

Political Science 202: Modern Political Thought
Professor Leonard Feldman

Hunter College, Fall 2020
Tues, Fri 9:45-11 am
ONLINE

Prof. Feldman's Contact Information:

Virtual Office hours:

Tuesday 11am -1 pm: [Zoom link](#)

Friday 3:30-5 pm: [Zoom link](#)

and by appointment.

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This course surveys some of the central works of modern political theory (18th and 19th centuries). Our central questions concern the "modern condition": How do modern political systems gain and maintain legitimacy? What are the core modern political values and how do modern political theorists grapple with their implementation? Does modernity signify *an age of progress* in terms of knowledge about the world and freedom for human beings or something darker? How should we conceptualize freedom, democracy and the rule of law and what institutions, practices and mentalities are necessary to maintain them? What are the chief obstacles to human freedom according to modern political theorists and what are the prospects for overcoming them?

Learning Outcomes

After completing this course, you will be able to identify central features of the modern political condition, and explain how key thinkers elaborated, defended and critiqued those features. You will be able to trace the development of core arguments in liberal and democratic political thought and engage in comparative evaluations of political thinkers, by learning to place their ideas in dialogue with each other. You will learn different approaches to political argumentation, develop your critical reading skills as you interpret difficult theoretical texts, and improve your writing skills, as you develop interpretive, comparative, and evaluative analyses of the texts.

Class Format and General Expectations

This course will be a mixed discussion/lecture format and a mixture of synchronous and asynchronous course delivery. Therefore regular attendance, careful preparation, and active participation are essential. You must prepare for every class by doing the reading, reflecting upon the course texts, and bringing to our online discussions

issues, questions, and passages for discussion. Have the relevant text with you when you watch the lectures and attend classes on Zoom.

Blackboard is the hub for this class, and it's essential that you log in to Blackboard at least every other day. While this syllabus gives you essential information concerning reading assignments and the schedule of classes, it's the Blackboard site where you'll find each week's set of Voicethread lectures, reading and writing assignments, study questions, and the link for joining our Friday Zoom class.

I will also make use of Blackboard's communication functions to send important email announcements to you. Thus it is very important for you to (a) check Blackboard at least every other day and (b) make sure that the email address that Blackboard has registered for you is an email address you check regularly. If it isn't, change your email address on Blackboard by clicking "Update Email" on the upper left-hand tools menu.

Incompletes and Credit/No Credit

To be eligible for a grade of incomplete, students must have reached an agreement to that effect with the professor prior to the final exam. No grade of incomplete will be awarded without documentation of a health issue, mental health issue, or some other legitimate obstacle to completing the course in a timely manner. Said health issues can affect either the student or a family member under the student's care. All work must be completed within a year.

In accordance with Hunter College policy, to be eligible for Credit/No Credit students must have completed all assignments and must do the final exam. The Credit/No Credit form must be completed and signed prior to the due date of the final exam.

Office of Accessibility

Hunter College is committed to ensuring educational parity and accommodations for all students with documented disabilities and/or medical conditions. It is recommended that all students with documented disabilities (Emotional, Medical, Physical and/or Learning) consult the Office of Accessibility located in Room E1124 to secure necessary academic accommodations. For further information and assistance please call 212-772-4857, TTY 212-650-3230.

Academic Integrity

Any deliberate borrowing of the ideas, terms, statements, or knowledge of others without clear and specific acknowledgment of the source is intellectual theft and is called plagiarism. It is not plagiarism to borrow the ideas, terms, statements, or knowledge of others if the source is clearly and specifically acknowledged. Students who consult such critical material and wish to include some of the insights, ideas, or statements

encountered must provide full citations in an appropriate form. Hunter College regards acts of academic dishonesty (e.g., plagiarism, cheating on examinations, obtaining unfair advantage, and falsification of records and official documents) as serious offenses against the values of intellectual honesty. The College is committed to enforcing the CUNY Policy on Academic Integrity and will pursue cases of academic dishonesty according to the Hunter College Academic Integrity Procedures.

Required texts (available through Akademos or other online sellers):

Hobbes, *Leviathan* (Hackett)

Locke, *Second Treatise of Government* (Hackett)

Rousseau, *The Basic Political Writings* (Hackett)

J.S. Mill, *On Liberty and other writings* (Cambridge)

Karl Marx, *Selected Writings* edited by Lawrence Simon (Hackett)

Other readings, marked (Bb) on the syllabus will be available in your weekly coursework folder.

Requirements

This class is graded out of a total of 600 points.

- Ten 1 page weekly response papers posted to Blackboard (20 points each, **200 points total**) Your paper is due **Thursday at 11:59 PM**, beginning with the second week of class, Thursday September 2. **No late papers accepted under ANY circumstances.** If you miss the deadline, just skip that week – you will still be able to write 10 papers, as there are 2 “makeup” weeks.
- A 6 page midterm essay due Wednesday October 14th (**120 points**)
- A Voicethread presentation applying one political theorist’s argument to a contemporary political controversy or problem due Thursday November 5th (**50 points**)
- A final comprehensive essay exam (10 pages) due Tuesday December 15th (**170 points**).
- Class Participation (regular participation in Friday’s live class (30 points, 2 points per class – 1 point for your attentive presence and 1 point for participating through voice and/or chat), participation in Tuesday’s lecture (30 points, 2 points per lecture – complete viewing of the lectures and offering a comment in response to my prompt) (**60 points**)

COURSE FORMAT

This course is designed as a hybrid of synchronous and asynchronous elements. **Each week’s activities and assignments will be posted in a single folder on Blackboard.** You can access this folder by clicking on “Weekly Coursework.”

The basic structure is as follows:

Monday: Asynchronous voicethread lecture made available. 1 page essay prompt (due Thursday) made available.

Monday and Tuesday: Complete reading assignment for Tuesday (using my study questions as a guide), and watch my lecture and submit a comment on Voicethread. (To get participation credit for engaging with the Voicethread lecture, you need to complete viewing the entire Voicethread presentation and provide a comment as directed by 11:59 pm on Tuesday.)

Wednesday and Thursday: Complete the reading assignment for Friday, and write a 1 page response to the essay prompt, which you must upload to Blackboard by 11:59 pm on Thursday.

Friday: Live (synchronous) class held on Zoom at 9:45 am. We will recap major issues from Tuesday's lecture and readings, as well as discuss the readings for Friday and your responses.

Notes about technology

Expectations regarding Zoom classes: To the greatest extent possible, please keep your camera on during our live Zoom classes. It's helpful to me to be able to see your nods and frowns. Please mute your microphone when you are not speaking.

Schedule of Classes and Readings

“Voicethread” indicates a recorded lecture that you need to watch by the end of the day.

“Zoom” indicates a live, synchronous class session to be held at 9:45 am.

Week 1

Zoom Fri Aug 28: Course introduction: What is Modernity? Political Legitimacy in the Modern Era (No response paper this week)

Early Modern Legitimacy: the Social Contract and Natural Rights

Week 2: Hobbes’ state of nature and law of nature

Voicethread Tues 9/1: Hobbes, *Leviathan* Introduction (pp. 3-5), Chapter 13
Response paper #1 due Thurs 9/3 at 11:59 pm

Zoom Fri 9/4 Hobbes, *Leviathan* Chapters 14 (para 1-5), 15 (1-5, 21, 23, 41)

Week 3: Creating the Leviathan: How strong is Hobbes’s state?

Voicethread Tues 9/8 Hobbes, *Leviathan* Chapters 17, 18

Response paper #2 due Thurs 9/10 at 11:59 pm

Zoom Fri 9/11 Hobbes, 19 (1-8), 20 (1-6), Charles Mills, *The Racial Contract*, pp. 62-67 (Bb)

Week 4: Critical questions for Hobbes

Zoom Tues 9/15 Hobbes, *Leviathan*, chapters 21, 29-30

Fri 9/18 no classes scheduled (no response paper this week)

Week 5: Locke’s state of nature and law of nature

Voicethread Tues 9/22 Locke, *Second Treatise* chapters I, II, III, IV

Response paper #3 due Thurs 9/24

Zoom Fri 9/25 Locke, Locke, *Second Treatise* Chapter V

Week 6: How “limited” is Locke’s government?

Voicethread Tues 9/29 Locke, *Second Treatise* VI (52-57, 60, 63), VII (87-93) Mills, *Racial Contract*, pp. 67-68, 81-89 (Bb)

Response paper # 4 due Thurs 10/1

Zoom Fri 10/2 Locke, *Second Treatise*, Chapter VIII (95-99, 119-122), IX, X, XI,

Week 7: Locke (and Hobbes) on the right of resistance

Voicethread Tues 10/6 Locke, *Second Treatise* XII, XIII (149, 150), XIV

Response paper #5 due Thurs 10/8

Zoom Fri 10/9 *Second Treatise* XVIII, XIX

Week 8: Rousseau's Idealized Natural Condition

Voicethread Tues 10/13 Rousseau, *Discourse on Inequality*: Rousseau's introduction

→ 5-6 page midterm essay due Wednesday 10/14

(no response paper due for this week; if you missed one, you can make it up with a response paper for Rousseau by Thursday 10/15 at 11:59 pm)

Zoom Fri 10/16 Rousseau *Discourse on Inequality* part one

Week 9: Corrupting Society

Voicethread Tues 10/20 Rousseau *Discourse on Inequality* part two

Response paper #6 due Thurs 10/22

Zoom Fri 10/23 Rousseau, *Social Contract*, Book I

Week 10 Rousseau's Solution

Voicethread Tues 10/27 Rousseau, *Social Contract*, Book II

Response paper #7 due Thurs 10/29

Zoom Fri 10/30 Rousseau, *Social Contract* Books III & IV excerpts

Week 11 Modern Natural Rights

Voicethread Tues 11/3 Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen (Bb).

Voicethread presentations due Thurs 11/5 at 11:59 pm

Zoom Fri 11/6 Massimiliano Tomba, "1793: The Neglected Legacy of Insurgent Universality" (Bb)

Week 12: From Natural Rights to Utilitarianism – the New Basis of Liberty

Voicethread Tues 11/10 Mill *On Liberty*, chapter 1

Response paper #8 due Thurs 11/12

Zoom Fri 11/13 Mill *On Liberty*, chapters 2, 3

Week 13: Mill's Critique of Gender Domination

Voicethread Tue 11/17 Mill, *On Liberty*, chapters 4 and 5, *Subjection of Women*, chpt. 1

response paper #9 due Thursday 11/19

Zoom Fri 11/20 *Subjection of Women* chapter 2

Week 14 Marx: Modernity's "Internal" Critic

Voicethread Tues 11/24 Marx, "Alienated Labor", pp. 58-68;

(Makeup response paper due Tuesday at 11:59 pm)

Zoom Wed 11/25 Marx's critique of liberalism: " On the Jewish Question," pp. 1-21.

Week 15: Marx's Theory of History and Critique of Capitalism

Voicethread Tues 12/1 Historical Materialism: Marx *The German Ideology*, pp. 102-112, pp. 113-122 ("... princes and states"), 123-126 ("driving force of history"), 129-131; Preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, pp. 211-212. Marx, Political Analysis: *Eighteenth Brumaire*, pp. 187-208 and *Critique of the Gotha Program*, pp. 315-321

Response paper 10 due Thursday 12/2 11:59 pm

Zoom Fri 12/4, Mature Critique of Capitalism: Marx, *Capital* chapter 7, pp. 264-273, 282-294

Week 16 Course Wrap-up

Zoom Tues 12/8 LIVE CLASS -- Review

Final Essay Exam Due: Tuesday December 15th