

Modern Political Thought
POL ####
Syllabus

Date/time of class meetings
Location of class meetings

Instructor: Be Stone
Email: estone@gradcenter.cuny.edu
Office Hours: dates/times

Course Description and Learning Objectives

This course is a survey of Modern Political Thought (16th century–19th century) closely engaging five political thinkers: Machiavelli, Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, and Marx. We will critically read these classic texts in two ways. First, we will consider what “modernity” means historically and theoretically; and interrogate practices and theories of exclusion and violence that seek to grant only some subjects access to the presumed progress of “modernity.” Second, we will analyze these texts for the discourses of race and gender they produce, both explicitly and tacitly. Aiding us in this aim will be contemporary readings of these theorists’ works. We will consider how the work of each thinker bears on the following questions:

- What is power and how is it deployed?
- What is human nature?
- What is freedom and how does it relate to the state?
- What are the core modern political values?
- In what ways can modern political thought enrich our understanding of contemporary politics?

Upon completion of this course, students will:

- Develop a working knowledge of the modern theoretical-political tradition.
- Improve skills in reading and comprehending theoretical and historical texts.
- Improve oral communication skills through class discussions.
- Write clear, well-argued expository analysis dealing with political questions and concepts.
- Think critically and inquisitively, and develop a sense of the political theory “canon” as a terrain of contested interpretation.
- Think systematically and analytically about one’s own political beliefs.

Texts

You do not need to buy a textbook for this class. All of the readings are available on Blackboard. **You are required to bring a copy of the readings to each class.** It is preferred that you print out hard copies of the readings, but you may also bring a tablet or laptop to class for accessing them. If it becomes clear that you are using your tablet or laptop for something other than accessing the readings, I reserve the right to change this policy. **NO CELLPHONES in the classroom.**

Grading & Class Requirements

Your grade is based on the five requirements for this course:

1. Class Participation (10% of class grade)

- Participation in class discussion is a critical part of the learning process. You are expected to come to every class having read all of the readings, prepared to contribute to class discussion and participate in class activities.
- If you miss class, it is your responsibility to get notes and any assignments from a classmate.
- You are required to bring a printed or electronic copy of all the readings and your reading response paper to each class. Failure to do so will negatively affect your grade.

2. Weekly Reading Responses (20% of class grade)

- To foster your thinking outside of class and to facilitate discussion in class you are required to submit weekly reading response papers. Response papers should be between 400–500 words in length and must include four parts. See the handout (available on Blackboard) for details.
- Unless otherwise noted, reading responses are due via Blackboard at TIME/DATE before class.
- You are required to bring a printed or electronic copy of your response paper to class. Failure to do so will negatively affect your grade.

3. Discussant Role (20% of class grade)

- You will be asked to sign up for **TWO** readings for which you will serve as the discussant. The role of the discussant is to briefly present a reading, offer critique, and raise questions to facilitate discussion. You will be asked to submit the outline/notes of your presentation prior to class. Specific guidelines can be found on Blackboard.

4. Short Essay Assignment (20% of class grade)

- You will be responsible for writing a 4–6-page essay on a prompt assigned in advance. This essay will allow you to demonstrate more in-depth knowledge on a political concept discussed the course. A rubric will be distributed with the prompt.

5. Final Paper Proposal (30% of class grade)

- In lieu of writing a final research paper, you will instead be writing a research paper proposal (approximately 8 pages) as though you are pitching your paper to a conference or a journal for presentation or publication. The purpose of this assignment is to allow you to begin exploring an issue area that interests you as well as to practice expressing your ideas in a concise and convincing way. A handout will be provided detailing the requirements of the assignment

Classroom Philosophy and Conduct

Discussing political topics can challenge deeply held or unexamined beliefs. Expect to be challenged in this classroom to think critically about the ideas presented in the readings and common assumptions made about historical and contemporary politics. Given the difficult, sensitive, and political nature of the material to be discussed in this course, students will be expected to conduct themselves in a mature and respectful manner. This requires both thoughtfully voicing your own opinion and respectfully listening and

responding to the opinions of others. The ultimate goal of this course is to provide you with the knowledge and critical thinking skills to construct informed opinions on complex political issues.

A Note on Gender Pronouns: Please notify me of your gender pronouns and the name you'd like to be called prior to the start of class using the First Day Survey. I use she or they pronouns and you may call me Professor Stone or Professor Be. You are expected to respect the pronouns and gender identities of me, your classmates, and the people we discuss in class.

Weekly Course Schedule

All dates, readings, and assignments are subject to change.

** Indicates a response paper is due at TIME this day

Part I: Introduction

Class Meeting 1: Welcome and introduction

Class Meeting 2: What is Modernity?

- Chandan Reddy. 2007. "Modern," in *Keywords for American Cultural Studies*.
- Marshall Berman. 1982. "Modernity—Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow," in *All That is Solid Melts Into Air*.
- Lisa Lowe. 2015. "The Intimacies of the Four Continents," Chapter one.

Class Meeting 3: Machiavellian State, Machiavellian Man

- Niccolò Machiavelli. 1532. *The Prince*, Ch. 1, 2, 8, 15, 17–18, 25.
- Hanna Pitkin. 1984. "Autonomy—Personal and Political" in *Fortune is a Woman*.

Class Meeting 4: Machiavellian State, Machiavellian Man II

- Niccolò Machiavelli. 1524. *Mandragola*.
- Mary G. Dietz. 1986. "Trapping the Prince: Machiavelli and the Politics of Deception."

Part II: Social Contracts, Natural Rights, and Liberalism(s)

Class Meeting 5: "Nasty, Brutish, and Short"

- Thomas Hobbes. 1651. *Leviathan*, Introduction (pp. 7–8), Ch. 5, 6, 13, 14–18, 19 (paras. 1–8 only).
- Carole Pateman. 1989. "Contract, the Individual, and Slavery," in *The Sexual Contract*.

Class Meeting 6: "Nasty, Brutish, and Short" II

- Thomas Hobbes. 1651. *Leviathan*, Ch. 20 (paras. 1–15 only), 21, 29, 30, 46 (paras. 1–21 only).
- Su Fang Ng. 2012. "Hobbes and the Bestial Body of Sovereignty," in *Feminist Interpretations of Thomas Hobbes*.

Class Meeting 7: The Social Contract and the Sexual Contract

- John Locke. 1690. *The Second Treatise of Government*, Ch. 1-9.
- Carole Pateman. 1989. “Contracting In” in *The Sexual Contract*.

Class Meeting 8: The Racial Contract and Liberal Imperialism

- Charles Mills. 1997. “Introduction” and “Overview” in *The Racial Contract*.
- Uday Singh Mehta. 1999. “Liberal Conventions and Imperial Inclusions” (pp. 46-64) and “Liberalism, Empire, and Territory” (pp. 124-132) in *Liberalism and Empire*.

Class Meeting 9: The Social Contract and Inequality

- Jean-Jacques Rousseau. 1762. *The Social Contract*, Book I; Book II (ch. 1–4, 6, 11).
- Charles Mills. 2009. “Rousseau, the Master's Tools, and Anti-Contractarian Contractarianism.”
- **Outline of Short Essay Assignment Due**

Class Meeting 10: The Social Contract and Inequality II

- Jean-Jacques Rousseau. 1762. *Emile*, Book V “Sophy, or Woman” (excerpts).
- Leah Bradshaw. 2002. “Rousseau on Civic Virtue, Male Autonomy, and the Construction of the Divided Female,” in *Feminist Interpretations of Rousseau*.

Class Meeting 11: Women and Liberty

- Mary Wollstonecraft. 1792. *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (excerpts).
- John Stuart Mill. 1859. *On Liberty*, Ch. 1, 2, 4.
- **Short Essay Assignment Due**

Part III: Modernity's Critics

Class Meeting 12: Marx's Critique of Liberalism

- Karl Marx. 1843. “On the Jewish Question” in *The Marx-Engels Reader*.
- Karl Marx. 1844. “Estranged Labor” in Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844.

Class Meeting 13: Marx, Race, and Gender

- Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. 1848. “The Communist Manifesto” in *The Marx-Engels Reader*.
- Cedric J. Robinson. 1983. “Introduction” and “An Ending” in *Black Marxism*.

Class Meeting 14: Marx, Race, and Gender II

- Silvia Federici and Nicole Cox. 1974. “Counter-Planning from the Kitchen” in *Patriarchy of the Wage: Notes on Marx, Gender, and Feminism*.
- Angela Y. Davis. 1981. “The Approaching Obsolescence of Housework: A Working Class Perspective” (1981) in *Women, Race, and Class*.

- **Outline of Final Paper Proposal Due**

Class Meeting 15: Conclusion

- Workshop for final paper proposals with Prof. Stone

DATE: Final Paper Proposals Due



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