

Modern Political Thought

GO 304, Spring 2011
Skidmore College

Note: I do not check phone messages and e-mail on weekends.

Office hours: MW 3:30-4:30 (*often* avail. MWF 11:30-3:00), T, 11:15-12:15 & 1:30-2:30

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This course centers upon the close textual study of several key modern political thinkers: Niccolo Machiavelli, Thomas Hobbes, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Thomas Jefferson, Karl Marx, and Chantal Delsol. Additionally, through lectures and secondary sources, it introduces the student to the thought of a number of other important political thinkers, providing a (necessarily incomplete) survey of modern political philosophy. It concludes with two thinkers, John Rawls (1921-2002) and Chantal Delsol (1947-present) who exemplify modes of political philosophy likely to characterize it in the 21st century.

As will become clearer as it proceeds, the course rests upon a five-fold conception of what constitutes modern political philosophy: 1) modern political philosophy began with Machiavelli, 2) it took a fundamental departure from both medieval and classical political philosophy, 3) it was understood by its greatest expounders as a deliberate project to shape society, 4) it was not primarily formulated by the application of modern natural science methods to the study of politics, and 5) a number of attempts to radically critique the modern political project actually tended to deepen the modern character of its theory and intensify its impact in practice, which is why Rousseau and Marx, despite their hostility to major aspects of modern life, are correctly categorized as themselves being modern philosophers. Delsol's book will prod us to consider whether a critique of modernity in our day can really claim to have moved beyond the modern perspective, that is, to have become "post-modern."

Required Texts:

The Prince

Niccolo Machiavelli (trans. Alvarez)

Leviathan

Thomas Hobbes

The Natural Rights Republic

Michael Zuckert

The First and Second Discourses

Jean-Jacques Rousseau (trans. Masters)

The Marx-Engels Reader (2nd ed.)

Karl Marx and F. Engels (ed. Tucker)

The Unlearned Lessons of the 20th Century Chantal Delsol

Course Packet, distributed in class; contains readings from John Locke, Alexis de Tocqueville, John Dewey, Friedrich Hayek, Raymond Aron, Will Kymlicka, and others.

General Reading Schedule: (specific reading schedule for first few weeks listed below)

Weeks 1 and 2: Machiavelli—main text, *The Prince*

Weeks 3 and 4: Hobbes—text, *Leviathan*

Weeks 5 and 6: Jefferson & Locke—main text, Michael Zuckert, *The Natural Rights Republic*

Week 7: Rousseau—main text, one of the *Discourses*

(Break)

Weeks 8 and 9: Marx—main texts, *The German Ideology* and *On the Jewish Question*

Weeks 10 and 11: Varieties of Liberalism—main text (in packet) explains John Rawls

Weeks 12 and 13: Delsol—main text, *The Unlearned Lessons of the 20th Century*

Prerequisite Reading: Some seniors may be taking this course without having taken its prerequisite, Introduction to Political Philosophy, due to when the policy requiring that prerequisite was enacted. If so, there will be a couple of required extra readings. 1) When we read *Natural Rights Republic*, you will need to also read the Locke selections (14 pages) provided in the packet. 2) When we read Marx, you will need to also read the first two parts of the *Communist Manifesto* provided in the Tucker volume. 3) If we read Rousseau's first discourse, you will also read the second.

Class Assignments and Grading

3 papers—60% Mon. 2/28, Mon. 4/4, Thurs. 5/5

Final exam: 25% Monday 5/9 1:30-4:30

Participation: 9%

Quizzes: 6%, or more if necessary.

Final Exam: This will be a comprehensive and mostly essay exam. You will need to prepare for it all semester long, using the syllabus and notes as the primary guides to what is regarded as important—I will not provide extensive preparation cues. Please do not ask me to reschedule it unless it conflicts with another final or you have some other Skidmore-approved emergency reason.

Essays: These are formal essays where you are expected to have an identifiable thesis with arguments to support it. 6-11 pages. They should demonstrate a command of the text at hand, and a thoughtfulness about the claims made therein. I will hand out topics approximately two weeks before the essays are due, although you will have a good deal of leeway to choose your own topic if you notify me in advance. These are not research papers and you are not required to read any secondary literature. I want you to engage these authors directly. Consult p. 5 of the *The Writing Requirement in the Government Dept.* pamphlet for grading guidelines.

An essay may be handed in the next session for the loss of 6% of the grade. Nothing is accepted later. Being more than 3 minutes late on due-dates will not only be counted as a tardy, but will get you this same 6% deduction. E-MAILED WORK WILL NOT BE ACCEPTED. Not handing in a paper "awards" you 40% of the percentage points.

Participation: Good participation means you contribute fairly regularly to the quality of class time. This can occur in a number of ways: giving good responses to my discussion questions, asking myself or one of your peers for clarification when needed, (politely) arguing against myself or one of your peers, asking useful questions, or even refraining from jumping in when others have established a useful line of conversation that you can add nothing significant to. The participation grade can also reflect your demeanor. For example, the always-silent-but-noticeably-attentive student will receive a C-. The always-silent-but-seemingly-disengaged student will receive an F. Quieter students may wish to meet with me in office hours and provide evidence (outlines) that they are doing the assignments. There may be outside lecture events that likewise allow the participation grade to be improved.

The grade is harmed by repeatedly participating without evidence of careful thought or without consideration of the good of the class.

Quizzes: There will be a handful of quizzes, generally multiple choice and by surprise, and occurring at the very beginning of class. No make-ups, so absences and tardies hurt doubly here. There might also be a couple page-long writing assignments.

General Expectations: *You are expected to read the assignments carefully and reflectively, remaining open to the possibility that what you are reading is right.* Your first duty as an attentive reader is to understand what is being said. This means grasping the argument of the author—identifying central claims and seeing how these claims are supported. When you encounter something you strongly disagree with, make sure you first understand the argument. You are expected to give reasons for your opinions.

Commonsense Rules: (My apologies for having to list them!)

You will be attentive in class and display the demeanor of one who is interested in the material and respectful of others.

Cell-phones or similar items, food, gum, tobacco products, make-up, and other personal items will not be on your desk, nor in use—remember to turn cell phones off. *It is extremely rude to “text” or otherwise consult electronic devices during class—you will be asked to leave class if you insult all of us by doing so.*

You will refrain from going to the restroom or the water-fountain during class, with only emergencies providing exceptions.

Four Non-Commonsense Rules:

- 1) Laptop computers and recording devices are not to be used in class. Exceptions are made according to Skidmore policy.
- 2) Hats and hoods are not to be worn in class.
- 3) Regular (non-alcoholic, obviously!) beverages may be brought to class.
- 4) I will be utilizing formal address, i.e., “Mr. Smith,” etc., for class purposes. If you refer to another student in class discussion, you will do likewise—e.g., “Contrary to what Mr. Smith said, I noticed that on page five of the reading...etc.” You will refer to me as “Professor Scott” or “Dr. Scott.”

Attendance: *Attendance is mandatory.* All excused absences must be cleared ahead of time. If you must miss class, you remain responsible for all the material covered that day. After three unexcused absences, each subsequent unexcused absence will bring your final grade down by 5%. Except in extraordinary circumstances, once you rack up more than four absences of any sort, including excused absences, your final grade will be penalized 3% for each subsequent absence. It will obviously be penalized more if many of these are unexcused. Two egregious tardies count as an unexcused absence.

Academic Honor: I take violations of the honor code very seriously. At minimum, plagiarism will merit a “0” for that assignment, with failure for the course likely. In cases that I deem particularly egregious, I will seek to have you suspended or expelled from Skidmore College.

Specific Reading Schedule, first few weeks

You will receive reading schedules for later weeks as we proceed; complete reading and be ready to discuss it by the day listed.

Machiavelli, *The Prince*

Read all footnotes providing historical context, and study the maps. There will be a quiz on the 7th that will ask questions regarding the historical figures Machiavelli repeatedly discusses, and there may be a map component on this quiz.

1	1/24	Epistle Dedicatory, chapters 1-3
2	1/26	4-8
3	1/28	9-14
4	1/31	15-19; Handout--"Biographical Note," and Mansfield excerpt: "Introduction"
5	2/2	20-26; Handout—Manent, "Machiavelli and the Fecundity of Evil"
6	2/4	<i>Bronx Tale</i> ; film available on reserve in library; view by this point.
7	2/7	Handout—Raymond Aron, "French Thought in Exile: Jacques Maritain and the Quarrel over Machiavellianism"

Hobbes, *Leviathan*

Consult notes as needed; sections marked OL are variants and do not have to be read.

8	2/9	Epistle Dedicatory , Introduction, Chapters 1-9
9	2/11	10-12