Modern Political Thought (SP215.II)

Lecturer: Gerry Fitzpatrick, Room 327, Áras Moyola
Lecture Venue: AM250 Mod. Lang. Building, Wed 12-1 and Friday 12-1

Semester II  2018/19

Introduction
This course will look at the history of Western political thought through a study of some of the principal European writers from the Renaissance to the eve of the First World War. This will involve tracing the development of varieties of political discourse from the sixteenth century through to the early twentieth century. The writings of political thinkers as diverse as More, Machiavelli, Hobbes and Locke, Rousseau, Kant, Bentham and Mill, Hegel and Marx will be elucidated and analysed. The aim of the course is for the student to obtain a thorough understanding of how historical political thought has shaped contemporary political philosophy - and thus affected the modern world.

The main theme of the course will be the emergence of the modern State and the related issues of allegiance, obligation and dissent: why should and do we display loyalty and obedience to the State within which we live? The implicit idea guiding the lecture series is to highlight the contemporaneous relevance of these seminal debates in the history of modern political thought:

If all important public affairs questions are ultimately political – and politics is finally expressed by State activism and through State institutions – then understanding the theoretical and historical underpinnings of the modern State is of supreme relevance to current affairs.

Prerequisites: None
Teaching and learning methods: Series of lectures.

Methods of assessment and examination: Two-hour written exam (70%) and 30% of marks awarded for an essay (to be submitted and marked via the SPSK3102 seminar series). Erasmus and other Visiting Students shall be graded entirely through the written examination.

Language of instruction: English
Core texts: Assigned readings
**Course Aims and Objectives**

The learning objectives of this course are to familiarise students with the key texts and major arguments of political modernity from the Renaissance until the early twentieth century: the thematic foci being both the emergence of the modern, integrated nation-state - and rival concepts of Obedience and justifications of Dissent.

**Learning Outcomes**

By the end of this course students should possess:

- A coherent grasp of the contents of the seminal texts of modern political thought
- An understanding of rival methodological and theoretical approaches within contemporary academic analysis
- The ability to evaluate critically a literary source
- The competence to place political ideas in their historical and linguistic context
- The capacity to relate general theoretical ideas and approaches to particular political questions

(See ‘Reading List Bibliography’ on Blackboard site)

**Textbooks** and General Reading:

The best five general textbooks for this course are

- **Wootton, David (ed.)**, (2008, 2nd ed.) *Modern Political Thought, Readings from Machiavelli to Nietzsche*, Hackett

These five books will cover almost all the thinkers we shall be analysing.
Other useful texts that contain good introductions to some of the thinkers we will be analysing are:

G Browning, (2016), *A History of Modern Political Thought, The Question of Interpretation*

D Boucher and P Kelly, (2009) *Political Thinkers, From Socrates to the Present*

A Haworth, (2004) *Understanding the Political Philosophers*

A Levine, (2002), *Engaging Political Philosophy: From Hobbes to Rawls*

J. Hampton, (1997), *Political Philosophy*

J. Wolff, (1996), *An Introduction to Political Philosophy*

M Forsyth and M. Keens-Soper, (1992), *The Political Classics: a guide to the essential texts from Plato to Rousseau*


D Miller et al. (1987), *The Blackwell Encyclopaedia of Political Thought*

Collections of academic articles can be found in J Lively and A Reeve, (1989), *Modern Political Theory from Hobbes to Marx*

Feminist critiques of some of the thinkers covered are provided in


C. Pateman, (1989), *The Disorder of Women*

C. Pateman, (2006), *The Sexual Contract*

Some copies of the key political text(s) of the thinkers we shall be discussing are also contained in the Hardiman Library’s collection.

(Any other relevant texts held by the library will be mentioned throughout the lecture series.)

(Full details of Articles cited are available on the Blackboard Reading List – for reasons of brevity I merely give author, title and date here)

The 16th Century

Introduction: Two voices of the Renaissance

• Thomas More and *Utopia*
• Niccolo Machiavelli and *The Prince*

More and Machiavelli deal in contrasting ways with the proper relationship between canon law and secular law, between Church and State. They provide very differing answers as to the causal impact of Christian ethics on political agency. Their writings were markedly influenced by the humanism of the European Renaissance: More, basing his ideas on universalist rationalism; Machiavelli, on amoral pragmatism. Both, nevertheless, gave a broadly republican perspective on the questions of right political conduct and the best political institutions.
Thomas More, *Utopia* (various editions)
LT Sargent, 'Five Hundred Years of More Utopia and Utopianism' (2017)
Simon Moore, 'Ideals and realities: Renaissance state communication in Machiavelli's *The Prince* and More's *Utopia* ' (2012)
Niccolo Machiavelli, *The Prince* (various editions)

**The 17th Century**

**Early Modern English 'Liberal' Thought**
- Thomas Hobbes and *Leviathan*
- John Locke and the *Second Treatise on Government*

The impact of the socio-political upheavals caused by the English Civil War and the subsequent Restoration of the monarchy formed the context in which Hobbes and Locke formulated their responses to the fundamental political question: Why should man obey the State? Both provided answers based around the concept of a social contract between the people and the duly constituted legal authorities.

*Leviathan* (Macpherson edition, 1985)
*Leviathan* (Project Gutenberg, e-edition)
*Two treatises of government* (1779 edition – e-edition)
Pye, Tom, ‘Property, Space and Sacred History in John Locke’s *Two treatises of government’* (2018)
The 18th Century

The Reaction against Contractarianism

• David Hume against the social contract
• Edmund Burke’s *Reflections* against rationalism

In the eighteenth century the growth of new forms of scientific learning and historical knowledge had a significant impact on political theorising. In particular, doubt was cast upon the historical legitimacy and empirical verifiability of contractarian thought. Hume used rationalist scepticism to criticise the assumptions of Lockean liberalism; while Burke’s historicism rejected radical assumptions that political power could be used beneficently to transform society for the better.

Kiss-Koczka, E, ‘Justice as an artificial virtue: Selfishness and human nature in the moral and political thought of David Hume’ (2016)

The European Enlightenment

• Jean-Jacques Rousseau and *The Social Contract*
• Immanuel Kant and liberal Reason

In contrast to the ‘empirical tradition’ of Anglo-British political thought, on mainland Europe Enlightenment rationalism in the second half of the 18th century led to attempts to understand the fundamental principles of both ‘civilisation’ and the meaning of ‘politics’. Rousseau analysed the historical origins and evolution of ‘modern’ society, and suggested radical solutions for what he believed to be its serious defects. Kant used his transcendental method of philosophy to formulate universally valid principles of ‘correct’ political conduct.

Rousseau, *Basic Political Writings* (D Cress ed., 2011)
Kain, PJ, ‘Rousseau, the General Will, and Individual Liberty’ (1990)
Boyd, R, ‘Rousseau and the vanishing concept of the political?’ (2013)
Kant, Immanuel, *Political Writings* (H Reiss edition 1991)
English Radicalism and Two Revolutions

- Tom Paine and *The Rights of Man*
- Mary Wollstonecraft and *The Rights of Woman*

Paine, an Englishman, was personally involved in both the major revolutions that created the modern political world: the American revolution of 1776 and the French Revolution of 1789. He attempted to combine Lockean notions with democratic republicanism, and anticipated the creation of the Welfare State. Mary Wollstonecraft, one of the first recognisably 'proto-feminist' political writers, sought to apply the insights of enlightened rationalism to the social and political inequalities suffered by women. She argued for greater social, economic and political rights for women.

Paine, Thomas, *Rights of Man, Common Sense and other political writings* (1998)
Coffee, Alan, ‘Mary Wollstonecraft and the enduring power of social domination’ (2013)

The 19th Century

English Liberal Utilitarianism

- Jeremy Bentham and utilitarian liberalism
- John Stuart Mill *On Liberty*

The impact of the Industrial Revolution on English society becomes clear in the writings of Bentham and Mill. Here it has become apparent that the Whiggism of the pre-industrial era is no longer sufficient for an adequate understanding of contemporary society. Bentham grasped the potential of exploiting the resources of the modern State to reform society according to the principle of utility. Whilst being a utilitarian, Mill was concerned that the growth of the State and modern politics would undermine individual liberty – the danger being not arbitrary government but benevolent despotism.

Bentham, Jeremy, *A fragment on government* (1891)
Arnesen, J, 'Benthamic Utilitarianism and Hard Times' (1978)
Mill, James, *Political Writings* (1992)
German Historical Idealism, Materialism and Nihilism

- Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel and *The Philosophy of Right*
- Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels and ‘Marxism’
- Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche and the ‘re-evaluation of all values’

These three German thinkers made manifest the impact of industrialisation on European political thought. Until the advent of Hegel most political thinking was based on a non-historical or historically cyclical understanding of society: either the fundamental realities of political civilisation were unchanging or politics was based on a cycle embracing the rise, decay and disintegration of the social order (the original meaning of the word ‘revolution’). Hegel through his application of dialectical idealism to historical change systematically introduced the concept of linear progress to ethical and political thought. Marx in a sense inverted Hegel and replaced his historical idealism with historical materialism to explain the primacy of the ‘economic factor’ in political analysis. Nietzsche radically enlarged the dimension of relativism contained within Hegelian historicism to preach an understanding of politics based around complete moral relativism, intellectual nihilism and the ‘will to power’.


Fowkes, Ben et al., *Capital: a critique of political economy* (1990)

Nietzsche, Friedrich, *A Nietzsche Reader* (1977)
Cameron, F and Dombowsky, D, *Political writings of Friedrich Nietzsche* (2008)
**The Early 20th Century**
**A Bridge to Contemporary Political Theory**

- Max Weber and modern political sociology
- L.T. Hobhouse and the ‘new’ liberalism

Recognisably ‘Contemporary’ (post-World War Two) varieties of political thought are encountered in the work of Weber and Hobhouse. Weber’s liberalism recognised the political importance of factors he regarded as constitutive of modern industrial society: the ultimate irreconcilability of moral values; the significance of nationalism and the nation-state; the limits of political agency in relation to the socio-economic sphere of human existence. Hobhouse’s modernism came from his attempt to find a ‘third way’ between the classical liberalism of Bentham and the socialism of Marx. He articulated a political framework based on a ‘mixed economy’, a generous welfare state and a complex ideological compromise which commingled individual libertarianism with social egalitarianism.

Lenin, VI, *The Three Sources and Three Component Parts of Marxism* (1913 web-source)


Eliaeson, S, ‘Max Weber and his critics’ (1990)


Nicholls, D, ‘Positive Liberty, 1880-1914’ (1962)


Terao, H, ‘Rights, welfare and morality: Re-Appraising Hobhouse’s contribution to British New Liberalism’ (2016)

Holthaus, L, ‘LT Hobhouse and the transformation of liberal internationalism’ (2014)
SP215.II: Essay Questions (plus relevant seminar readings), 2018-19

Students must choose to answer ONE of the following three essay questions.

Reading (1) for SP215 (Modern Political Thought):

Essay Question 1:

Is the fundamental difference in the analysis of politics found in Machiavelli’s *The Prince* and More’s *Utopia* one based significantly upon the contrast between ‘realism’ and ‘idealism’?

(For the essay it is expected that you will have read and will use the texts of both *Utopia* and *The Prince* – as well as the Seminar reading.)

Reading (2) for SP215 (Modern Political Thought):

Essay Question 2:

‘The Passions that most of all cause the differences of Wit, are principally more or lesse Desire of Power, of Riches, of Knowledge, and of Honour. All of which may be reduced to the first , that is Desire of Power. For Riches, Knowledge and Honour are but severall sorts of Power....I put for a general inclination of all mankind a perpetuall and restlesse desire of power after power, that ceaseth only in Death. (*Leviathan*)

Do both Hobbes's pessimistic depiction of human nature and his novel understanding of the meaning of 'liberty' explain why he argues from rather libertarian and egalitarian premises in his *Leviathan* - to such startlingly illiberal and authoritarian political conclusions?
Reading (3) for SP215 (Modern Political Thought):

Essay Question 3:

Is Rousseau’s doctrine of the ‘General Will’ an instrument for the suppression of human freedom? Or the origin of modern democratic republican theory?
Essay Entry Form
- Semester II -
(2BA Political Science and Sociology, Academic Year 2018/19)

__Essay submission__: hand in a hard copy of your Essay to your Seminar Leader at the due date for each essay. Also __electronically submit via TURNITIN__

This form MUST be signed by the essay entrant and must accompany each essay as a cover page. We cannot under any circumstances accept essays without this form attached. ESSAYS WILL NOT BE CONSIDERED FOR MARKING UNTIL AN ENTRY FORM IS SIGNED AND SUBMITTED.

Name: ________________________________________________

ID number: ________________________________________________

__Module Code__ (e.g. SP 215.II): __________

Title of the Module: ___________________________________________

Essay title: ___________________________________________

Number of pages: __________

Bibliography attached?  q Yes  q No

I hereby certify that I understand what plagiarism is and that this essay is entirely my own work. Neither the paper in its entirety nor parts thereof have been published elsewhere in either paper or electronic form unless indicated through referencing. I understand that this work may be entered on a database to enable detection of similarities and I give my consent to this.

__________________________________________________________  _______________________
Signature                                      Date