

## POLSCI 251 : Modern Political Philosophy

### INFO

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**Instructor:** Joel Alden Schlosser

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**Dates:** Winter Term 2010

**Times:** T and TH 1:15 – 3 PM

**Place:** CMC 209

**Office hours:** W 3 – 5 PM and by appointment

### COURSE DESCRIPTION

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What is the state? What are the origins of the concept? Could or should human beings live without the state? Would we possess more or less freedom with or without the state? Modern political philosophy initiated many of the ways of thinking about political life and, in particular, the state and freedom that remain salient today: balancing individuality and community; negotiating liberty and equality; and questioning the relationship of politics and morality. In this course we will focus on the Continental tradition of modern political philosophy from Kant to Hegel to Marx, which has had particular influence on politics and culture in Europe, Latin America, and China.

### OBJECTIVES

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The primary objective of this course is for you to learn **how to think like a political theorist**. This includes the ability to do the following things and to do them well:

- Understand the arguments of modern political philosophy including key arguments, concepts, and ambiguities. (See the terms listed above.)
- Compare and contrast the differences within and among positions in this period, developing connections as well as identifying disagreements.
- Analyze the strengths and weaknesses of arguments in relation to each other and from the perspective of contemporary political and ethical questions.
- Construct and evaluate your own political commitments, as well as possible critiques of these positions, by creating a critical review of some contemporary use of modern political philosophy and its arguments.

### COURSE NARRATIVE

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In this course, you will learn how to think well about thinkers such as Kant, Hegel, and Marx as well as concepts such as the state, autonomy, morality, labor, and excellence both by reading about these things but even more importantly, by *writing* about them. While these thinkers and texts will serve as our starting points, your responses to them, disagreements with them, thoughts inspired by them,

and arguments articulated in conversation with them – in a word, your *writing* – will structure our activities throughout the semester. Biweekly reflection papers will form the basis of our conversations about the arguments and their relevance today; this writing will also serve as a site for developing your own approaches that you will use in the major assignment of the course (described below). Throughout the semester we will create a community of discourse by publicly reading our writing together in the form of seminar discussions, class workshops, and small group activities, all the while trying to discover how to articulate the nuances and complexities of modern political philosophy while also bringing this tradition's insights (and ours) to bear on the contemporary world around us.

Our work together will culminate with a **critical review**. For this assignment, you will read a contemporary work of political theory that draws on modern political philosophy and write a review that discusses the book and assesses its particular uses of the figures from our course. (More specific details for the assignment are below.) This assignment introduces you to an important activity in academic political theory as well as an intellectual work shared by many different fields. You will complete stages of this assignment during the term and we will spend portions of class every few weeks working on these parts through workshops and other activities. At the end of the course each of you will present your work to the class.

## ASSIGNMENTS AND ACTIVITIES

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This is an intensive course: we will read some of the most difficult philosophy ever written and try not only to understand its arguments but to take them up on our own terms. Expect to spend at least **2 – 3 hours per class reading** and **1 – 2 hours per class writing**. If you find yourself needing much more time than this, talk to me about how you can prepare more efficiently. That said, given the complexity of the material, I cannot stress enough the need for thorough and undistracted preparation before every class. You owe it to these thinkers to take your time! Depending on your own speed and preferences, you may also allot your preparation time to taking notes on the readings, meeting with other students to discuss the material, or preparing in other collaborative ways. I strongly encourage you to meet regularly with other students from the class. Even informal meetings over dinner after class will significantly help both your writing and your thinking about justice.

Specific activities and assignments will run as follows:

1. **Participation.** Whether discussing Hegel, politics, our writing, or even the weather, I expect you to participate with vim and vigor. Participation includes active listening as well as speaking. Additionally, quality counts over quantity. The more time you spend outside class reading and reflecting, the better our discussions in class. Thus participation will include consistent attendance, preparedness, thoughtful engagement (both listening and speaking) in classroom activities, and timely responses to your peers' writing.

**\*IMPORTANT\*** Many of our discussions in class will involve sensitive issues such as race, class, gender, and sexuality. It is of the utmost importance that we maintain an environment of respect and openness conducive to everyone's full and honest participation. Each individual student's success in the course depends on the success of the class as a whole; we cannot expect to discuss these issues thoughtfully and with sophistication unless all students feel that they can contribute to the conversation.

2. **Response papers.** We will use part of every class meeting to discuss the previous day's response papers and comments. The discussion forum in Moodle will create another community of discourse where we can interrogate the text and its arguments, link its concerns to our own, and discuss our ideas and confusions with other students. Each of you will post once for every thinker we read and add a comment to another student's post on every other day.
3. **Critical review.** Your critical review will form the major project for the course and will give you the opportunity to demonstrate your prowess as an intellectual writer and a creative thinker. We will discuss this writing throughout the semester and spend significant time revising our ideas and our writing as we work together on them.

## REQUIRED TEXTS

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The following texts may be purchased at the Carleton Bookstore, or elsewhere as may be your preference. **Please purchase only the editions indicated, as we will require identical translations in class.** I may also place additional readings on Moodle (M) or Closed Reserve (CR).

- Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. *The Basic Political Writings*. Hackett, 1987.
  - Kant, Immanuel. *Political Writings*. Cambridge, 1991.
  - Hegel, G.W.F. *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*. Cambridge, 1991.
  - Marx, Karl and Friedrich Engels. *The Marx-Engels Reader*. Second Edition. Norton. 1978.
  - Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Genealogy of Morality*. Cambridge, 2006.
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## EVALUATION

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The following is a list of requirements and means of evaluation:

<i>Task</i>	<i>Due Date</i>	<i>Percentage of grade</i>
1. Participation (class discussion, other kinds of participation, and attendance)	Ongoing	20%
2. Response papers (posted on discussion board; five over semester)	Ongoing	20%
3. Comments on discussion board	Ongoing	10%
4. Critical Review: Presentation and Final Draft	Due at end of assigned exam period.	50%

NOTE: Components of this assignment are due during the course of the semester. You must submit all of these parts in order before earning credit for the final draft

## COURSE POLICIES

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**ATTENDANCE:** Our class activities form a vital part of this course. Whether excused or not, each absence will lower your participation grade by 10% unless made up with the submission of an extra response paper to the discussion board on the material for the next day's course. Excessive tardiness will lower your participation grade by 5%.

**MISSING AND LATE ASSIGNMENTS:** Assignments are due at the specified times. Each day an assignment is late I will deduct one letter grade. Missing assignments will receive no credit.

**INTEGRITY:** I will report all cheating, plagiarism, and academic misconduct immediately to the College. Please also note Carleton College's policy on Academic Integrity and its Community Standards as detailed at [http://apps.carleton.edu/campus/dos/handbook/policies/?policy\\_id=6131](http://apps.carleton.edu/campus/dos/handbook/policies/?policy_id=6131).

**SUPPORT:** Please make use of the Write Place as well as other Academic Services the College has to offer. See the list of support services at <http://www.carleton.edu/student/support/index.html>.

**LAPTOPS:** Because of extreme potential for distraction, **no laptops are allowed in class**. If you have medical reasons for needing a laptop, please discuss this with me outside of class.

## ASSIGNMENT: RESPONSE PAPERS AND COMMENTS

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Throughout the term, our course's discussion board will provide a virtual extension for our conversations with the texts of modern political philosophy. Prior to every class meeting, 4 – 5 students from our class will write a post and publish it on the discussion board. Every student who does not post that day should read each of these posts carefully and write a comment in response to at least one of the posts before coming to class.

In these posts, I would like you to do three things:

1. Give a brief account of the reading that focuses on what you consider one or two important themes or passages of the text. As you consider these key themes, reflect not only on what is being said but also on how it is being said and how it might speak to other parts of what we have read or written in the course.
2. Connect your account of the text to something from our contemporary political life. To do this, you may insert a link to an example from a source and then explain the connection between the readings and the present example. Reputable sources might include regular newspaper stories but also blogs, art reviews, even YouTube videos. What is important is that whatever you choose speaks to a broader trend or issue; you want to avoid making entirely subjective connections. But I encourage creativity – this is your chance to try out the relevance of our readings as well as prepare to engage a particular text for your critical review – you may, naturally, introduce these texts as contemporary examples.
3. Ask two or three open-ended questions to provoke discussion. (You want to generate comments.)

The best response papers will connect these three elements into a clear, short essay running 300 – 400 words. Think of these short papers as your opportunity to test potential ideas and connections for your critical review and ask questions that you would like help considering or exploring. We will usually use these responses as the basis for our discussions in each class period, so you might have the chance to enlist the entire class in thinking about your future writing. **Response papers are due by 5 PM on the day before class.**

When you do not write an assigned post, you will need to write at least one comment (running 40 – 100 words) on someone else's post. Try to respond directly to one or more of the questions in the post or to the previous commenter. Ideally, the discussion board will create a virtual and less formal discussion space where we can feel comfortable trying out new ideas and connections. For this reason, please try to participate thoughtfully and respectfully in the conversation. **Comments are due by 10 AM on the day of class.**

**Purpose:** Writing these posts will help you practice two important skills in our course: first, you will practice “coming to terms,” the first step of all intellectual work where you attempt to explain and assess another thinker's approach. Second, you will also practice taking your own approach by experimenting with how you can use the thinkers of the course to think about some aspect of political life today. Thus the overarching goal of this assignment lies in giving you a place to hone two of the most important skills for clear and effective writing and thinking.

## ASSIGNMENT: CRITICAL REVIEW

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Your assignment is to write a critical assessment of a recent work of political theory in which you demonstrate your ability to evaluate an argument using modern political philosophy as well as advance your own position drawing from these resources. Your paper should be **no more than 15 pages** (12-pt font, 1 inch margins). Critical reviews are designed to explain the argument of a book (or books), assessing its uses and limits while also offering alternatives. Academics usually read these reviews, but you should write so that an intelligent layperson could understand you. While reviews can vary in format, I would like you to use the following in your own reviews:

I. Introduction: This should be brief and to the point. It should state your approach and argument (the thesis you will develop and support).

II. Background: This section will discuss the political, social, legal, or cultural contextual factors that you think will help to illuminate the problems or questions to which this book is responding. It should conclude by telling us how the writer came to write the book she or he did – previous books and studies, the particulars of an approach, the occasion, and so forth. (For this section you will need to research the particular writer in question and her or his previous books as well as other critical responses to this work.)

III. Analysis of the Argument: This section will take us carefully, in a step-by-step analysis, through the book's argument. Here you will try to give a concise yet precise account of what this book is about, saving the assessment for Section IV. You may ignore or only touch on the minor or technical issues; focus on the important ones. (This section should deal mostly with the particular book being reviewed, although you may wish to use some of the author's previous work or reviews of that work to explain knotty sections.)

IV. Assessment: This section should discuss the use and/or abuse of modern political philosophy by the author under scrutiny. Here you should display the knowledge you have accrued during the course and assess how the book appropriates these sources. In other words, in this section you will “strut your stuff” by showing your audience the depth and intelligence of your training and how this helps us better understand a particular problem in contemporary political thought and practice.

V. Conclusion: Your conclusion should clarify what you wish your reader to take from the review as well as what further questions or issues arise from the work you have done. You need not answer these questions; think of your review as further contributing to the discussion we have begun in the course and preparing all of us for better, more-informed conversation about political life in the future.

You will turn in sections of the review to me for comment as indicated on the syllabus. I also strongly recommend that you meet with other students to discuss your research or read drafts. We will use our final week of class to present our reviews-in-progress to the class. You will then revise the final draft during reading days and submit a polished critical review by the end of our designated exam time.

Documenting sources: I expect you to do a **significant** amount of research on your case. A thoroughly researched paper will rely on many sources, drawing on both books and periodicals. Your bibliography should demonstrate that you have explored the **best** scholarship on the subject (which will typically mean that you should not rely on Internet sources, unless you can make the case that they are reliable and respected). You should cite your sources; the conventions of political theory scholarship demand that you carefully document your factual assertions. *PLEASE NOTE:* You should carefully document your sources on **all** drafts that you submit.

**Suggested books for Critical Review.** I suggest that within the first two weeks of class you choose your particular book, begin reading it, and start researching other sources related to it. You will probably want to order your own personal copy of the book and that can take time, so please choose early. You may choose a book not on this list; just clear it with me first.

I. Books “using” thinkers from our course:

Benjamin Barber, *Strong Democracy* (Rousseau)  
Seyla Benhabib, *Another Cosmopolitanism* (Kant, Nietzsche)  
G.A. Cohen, *If You're an Egalitarian, How Come You're So Rich?* (Marx)  
William Connolly, *Pluralism* (Nietzsche)  
Juergen Habermas, *The Inclusion of the Other* (Kant)  
Juergen Habermas, *The Divided West* (Kant)  
David Harvey, *A Short History of Neoliberalism* (Marx)  
Bonnie Honig, *Democracy and the Foreigner* (Rousseau, Nietzsche)  
Axel Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition* (Hegel)  
Axel Honneth and Nancy Fraser, *Redistribution or Recognition* (Hegel, Marx)  
Sankar Muthu, *Enlightenment Against Empire* (Rousseau, Kant)  
John Rawls, *The Law of Peoples* (Kant)  
Michael Steinberg, *The Fiction of a Thinkable World* (Hegel)  
Charles Taylor, *Ethics of Authenticity* (Hegel)  
Cornel West, *The Ethical Dimensions of Marxist Thought* (Marx)

II. Books that ignore (for the most part) thinkers from our course, but could use some interrogation:

Mark Lilla, *The Stillborn God* (on religion and politics)  
Martha Nussbaum, *Frontiers of Justice: Disability, Nationality, Species Membership* (Criticizing Rawls)  
Michael Sandel, *Justice: What's the Right Thing to Do?* (Criticizing Rawls)  
Amartya Sen, *The Idea of Justice* (Criticizing Rawls)  
Iris Marion Young, *Inclusion and Democracy* (Criticizing Rawls)

III. Directors and novelists that might intersect with thinkers from our course (suggestions welcome)

## COURSE SCHEDULE

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Date	Topic	To be completed before class:
01-05	Introductions, objectives for the course, discussion of questions of modern political philosophy	Kant, "What is Enlightenment?" *Also read syllabus thoroughly*
01-07	Justifying the state: Rousseau's <i>On the Social Contract</i>	Rousseau, <i>Basic Political Writings</i> : "On the Social Contract," Books I and II
01-12	Rousseau II	"On the Social Contract," Books III and IV
01-14	Toward a cosmopolitan modernity: Kant's political writings.	Kant, <i>Political Writings</i> : "Idea for a Universal History," "This May be True in Theory but it Does Not Apply in Practice"  *PAPER TOPIC AND PRELIMINARY BIBLIOGRAPHY (>10 SOURCES) (emailed to Joel by 5 PM, Monday 1/18*
01-19	Kant II	"Perpetual Peace"
01-21	Kant III	"The Metaphysics of Morals" and "The Contest of Faculties" (selections)
01-26	Freedom and the State: Hegel as the apotheosis of modernity.	Hegel, <i>Elements of the Philosophy of Right</i> (selections)
01-28	Hegel II	Hegel, <i>Elements of the Philosophy of Right</i> (selections)
02-02	Hegel III	Hegel, <i>Elements of the Philosophy of Right</i> (selections)
02-04	Hegel IV	Hegel, <i>Elements of the Philosophy of Right</i> (selections)  *CRITICAL REVIEW BACKGROUND SECTION AND OUTLINE OF ANALYSIS DUE* ( <i>properly documented</i> and with preliminary bibliography, emailed to Joel by 5 PM Friday 2/5)
02-09	Questioning the state: Marx's radical critique.	Marx and Engels, <i>The Marx-Engels Reader</i> : "On the Jewish Question,"

		“Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s <i>Philosophy of Right</i> : Introduction” and “Theses on Feuerbach”
02-11	Marx II	Marx, “Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts,” “On the German Ideology” (selections)
02-16	Marx III	Marx, “Manifesto of the Communist Party”
02-18	Marx IV	Engels, “Speech at the Graveside of Karl Marx” and “Socialism: Utopian and Scientific”
02-23	Beyond modernity: Nietzsche as the end and the beginning.	Nietzsche, <i>On the Genealogy of Morality</i> : Preface and First Essay
02-25	Nietzsche II	Second Essay
		*REVISED BACKGROUND SECTION, ANALYSIS SECTION, AND OUTLINE OF ASSESSMENT DUE* ( <i>properly documented</i> and with bibliography, emailed to Joel by 5 PM Friday 2/26)
03-02	Nietzsche III	Third Essay
03-04	Critical Review Presentations	
03-09	Critical Review Presentations	