
On the Genealogy of Morality: 72-97, 98-117 (skim)

What are the “optimum conditions” for the ascetic priest (84-85)? What is the role of suffering in the ascetic view (p. 88)? How does Nietzsche explain the ascendance of the ascetic ideal (pp. 88-89, 91)? What is Nietzsche’s principal criticism of the ascetic ideal (p. 91)? Why is the

ascetic ideal a threat to civilized life (pp. 94-97)? What is Nietzsche's solution (p. 97)?

Requirements

There are three course requirements. First, there will be three papers. Second, there will be four in-class quizzes. Computers and phones may not be used during the quizzes. The third requirement is engaged participation.

The course syllabus is a general plan for the course; deviations announced to the class by the instructor may be necessary.

Grades

The three papers will constitute 80% of the course grade. The quizzes will count for 20%. Any semester average falling between two letter grades will be resolved according to the quality of class participation. The instructor reserves the right to raise the letter grades of students who have participated exceptionally well over the course of the semester. Grades are calculated on the 4-point scale. A makeup quiz will be scheduled at the end of the semester for students who have missed one or more quizzes.

Attendance is mandatory, and the instructor reserves the right to make up to a 10-20 percent reduction in the overall course grade in the case of poor attendance. **Three unexcused absences will lead to a mandatory grade reduction. Five unexcused absences will lead to a mandatory F in the course.**

The instructor reserves the right to lower the letter grades of students whose behavior in class falls below the standards of civility and respect for fellow students expected of UGA students.

Finally, you are bound by the University's conduct regulations concerning academic honesty. In the context of this course, the inaccurate presentation of written materials as your original work would constitute academic dishonesty. **In particular, any submitted written work written in substantial part by ChatGPT or any other AI app will receive an F.** All academic work must meet the standards contained in a culture of honesty. Students are responsible for informing themselves about those standards before performing any academic work.