

**POLITICAL SCIENCE 303  
MODERN POLITICAL THEORY**

**BULLETIN INFORMATION**

POLI 303 - Modern Political Theory (3 credit hours)

**Course Description:**

Political theories from the Renaissance to the 19th century.

**SAMPLE COURSE OVERVIEW**

An introduction to the sources and functions of social and political values by way of the political theories of thinkers across the history of modern thought (Machiavelli to Marx). This course emphasizes the critical analysis of values/ideals like justice, equality, and liberty, the impact these values/ideals do and can have on individuals and on collective life, and how reflection on the modern history of these values/ideals has shaped and continues to shape personal and political ethics, decision-making, and social responsibility and action. The course explores competing treatments of these ideals/values and important differences as well as commonalities regarding the alleged sources and functions of these values/ideals across the modern period (16<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> century) and with a view to their ongoing relevance.

**ITEMIZED LEARNING OUTCOMES**

**Upon successful completion of Political Science 303, students will be able to:**

1. Recognize and analyze basic ethico-political terminology and concepts.
2. Demonstrate understanding of the fundamental elements of political society, and the differing methods and goals of modern political theories.
3. Develop interpretive and critical political arguments based on primary sources.
4. Identify and analyze the political, social, and ethical values that shape specific theories and the regimes they produce.
5. Demonstrate understanding of the sources and functions of values and how they shape the foundation of a political community, and the personal and community ethics, and decision-making that go on in it.
6. Apply past theories of politics to the present in order to understand the continuities and differences between past and present theories, practices, and values of politics.

**SAMPLE REQUIRED TEXTS/SUGGESTED READINGS/MATERIALS**

*Modern Political Thought: Readings from Machiavelli to Nietzsche*, ed. David Wootton, Hackett, Second Edition, 2008.

**SAMPLE ASSIGNMENTS AND/OR EXAMS**

In-class writing assignments and written short answer and essay exams are based on individual

and collective close readings and interpretation of primary sources, and class discussion. The exams require students to define, explain, analyze, compare, and evaluate, through the lens of selected thinkers and the values they explore, foundational problems of politics, such as the sources of order and disorder and/or of rights and obligations, the sources and character and functions of conflict, and sources of political legitimacy, the nature of liberty, equality, and justice and how these fundamental values/ideals affect collective and individual deliberation and judgment about the distribution of authority, power, and social and material goods.

1. Quizzes
2. Two 1-hour in-class midterm exams
3. One final exam: The 2 ½ -hour exam will cover all the material in the course.

### **SAMPLE COURSE OUTLINE WITH TIMELINE OF TOPICS, READINGS/ASSIGNMENTS, EXAMS/PROJECTS**

**Class 1, Introduction:** What is modern political theory? What changes in values accompanied the transition from ancient/medieval times to modernity? How do these changes in values affect how decisions about ethics and politics get made? What standards should be used to decide what is right and good when, as in the modern period, traditional sources of value, specifically moral and religious authority, diversify and are increasingly subject to question? Political theorists of modernity answer these questions by offering an account of a modern, which is to say, a secular or nonreligious state.

Treating the modern state as a framework for ethical analysis, reasoning, and decision-making, this course explores five different accounts of the modern state, its foundation and development, and practices and institutions, the nature of the modern individuals who comprise the state, and the differing values/norms/ideals that guide the state's foundation, institutions, and individuals.

Class discussion focuses on student identification of the major events of the modern period

(Enlightenment, Industrial Revolution, French Revolution, etc.) and the changes in values these events inaugurated and reflected.

Achievements and requirements: VSR 1 (all), 2 (all), 3i.

#### **Account 1: Pre-modern sovereignty**

**Class 2:** small-group work analyzing specific quotations in Machiavelli's text to explore and unpack his theoretical approach to politics, and the centrality of deception and violence to his account of the foundation of new principalities

Reading: Machiavelli, *Prince*, Letter, Dedication, chs. 1-8 (pp. 6-24)

Achievements and requirements: VSR 1 (all), 2 (all), and 3i, 3ii.

**Class 3:** quiz and then lecture and discussion about the different ways of Machiavelli discusses of founding a new principality, including virtue, fortuna, and crime.

Reading: Machiavelli, *Prince*, chs. 9-18 (pp. 24-38)

Achievements and requirements: VSR 1 (all), 2 (all), 3ii.

**Class 4:** small-group work analyzing specific quotations in Machiavelli's text to explore Machiavelli's reevaluation of traditional Christian values, his advice to a ruler about how to use his power, about whose judgments to rely on and trust, and accountability.

Reading: Machiavelli, *Prince*, chs. 19-24 (pp. 38-48)

Achievements and requirements: VSR 1 (all), 2 (all), 3 (all).

**Class 5:** guided by pre-prepared questions from the students, the focus is on Machiavelli's complex replacement of the role of God in human affairs with some combination of fortuna and human virtue.

Reading: Machiavelli, *Prince*, chs. 25-26 (pp. 48-52)

Achievements and requirements: VSR 1 (all), 2 (all), 3 (all).

## **Account 2: Authoritarian sovereignty**

**Class 6:** small-group work analyzing specific quotations in Hobbes' text to explore the importance of the passions as sources of value, to unpack Hobbes' rejection of religion as a source of value, and to begin to subject to scrutiny his claim to be tacking between the political values of stability and freedom as he develops his account of the state.

Reading: Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Letter and Introduction (pp. 116-118), ch. 4 (pp. 124-27), ch. 5 (pp. 128-31); ch. 6 (pp.131-36); ch. 12 (pp. 152-56)

Achievements and requirements: VSR 1 (all), 2 (all), 3i, 3ii.

**Class 7:** guided by pre-prepared questions from the students, the focus is on Hobbes's account of the source of moral value in self-interested prudential calculation, with special attention to his treatment of sources and social effects of human violence and obstacles to cooperation.

Reading: Hobbes, *Leviathan*, chs. 13-16 (pp. 158-73)

Achievements and requirements: VSR 1 (all), 2 (all), 3 (all).

**Class 8:** Quiz and then lecture and discussion about Hobbes's account of the foundation of political society as a social contract, followed by discussion about sources of political authority and force of law, and the complex relationships between authority, law, and political freedom.

Reading: Hobbes, *Leviathan*, chs. 17-18 (pp. 173-79), ch. 21 (pp. 188-93).

Achievements and requirements: VSR 1 (all), 2 (all), 3iv.

**Class 9:** small-group work on Hobbes's treatment of the relationship(s) between moral rules and positive law, the role of coercive force in law, and the potential precariousness of legal authority

Reading: Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ch. 26 (pp. 208-15), ch. 28 (pp. 224-26), ch. 29 (pp.

228-33), Conclusion (pp. 272-77)  
Achievements and requirements: VSR 1 (all), 2 (all), 3 (all)

**Class 10:** Review

**Class 11:** FIRST MIDTERM

Sample test essay question: In the dedicatory letter that opens *Leviathan*, Hobbes says: "That which perhaps may most offend are certain texts of Holy Scripture, alleged by me to other purpose than ordinarily they use to be by others."

What does Hobbes understand the purpose of religion to be and how does he argue religion achieves this purpose in a commonwealth? Would Machiavelli agree with Hobbes's account of the relationship between religion and politics? Do you? Please answer with reasons and textual evidence.

Achievements and requirements: VSR 1 (all), 2 (all), 3 (all).

**Account 3: Liberal sovereignty**

**Class 12:** small-group work analyzing specific quotations in Locke's text to explore his articulation of the fundamental values of equality and liberty and the authority of the laws of nature in the state of nature

Reading: Locke, *Second Treatise*, Preface, chs. 1-2 (pp. 285-90)

Achievements and requirements: VSR 1 (all), 2 (all), 3ii.

**Class 13:** quiz and then lecture and discussion on private property as a guarantor of the value of individual freedom, on the transition from the state of nature to the state of war, and on the necessity of government

Reading: Locke, *Second Treatise*, chs. 3-5 (pp. 290-99)

Achievements and requirements: VSR 1 (all), 2 (all), 3 (all).

**Class 14:** guided by pre-prepared questions from the students, the focus is on Locke's social contract theory and its underlying commitment to the values of individual freedom and equality.

Reading: Locke, *Second Treatise*, chs. 6-8 (pp. 299-320)

Achievements and requirements: VSR 1 (all), 2 (all), 3 (all).

**Class 15:** quiz and then small-group work analyzing specific quotations in Locke's text to explore the institutions that comprise government, their purposes, powers, and duties, and to analyze the norms/ideals/values that guide their activities.

Reading: Locke, *Second Treatise*, chs. 9-15 (pp. 320-34)

Achievements and requirements: VSR 1 (all), 2 (all), 3 (all).

**Class 16:** an exploration of Locke's account of under what conditions a war is unjust and what rights and duties belong to just versus unjust conquerors, and an examination of Locke's justification of the right of revolution (a civic "just war").  
Reading: Locke, *Second Treatise*, chs. 16-19 (pp. 334-53)  
Achievements and requirements: VSR 1 (all), 2 (all), 3 (all).

#### **Account 4: Sovereignty of the people**

**Class 17:** small-group work analyzing specific quotations in Rousseau's text to explore the similarities and differences in approach, value-orientation, and ethical framework between Rousseau, Locke, and Hobbes  
Reading: Rousseau, *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*, Part I (pp. 371-395, and notes, pp. 410-426)  
Achievements and requirements: VSR 1 (all), 2 (all), 3i.

**Class 18:** quiz and then lecture and discussion guided by students' pre-prepared questions on the transition from the state of nature to a civil society grounded on private property where, unlike for Locke, private property is the guarantor not of freedom but unfreedom, dependence, and inequality.  
Reading: Rousseau, *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*, Part II (pp. 395-410 and notes, p. 426)  
Achievements and requirements: VSR 1 (all), 2 (all), 3 (all).

**Class 19:** Review

#### **Class 20: SECOND MIDTERM**

Sample test essay question: The Abenaki Nation, who live primarily by hunting, fishing, and farming, claim extensive acreage in Vermont consisting largely of forest and farmland. State police arrest thirty Abenakis for fishing on the Missisquoi River without first obtaining fishing licenses from the state of Vermont. Vermont's licensing law was enacted to regulate fishing with a view to promoting the state's budding fishing industry. The Abenakis claim the right to fish on the river without state permission on the ground that they have never given up their ancestral homeland. They claim that the fish belong to them.

Vermont sues the Abenaki fishermen for violating the licensing law.

The Abenakis were never conquered by the United States. No treaty was ever entered into between the Abenakis and the United States by which the Abenaki Nation agreed to cede its territory. No purchase of property ever took place, and no federal statute has ever been passed divesting the Abenaki Nation of its property rights.

Sitting as Chief Justice, decide this case, basing your judgment on the carefully reasoned opinions of Justice Locke and Justice Rousseau.

Achievements and requirements: VSR 1 (all), 2 (all), 3 (all).

**Class 21:** small-group work analyzing specific quotations in Rousseau's text to explore his account of the social contract and its commitment to the fundamental values of equality, liberty and independence

Reading: Rousseau, *Social Contract*, Book I (pp. 427-36)

Achievements and requirements: VSR 1 (all), 2 (all), 3ii.

**Class 22:** quiz and then guided by pre-prepared questions from the students, the focus is on Rousseau's account of the "general will" as a framework for collective decision-making about legislation that will guarantee for a political society the values of equality, freedom, and independence.

Reading: Rousseau, *Social Contract*, Book II (pp. 436-49)

Achievements and requirements: VSR 1 (all), 2 (all), 3 (all).

**Class 23:** quiz and then lecture and discussion about the role of the relative advantages and disadvantages of the different forms of regime with specific attention to why Rousseau, though an advocate of the sovereignty of the people, disfavors democracy.

Reading: Rousseau, *Social Contract*, Book III (pp. 449-70)

Achievements and requirements: VSR 1 (all), 2 (all), 3 (all).

**Class 24:** guided by pre-prepared questions from the students, the focus is on Rousseau's account of the relation between religion and politics.

Reading: Rousseau, *Social Contract*, Book IV, chs. 1-3, 8 (p. 470-73, 482-87)

Achievements and requirements: VSR 1 (all), 2 (all), 3i, 3ii.

#### **Account 5: Criticizing sovereignty**

**Classes 25 and 26:** small-group work analyzing specific quotations in Marx's text to bring to light social and material conditions that challenge the shared political ideology underlying the accounts of equality, freedom, and independence explored so far, with some contemporary examples to illustrate Marx's critique.

Reading: Marx, "On the Jewish Question" (pp. 742-54)

Achievements and requirements: VSR 1 (all), 2 (all), 3 (all).

**Class 27:** small-group work analyzing specific quotations in Marx and Engel's text to explore the alternative communism offers to liberal political theory and capitalism.

Reading: Marx & Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (pp. 798-809)

Achievements and requirements: VSR 1 (all), 2 (all), 3 (all).

**Class 28:** Review and Conclusion

#### **FINAL EXAM according to University exam schedule**

Sample final exam essay question: The U.S.A. is considering whether to wage war against Iran on three grounds: first, that Iran is undermining U.S.A. by funding terrorism; second, that Iran is trying to develop nuclear weapons; and third, that, as a theocratic republic, Iran presents a threat to the democratic order the U.S.A. seeks to encourage in the region.

Using the well-reasoned arguments of Machiavelli and Locke, advise President Obama on 1) the justice and 2) the wisdom of staging a war on each of these three grounds.

Achievements and requirements: VSR 1 (all), 2 (all), 3 (all).