

POLI 271: Modern Political Theory
Fall 2019
MWF 11:15-12:05, Bingham 0101

Instructor: Matthew H. Young

Email: mhyoung@live.unc.edu

Office Hours (303 Hamilton Hall): MWF, 10-11 AM and by appointment.

Course Description

Welcome to Modern Political Theory. This is a survey course covering major developments in the history of political philosophy during the modern era. Take note, the word ‘modern’ carries different connotations in different disciplines: for our purposes it spans roughly from the European Renaissance to the Industrial Revolution, or from 1500-1900.

Political theory seeks to answer normative and ethical questions related to the practice of living together in communities. During the Modern Period, political theory was characterized by a focus on the ideas of liberty, equality, authority, and representation. These concepts deeply inform our contemporary practice of politics today. One of my aims is to assist you in understanding the genesis and historical development of the influential ideas of this period.

Students often ask why they ought to study political theory—a seemingly esoteric field of study. There are a few reasons why this course ought to commend itself to you. It is my hope that through studying political theory you will become a more conscientious and reflective member of your own political community. This class has several objectives to that end. First, we aim to *understand* the conceptual and historical roots of our current political order. Second, we hope to learn to *critique* these ideas. The ideas of responsibility, freedom, liberty, and authority that came to the forefront of our political psyche during the modern era have not been unequivocally good or equally beneficial: you will learn to identify the weaknesses of theories, and to defend, criticize, and compare the myriad political ideas that you may be confronted with. In turn, you may find yourself becoming a better participant in your intellectual or political community.

Course Requirements and Grading

Your course grade will be determined by your satisfaction of the following requirements:

Exams

There will be three exams, each marked clearly on the syllabus. The first two exams will be non-cumulative, the final exam will be cumulative. The first exam is worth 10 percent of your final grade; the second exam is worth 15 percent; the final exam is worth 25 percent. Exams 1 and 2 are non-cumulative, Exam 3 is cumulative. Exams will be a combination of short response questions (3-5 sentences) and essay questions (5-7 paragraphs). Absences from exams will only

be excused for documented medical or family emergencies, and make-up exams must be scheduled at my convenience. *Failure to take the final exam will result in a failing grade for the course.* Exams will be administered on Sakai: **please bring your laptops to take all exams.**

Papers

You are required to write two papers for this course, each worth 20 percent of your final grade. Producing any type of writing, perhaps especially philosophical writing, is a process of drafting, sharing, redrafting, and revising. In this course, I highly recommend you begin writing papers long before the date they are due. No outside reading is necessary for writing an excellent paper. An excellent paper will be mechanically elegant and almost entirely free of errors, show a good understanding of the texts we read in class, and contain a significant amount of original critical content. A summary or outline of the paper without a critical argument is *not* adequate, and *will not* receive a good grade. *Failure to submit both papers will result in failure of the course.*

The bulk of your paper grade will evaluate your demonstrated understanding and critical analysis of the text, your response to the prompt, and your clear, error-free, and elegant use of the English language. You may, however, be penalized for failing to adhere to the following guidelines.

Submission: Papers must be submitted by class time on the day it is due. Upload your completed paper to the 'Drop Box' folder on the course Sakai site. This is a private, secure folder that only you and I can access. Graded versions of your paper will generally be returned via Drop Box. Your file ought to be named '[Lastname] I' or '[Lastname] II', and saved as a .doc or .docx file format.

Formatting and Length: Papers must be typed in a 12-point Times New Roman font, with 1-inch margins. Please place page numbers on all pages and keep first-page assignment info to a minimum. Your word count (excluding bibliographic entries and assignment info) should be clearly typed at the top of the first page. Papers must be between 1200-1600 words long. Papers shorter than 1200 words will have a multiplicative penalty of length/1200 applied, while papers longer than 1600 words will have a multiplicative penalty of 1600/length applied. Roughly speaking, this means that if you submit a paper that is only 75 percent of the required length, you can earn at most 75 percent of the available credit.

Works Cited: You are only required to have a works cited page at the end of your paper if you reference sources other than those assigned in the course. You *must*, however, include in-text page-number references (either parenthetical or as footnotes) throughout the paper. I do not care what bibliographic style you use.

Lateness: All students will be given one 'grace day' for their papers. You may turn in one paper, one day late, without penalty. After that, late papers will be assessed a 10 percent penalty for each day late. If using your 'grace day', please state it at the top of your paper.

Reading

Political theory is a reading-intensive discipline. While I have done my best to limit the length and difficulty of assigned readings, you should be prepared to spend a significant amount of time completing the assigned readings prior to coming to class. I almost exclusively assign primary source documents that will often be dense, difficult, and written in a style or form foreign to your experience. Reading well will require long periods of time uninterrupted by your technology or circumstances. I recommend reading in a well-lit place with a pencil in hand and a notebook nearby to record any questions, comments, or areas that require clarification. Do not expect to skim the reading once and understand it fully.

Participation and Effort

Attendance

Regular and timely attendance is a required aspect of this class. Unexplained absences cost valuable time; late entrances distract the class. I will pass a sign-in sheet around at the beginning of class. I recognize that things happen – accordingly, each student is permitted 2 unexcused absences. I am generally happy to grant an excused absence *so long as you email me prior to class time*. Further unexcused absences will result in a 10 percent penalty per absence.

Participation

In a class of this size, I do not expect you to speak every period. I do, however, expect every student to contribute thoughtfully throughout the term. Participation is not only measured in quantity, but in quality. The main aim is to contribute to a productive and welcoming learning environment. I cannot entirely exempt you from speaking, no matter how reticent or shy you are. You may, however, contribute to our class experience by speaking with me in office hours, asking useful questions privately or in class, and contributing to discuss. On the other end, it is possible to contribute too much—if you are regularly speaking over or interrupting others, or are always the first person to answer a question, you may be preventing your classmates from equally sharing.

Grading Scale

All letter grades will be given according to the following scale.

A	93-100
A-	90-92
B+	87-89
B	83-86
B-	80-82
C+	77-79
C	73-76
C-	70-72
D+	67-69
D	60-66
F	0-59

Technology and Classroom Behavior

Laptops, tablets, e-readers, cell phones, and other electronic devices will not be needed for this class, and should be silenced and put away. Pedagogical studies suggest that material is better processed and retained when students take notes by hand. Further, the use of electronics in the classroom is often a distraction not only for users, but for those seated around them. I may grant exceptions to this policy on an individual basis for those with documented accessibility needs.

This course covers ideas, theories, and concepts that may be divisive or contentious. I expect the highest standard of civil discourse and mutual respect from, and for, all participants in this course. It is not my goal to persuade you to see politics through any particular lens, or to share my political conclusions. As I will explicitly remind you throughout the term, my aim is to help you appraise and examine the various positions we encounter with charity and integrity. Some of the ideas we encounter may be similar to convictions you or others you know hold. Other theoretical positions may seem hostile to your deeply held religious, ethical, or political commitments. In all, I expect you to react with academic integrity, maturity, and civility.

Communication

I am easiest to contact via email, at mhyoung@live.unc.edu. I strive to be prompt in responding to your emails. If you have a question that will require a detailed or lengthy response, I recommend speaking with me during office hours or scheduling an appointment. I do not, as a rule, read or respond to emails on Sunday.

Required Texts

Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*. Hackett Classics, ed. Edwin Curley. ISBN: 0872201775

John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*. Hackett Classics, ed. C.B. Macpherson. ISBN: 0915144867

John Locke, *Letter Concerning Toleration*. Hackett Classics, ed. James Tully. ISBN: 0915145607

Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Fundamental Political Writings*. Broadview Press, ed. Macguire and Williams. ISBN: 1554812976

Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*. Hackett Classics, ed. J.G.A. Pocock. ISBN: 0872200205

J.S. Mill, *On Liberty, Utilitarianism, and Other Essays*. Oxford University Press. ISBN: 0199670803

Karl Marx, *Selected Writings*. Hackett Classics. ISBN: 0872202186

Academic Integrity and Accommodations

Academic Integrity

Students and faculty at UNC are governed by the Honor Code. Academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. Any student who is caught presenting someone else's work as their own, making inappropriate use of resources, or behaving dishonestly in any manner will be subject to Honor Court proceedings. For additional information about academic dishonesty and plagiarism, please see <http://www.lib.unc.edu/plagiarism>.

Accommodations

Reasonable accommodations are available for students with disabilities, chronic medical conditions, a temporary disability or pregnancy complications resulting in difficulties with accessing learning opportunities. All accommodations are coordinated through the Accessibility Resources and Service Office. See the ARS Website for contact information: <https://ars.unc.edu>