

POL 2002H1S: MODERN AND CONTEMPORARY POLITICAL THOUGHT
(Ph.D core in political theory, part II)
Spring 2024
Northrop Frye Hall, Room #9
Victoria College

Course meeting time: Thursday, 1:10-4:00 p.m. In person.
Via Zoom if necessary
TBA

Professor Ruth Marshall
Office hours: By Appointment via Zoom/In Person
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Office Hours: Wednesday 3:00-4:00
by appointment Birge Carneige #24 or
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We will spend roughly one week apiece on ten major political theorists (or figures who may be read as political theorists). By the time of class on a given theorist you will be expected to have read all of their work that is under consideration in the seminar. This will enable us to consider the relationship between earlier and later parts of a work, or in some cases relationships among different works, in addressing questions of interpretation.

Requirements:

1. Six short papers (**maximum one page – single spaced**)
 - **The papers should form the basis of a presentation to the class on the theorist of approximately 20-25 minutes.** You will be asked also to lead the class discussion with any others who have chosen the theorist.
 - You will be asked to chose the 6 theorists after our first class. We may have to limit the number of presenters for each class depending on numbers.

Completion of these papers is worth **10 percent of the final grade.**

We have set out three questions (or sets of questions) to guide each week's discussion, and each short paper should respond to one of the questions for the class in which the paper is submitted. Your papers should not attempt to develop an argument in detail. Rather you should provide a summary statement of claims that you are prepared to support with arguments and **explicit references to the text** in the course of class discussion.

The papers must be posted on the class website (on Quercus, in “Discussions”) by 6:00 pm on the Wednesday before class. Please show your colleagues the courtesy of keeping this deadline, in order that may we all have time to read them and reflect before class. If you are unable to meet the deadline

for illness or personal reasons, please let the instructors know as soon as you can. They will be graded on a pass/fail basis, and count for 10% of the final grade.

2. Active and informed participation in class discussion (including familiarity with your colleagues' short papers): **20% of the final grade**. Regardless of whether you have written a paper or not, you should come prepared to discuss the week's questions and you should have read carefully the comments of your fellow students.
3. One 20-page paper on a topic of your choice dealing with the theorists from the term. The paper may either analyse one theorist or compare two of them. The paper is worth **70 percent of the final grade** and is due on 4 April 2024 (a later deadline may be announced during the course, and you may request an extension). Please submit your papers electronically in .docx or .rtf format to both instructors.

CLASS SCHEDULE

January 11th: Introduction (1 hour); Marx (2 hours)

Marx, selections from *The Marx-Engels Reader* [see "Recommended Texts" below]:
pp. 3-6, "Preface to the Critique of Political Economy"
pp. 26-46, "On the Jewish Question"
pp. 53-65, "Introduction: Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right"
pp. 70-93, "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts"
pp. 143-199, "Theses on Feuerbach" and "The German Ideology, Pt. I"
pp. 469-500, (Marx and Engels) *The Communist Manifesto*
pp. 525-541, "Critique of the Gotha Programme"
pp. 594-617, "The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte"

Questions:

1. What does Marx think about capitalism? Is he critical of capitalism? If so, from what perspective? Does Marx think that capitalism is unjust or otherwise immoral? Why or why not?
2. How does Marx characterize power? Does he leave out anything that he should have included? [Because this is an introductory week, there are only two questions.]

January 18th : Marx (continued) and Mill, *On Liberty*

Marx, selections above (Continued);

J.S. Mill, *On Liberty*, Chapters 1-3. (There being no standard edition, please number the paragraphs of your edition before coming to class so that everyone can follow along.)

Questions:

2. How does Marx advance his critique of rights in "On the Jewish Question"? What are the strengths and weaknesses of his analysis? How do the rhetorical dimensions of the text reinforce or undermine the argument?"
3. How does Marx understand the state (perhaps in more than one way)? How is the state related to democracy? Is it accurate to suggest that he radicalizes democratic values while condemning democratic institutions?

4. Mill seems to portray culture and society as both the chief threats to liberty in the contemporary world and the chief method of combatting those threats (via “a strong barrier of moral conviction”—Chapter 1, §15). Does Mill have good grounds for downplaying the role of political and social institutions?

January 25th : Mill (Continued).

On Liberty: Chapters 4-5; *The Subjection of Women*, all.

Questions:

1. What is the relationship between liberty and progress in Mill? To what extent does his defence of liberty depend upon his assessment of its consequences, and how persuasive is that assessment?
2. To what extent is *On Liberty* consistent with *The Subjection of Women*? Is the critical analysis of group- (in this case, gender-) based power in the latter in tension with the individualism of the former? Or, on the contrary, is the account of liberty contained in the former incomplete without the critical analysis of the latter?
3. What are the strengths and weaknesses of Mill’s analysis in *The Subjection of Women*? Does it go far enough in challenging the gender roles of his time? Does it go *too* far in the sense of implying the illegitimacy of cultures and subcultures in which men and women are expected to take on very different roles?

February 1: Nietzsche.

Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality* (Kaufmann translation [Vintage], or else Carol Diethe translation [Cambridge]).

Questions:

1. In *Genealogy* I, 16, Nietzsche suggests that each of the decisive moments of our civilization has been a triumph of slave morality over master morality (and that this fact has been a moral disaster). What does Nietzsche mean by “master morality” and “slave morality”? Does his genealogical method imply that what we take to be “truth”—and especially the truth about morality—is always, and only, the product of willed social formations?”
2. The subtitle of *The Genealogy of Morality* is “a polemic”. What, speaking as bluntly and simply as possible, is Nietzsche attacking? Does he succeed in destroying (or at least wounding) it?
3. What does Nietzsche mean when he states in III, 27 that “morality will be destroyed by the will to truth’s becoming-conscious-of-itself...”? In what sense is Nietzsche hopeful about the future?

February 8 : Critical Theory

Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford University Press):

- Preface (1944 and -47);
- “The Concept of Enlightenment”
- “The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception”

Questions:

1. Horkheimer and Adorno write that the book aimed “to explain why humanity, instead of entering a truly human state, is sinking into a new kind of barbarism” (1944 Preface, p. xiv of the Noerr/Jephcott [Stanford] edition). What do they mean? How is their judgment regarding modern “barbarism” related to the claim that enlightenment displays a “fear of truth” and has relapsed “into mythology” (ibid., xvi)? If enlightenment has really produced barbarism, what went wrong, how long ago did it go wrong, and how, if at all, might we make things better?
2. The authors are opposed to all forms of “positivism”. Why? What do they mean by extolling “determinate negation” or striving to discern the “negative” aspect of observed phenomena? Is their method productive or persuasive? Does the premise that clarity and “common sense” necessarily serve the existing order prove that “bad” (obscure, difficult) writing can produce proper critique? What are the advantages and disadvantages of concluding that it does?
3. “All mass culture under monopoly is identical” (“The Culture Industry”, p. 95). What is Horkheimer and Adorno’s critique of mass culture? What is their (implicitly or explicitly) proposed alternative? In the age of the Internet and social media, it no longer seems the case that people passively absorb a centrally-produced mass culture: commenting on mass culture and answering back to its claims are ubiquitous. To what extent does this render the authors’ critique obsolete?

February 15: Arendt

Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, Chapters 1-6.

Questions:

1. How does Arendt distinguish the public from the private realm—and why does she so strongly prefer the former? Why is she so critical of the modern “social” realm, is she right to be critical, and what would follow if we accepted her criticism?
2. What are the key elements of Arendt’s theory of action, and why is Arendtian action so frustrating? How, if at all, does it change your reading of the discussion of freedom in chapter 2? Do efforts to mitigate the frustrating or unsettling aspects of action necessarily undercut freedom or are there modes of activity that can soften the “burdens” that pertain to political action?
3. What does Arendt mean by ‘world’ and ‘worldliness’? What conditions are needed to maintain worldliness – does it depend on labour, work, and/or action, or any particular relationship among citizens? What conditions or forces threaten worldliness?

Feb 19: Feb 23 Reading Week—no class on Feb. 22

D. Cook will only be reachable via email as I will be out of the country for the week.

Feb. 29: Arendt (Continued)

Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Part II, Chapter 9; Part III, Chapters 10-13

Questions:

1. How does Arendt understand power? How does she conceive the relationship between power and violence? Do you find her account of power more or less incisive for political analysis than liberal and Marxists analyses of power?
2. Discuss Arendt's concept of the "right to have rights" and its relation to her conception of the polis and citizenship.
3. Discuss Arendt's understanding of totalitarianism in the context of the specificities of modern politics and political community, as a political form that responds to "the more or less general, more or less dramatic breakdown of all traditional communities." Explain what she means by 'totalitarian lawfulness.' Do you find her characterization compelling?

March 7: Foucault

Michel Foucault, "The Subject and Power", TBA – on Quercus
"Society Must be Defended": *Lectures at the College de France, 1976* – Courses Jan.7, Jan.14, Jan.21, Feb. 4, Mar. 10, Mar. 17.

Questions:

1. Foucault writes "There is no power, but only relations [*rappports*] of power, which are ineluctably born, as effects and conditions, from other processes." Discuss how Foucault's approach to power breaks with liberal theories of power, both substantively and methodologically.
- 2.

March 14th : Deleuze and Guattari

Thousand Plateaus, #1 Rhizome, #6 Body without Organs, #12 Treatise on Nomadology.
The Three Ecologies.

Questions:

1. Describe the War Machine.
2. What is a body without organs?
3. Describe ecosopy.

March 21th : Fanon.

Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Richard Philcox, Grove Press, 2008:

Questions:

1. What is Fanon's attitude towards language, and towards the truths that language both reveals and produces? To what extent does it resemble that of Marx in the "Theses on Feuerbach" ("The philosophers have only *interpreted* the world, in various ways; the point, however, is to *change* it"—Marx-Engels Reader, p. 145)? How does it relate to Fanon's refusal to adopt an "abstract point of view" (67)?
2. :constructed as the objects of action or perception—of the "white gaze", often internalized—and must become subjects. What does this mean? What would it amount to in practice?
3. Fanon explores various theses regarding blackness: phylogenic, ontogenic, and sociogenic. How does he use psychoanalysis and philosophy to evaluate and critique these theses? Is there an "essence" to blackness (and to whiteness)?

March 28st : Butler

Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*.

Questions:

- 1.

April 4th: Rawls

John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* —original (1971) edition (Belknap Press of Harvard University Press): §§1-12 and 49-50 (pp. 3-75, 315-332).

----- *Political Liberalism*, paperback edition (with a New Introduction and the "Reply to Habermas", Columbia University Press, 1996): "Introduction to the Paperback Edition"; Lecture II, §§1-2 (on the "reasonable"); Lecture IV, all (on the overlapping consensus) (pp. xxxvii-lxii, 48-58, 133-172). (The "Expanded Edition" should have the same text but slightly different pagination).

Both these texts are available through the U of T library. **Please do use the original (1971) edition of Rawls**, both because it's the one available through the library and because the revised edition is substantively inferior to the original.

Questions:

1. What are the foundations of Rawls's argument: his fundamental axioms or starting assumptions? What would happen to his theory if we questioned or relaxed them? You might think specifically about (a) his account of what counts as "reasonable"; (b) what we must assume about human nature and why (see esp. the end of the paperback introduction); (c) why he rejects a "mixed" theory that would endorse utility constrained by a social minimum. Which of these assumptions (if any) is subject to rebuttal or questioning, and on what grounds would such rebuttal or questioning rest?
2. The Original Position is an attempt to improve on the contract theories of Locke and Rousseau. Does it succeed in this respect (whether or not one accepts the particular conclusions that Rawls derives from it)? Since it is not a real contract, why should anyone accept it as binding? Does the "veil of ignorance", by requiring that people put aside not only their social identities but also their conceptions of the good, disable necessary moral and social reflection?
3. Rawls' "overlapping consensus" posits that a society with deep moral and political differences must still be able to appeal to a common "public reason" that can be affirmed within each "comprehensive

conception" of the good. Does his account succeed? Or is modern society bound to be a mere *modus vivendi* (and what would be so bad if it were)? Does many countries' (Hungary, Poland, the US) recent experience of illiberalism and so-called "democratic decline" demonstrate the weakness of Rawls' position—or, on the contrary, its necessity?

Recommendation on Texts:

Some of the texts for this term have fewer available editions (and in the case of translated works, fewer reliable translations) than last term's texts. Please use the texts listed below; used copies and library copies are often readily available (the latter via curbside pickup).

Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 2d ed., ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1978).

John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty* (any edition, but please number the paragraphs).
John Stuart Mill, *The Subjection of Women* (any edition).

Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality [or "Morals"]*: Kaufmann Translation (Vintage) or Diethelme Translation (Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought, 2017).

Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford University Press, 2002).

Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018).

Franz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2007).

Félix Guattari, *The Three Ecologies*, trans I. Pindar & P. Sutton, (N.Y. & Ldn, Continuum, 2011.)

Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, trans. Brian Massumi, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987.)

Michel Foucault, "*Society Must Be Defended*": *Lectures at the Collège de France, 1976*. (NY: Picador, 2003) The Foucault readings will be posted as PDFs to Quercus.

Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. (NY: Routledge, 1990)

John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* original (1971) edition (Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1971.)

-----, *Political Liberalism*: expanded edition including "The Idea of Public Reason Revisited" (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005).