

## **Philosophy 4430/6430 Modern Political Philosophy**

### **Fall Term, 2023**

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Philosophy Department, 428 Cohen Hall

Course Meeting time and place: 3:30-6:30 Wednesdays: Cohen Hall 493

Office Hours: Wednesday 2-3:20 pm or by appointment

The aim of this course is to examine the works of many of the major figures in modern political philosophy who have been especially influential in the development, defense, and critique of liberalism and democracy.

We begin with two social contract views. First, Thomas Hobbes's *Leviathan*, is widely regarded as the greatest work in political philosophy written in English. Hobbes provides the first modern statement of social contract doctrine, arguing that social and political cooperation is grounded in a social contract that is in everyone's rational interest. On that basis, Hobbes argued for an authoritarian form of government. This makes his work especially relevant to contemporary attacks upon liberalism and democracy.

We next examine John Locke's *natural rights theory of the social contract*, which seeks to provide a justification of limited government, constitutionalism, and strong rights of private property. Locke's view had a seminal influence on the American Declaration of Independence, and the intellectual justification of religious toleration, personal freedom, and capitalism.

Then we examine two *utilitarian views*. David Hume criticizes Locke's social contract, arguing that justice and property are not grounded in natural right or a social contract, but instead in public utility, or the general happiness of members of society. John Stuart Mill revises the classical utilitarianism of Jeremy Bentham to argue for liberalism, representative democracy, the equal rights of women, and a market economy that provides for workers' private ownership of the means of production.

Next we turn to works by Jean-Jacques Rousseau, the major representative of the *democratic social contract tradition*. Locke, Hume, and Mill are important philosophical representatives of the classical (Locke and Hume) and the high (Mill) liberal traditions. By contrast, democratic egalitarianism has its philosophical origins in the works of Rousseau, whose critiques of social and economic inequality had a major influence on the development of theories of distributive justice, as well as 19<sup>th</sup> century socialism.

After Rousseau, we turn to Karl Marx's critique of liberal democracy, and consider his argument that liberal political and economic institutions sustain capitalism as a system of exploitation. We

will read relevant portions from Marx's *Capital*, to gain a sense of what he means by exploitation, and also other works that argue that capitalism results in alienation and that the liberal conception of justice is based in ideological or false consciousness.

Finally, we will study a modern *liberal egalitarian social contract view*. We will read a good portion of John Rawls' book, *A Theory of Justice*, widely regarded as the major work in political philosophy written in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Here we consider among other things whether Rawls' theory, "justice as fairness," provides a convincing alternative to Mill's utilitarian justification of liberalism, and an adequate response to Marx's criticisms of liberal democracy and distributive justice. In conjunction with Rawls we will also discuss criticisms of Rawls and social contract doctrine by Charles Mills, a critical race theorist.

One-half to two-thirds of class time normally will be devoted to lecture, with the remainder of the class reserved for questions and discussion. To encourage discussion, periodic submission of discussion questions by students on the material prior to class may be required.

### **Course Requirements:**

*Undergraduates:* (a) Two papers, 1800-2100 words (6-8 pages), the first due the middle of the term (around Fall Break) and the second the last week of class and (b) a final examination consisting of three essays. For the final, a list of study questions will be provided in advance. [Note: 3d and 4th year students who are Philosophy majors or have substantial experience writing philosophy papers may petition to submit one paper, 12-16 pages at the end of the term.]

*Graduate Students:* (a) A term paper of approximately 3800-4500 words (approx. 12-16 pages) due Monday the final week of class and (b) the final examination.

Mask Policy: While I do not require Students to be masked against Covid, I reserve the right to require masks during class should it rebound during the Semester.

### **Course Outline**

**Thomas Hobbes's *Leviathan*:** The Social Contract and the Grounding of Society in Individuals' Rational Interests (2 weeks)

1. Human Nature and Our Fundamental Interests in Self-Preservation, "Conjugal Affection," and "the Means for Commodious Living."
2. Hobbes's Thesis: a State of Nature tends toward a State of War.
3. The Social Contract as the Basis for Social Cooperation
4. The Laws of Nature and "Articles of Peace"
5. Role and Powers of the Sovereign.

### **John Locke: Liberalism and the Natural Rights Theory of the Social Contract** (2 weeks)

1. Religion and the Natural Law Tradition
2. Locke's Doctrine of the Fundamental Law of Nature.
3. The Social Contract and the Limits of Political Power.
4. The Legitimate Constitution and Political Obligation
5. The Exclusionary Crisis
6. The Right of Revolution
7. Private Property: The Purposes of the Labor Theory of Property

### **David Hume and the Origins of Utilitarianism** (1 week)

1. 'Of the Original Contract': Hume's critique of Locke's Social Contract
2. The Doctrine of Moral Sense: Sympathy and the Sentiment of Humanity
3. Hume's Thesis: Justice has its basis not in contract but in utility.
4. Property as a Social Convention

### **J.S. Mill and the Grounding of Liberalism in Utility** (2 weeks)

1. Bentham's Classical Principle of Utility and Mill's revisions.
2. Justice and Moral Rights.
3. Individuality and The Principle of Liberty
4. Representative Democracy
5. The Status of Women in the Modern World
6. Private property, competitive markets, and socialism.

### **Rousseau: The Social Contract and the Ideal of Democracy** (2 weeks)

1. The Doctrine of the Natural Goodness of Human Nature
2. Moral Education and the Possibilities of a Well-Ordered Society
3. Autonomy and the General Will
4. The Social Contract as the Expression of the General Will
5. Rousseau and Deliberative Democracy

### **Marx as a Critic of Liberalism and Distributive Justice** (2 weeks)

1. Marx's Critique of Conceptions of Justice.
2. Historical Materialism
3. Theory of Ideological Consciousness.
4. Surplus Value and the Theory of Exploitation and Alienation
5. Communism and the Conception of a Rational Human Society.

### **Rawls's Liberal Egalitarian Theory of Justice** (3 weeks)

1. Justice as Fairness and the two principles of justice
2. The Equal basic liberties and their priority
3. Distributive justice and the difference principle
4. The Original Position and the Veil of Ignorance
5. The argument for the two principles of justice
6. Criticisms of Rawls and Social Contract Theory in Critical Race Theory

**Texts** have been ordered at the Penn Book Store on Walnut and 36<sup>th</sup> and otherwise are obtainable in multiple editions (except Rawls's books). Editions on order are suggested first below, with other good editions mentioned afterwards. Also, most of the major historical works are posted on Canvas, in earlier editions and translations no longer under copyright

Thomas Hobbes: *Leviathan* (Penguin Press; Cambridge; or Hackett)

John Locke: *Two Treatises on Government* (Hackett; or Cambridge)

David Hume: 'Of the Original Contract'; 'On Justice' (On Canvas)

J.S. Mill: *On Liberty, Utilitarianism, and Other Essays* (Oxford U Press; also contains *The Subjection of Women* and *On Representative Government*)

Jean-Jacques Rousseau: *Discourse on Origin of Inequality* and *The Social Contract* (Rousseau: *The Basic Political Writings* from Hackett Press or UChicago, Cambridge U volumes)

Karl Marx: *Selected Writings* (editions by Hackett. Also good: Norton (Tucker ed.); or Oxford U. Press, D.McClellan ed.)

John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (1971 or 1999 revised ed.) (Harvard U. Press)

John Rawls, *Lectures on the History of Political Philosophy* (recommended) (Harvard U Press), edited by Samuel Freeman

**Assigned Readings:**

**Hobbes:** *Leviathan*, Books I, especially ch. 6,10,11,13-16, and Book II, esp. ch. 17-21, 26-27, 29-30

**Locke:** (1) *Second Treatise on Government*; (2) *Letter Concerning Toleration* (Canvas)

**Mill:** (1) *Utilitarianism* (entire but esp. ch. 2 and 5); (2) *On Liberty* (entire, esp. chs.1-3); (3) *The Subjection of Women* (entire); (4) *On Representative Government* (chs.1-3)

**Hume:** (1) 'Of the Original Contract (on Canvas) (3) *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, §3 on Justice & Appendix (Canvas)

**Rousseau:** (1) *Second Discourse on Inequality*; (2) *The Social Contract*

**Marx:**

On the Jewish Question

Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts (excerpts)

On James Mill

Theses on Feuerbach

German Ideology (excerpts)

Wage Labor and Capital

Selections from *Grundrisse*

Preface to A Critique of Political Economy

Selections from *Capital*

Critique of Gotha Program

**Rawls:** Chapters 1-3 of *A Theory of Justice*, also sections 32-36 and 39-40 on Basic Liberties; sections 41-43, 47-49 on Distributive Justice; and in Part III, sections 66-67, 77-79, 82, and 86.

**Charles Mills:** 'Rawls on Race/Race on Rawls' (on Canvas)