

Political Science 2203: History of Modern Political Philosophy
Vanderbilt University
Spring 2018

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'Send us your references' from Kate Beaton's *Hark! A Vagrant*

Course description

Welcome to the History of Modern Political Philosophy! This is an intermediate level course in political theory. It is the second in a sequence of courses that begins in Ancient Political Thought (PSCI 2202) and continues in Contemporary Political Theory (PSCI 2205). No prior knowledge of the periods or the materials covered is required and those who have completed, or are concurrently enrolled in PSCI 1100, 1101, 1102, 1103, or 1150 are welcome. If possible, it is advisable to take Justice (1103) first. We will meet three times a week for fifty minutes. Time will be made in each meeting for questions and discussion.

Our readings are oriented around the central question, *what is the relationship between politics and freedom?* This raises a variety of related concerns, such as: how do we define freedom? Is it something we have a natural right to or is it the product of membership in a political community? Is the state the best site to pursue liberty? Should the state protect its citizens' right to be left alone or should it require participation in the pursuit of shared goals? How can we think of freedom outside of the familiar paradigm of choice? What relationship between ruler and ruled is most likely to increase liberty - and for whom? What recourse do

citizens have when the government seems to limit their liberties? Is freedom compatible with other values, such as equality and justice? How do we decide which value to pursue when they come into conflict?

In order to think through these questions, we will read a number of major works in the western canon that propose various answers. These answers will necessarily be incompatible and at odds with one another. Our task is to read the texts critically and judge what we, as individuals, find most and least compelling. The approach of the course is contextual and historical; that is, we will examine how particular authors were motivated and constrained by their circumstances, why they raised the questions they did and gave their specific answers. Nonetheless, one aim of the class is to demonstrate that the analytic skills acquired in engaging these authors and their works can be brought to bear on a wide range of political questions, including those of our own time.

Our texts begin in renaissance Florence and end in mid-twentieth century America. In that time, the Spanish, Portuguese, Dutch, French, and British empires rose and fell; the modern state as we know it came into existence; the American, French, and Haitian Revolutions challenged long-standing political truisms about citizenship and rights; and the purview of political life was forcibly expanded to include women, people of color, colonized nations, and the laboring classes. Our readings will come from a variety of schools of thought, including republicanism, conservatism, liberalism, and marxism.

Note that the reading is demanding: it will likely take longer than more expository texts to complete and it will often address ideas at a highly conceptual level. Give yourself adequate time to read in advance of class, as that, along with discussion, is the primary activity for this course. The goal of our discussions will be to help you unpack and think through what you have read. See ‘Some Suggestions for Studying Political Theory’ at the end of the syllabus for further advice.

Reading schedule

Reading must be completed in advance of the day listed in the reading schedule below. Readings marked with an asterisk will be available on the course site. Changes may be made to the assigned reading over the course of the semester.

Week 1

January 8 Petrarch, “How a Ruler Ought to Govern His State”*

Machiavelli, *The Prince*, in *Selected Political Writings*, letter to Vettori, dedication, chapters 1-5, pp. 1-18

January 10 Machiavelli, *The Prince*, in *Selected Political Writings*, chapters 6-15, pp. 18-49

January 12 Machiavelli, *The Prince*, in *Selected Political Writings*, chapters 16-26, pp. 49-80

Week 2

- January 15 *No class*
- January 17 Machiavelli, *The Discourses*, in *Selected Political Writings*, Book I, chapters 1-5, 9, 10, 16-18 and Book II, chapters 1-3, pp. 82-97, 107-113, 121-129, 161-165, 171-172
- January 19 Machiavelli, *The Discourses*, in *Selected Political Writings*, Book III, chapters 1, 3, and 7-9, pp. 189-200

Week 3

- January 22 Hobbes, *Leviathan*, letter dedicatory, introduction, chapters 1-6, pp. 1-35
- January 24 Hobbes, *Leviathan*, chapters 11, 13-16, pp. 57-63 and 74-105
- January 26 Hobbes, *Leviathan*, chapters 17-20, pp. 106-135

Week 4

- January 29 Hobbes, *Leviathan*, chapters 21-23, pp. 136-159
- January 31 Hobbes, *Leviathan*, chapters 24-26, pp. 159-189
- February 2 Hobbes, *Leviathan*, chapters 27-29, pp. 190-219

Week 5

- February 5 Locke, *Second Treatise*, preface and chapters 1-8, pp. 5-51
- February 7 Locke, *Second Treatise*, chapters 8-15, pp. 52-91
- February 9 Locke, *Second Treatise*, chapters 16-19, pp. 91-124

Week 6

- February 12 Hume, “That Politics May Be Reduced to a Science” and “Of the Original Contract”*
- February 14 Rousseau, *A Discourse on Inequality*, in *The Basic Political Writings*, letter to the Republic of Geneva, preface, and part one, pp. 31-69
- February 16 Rousseau, *A Discourse on Inequality*, in *The Basic Political Writings*, second part, pp. 69-92

Week 7

- February 19 Rousseau, *Social Contract*, in *The Basic Political Writings*, Book I (entire) and Book II, chapters 1-4 and 6-10, pp. 156-176, and 178-188
- February 21 Rousseau, *Social Contract*, in *The Basic Political Writings*, Book III, chapters 1-7 and 10-18, pp. 191-206 and 212-224
- February 23 Rousseau, *Social Contract*, in *The Basic Political Writings*, Book IV, chapters 1-2 and 8-9, pp. 224-228, 243-252

Week 8

- February 26 Price, *A Discourse on the Love of Our Country*, and Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, in *Romanticism and Revolution*, pp. 12-33
- February 28 Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, in *Romanticism and Revolution*, pp. 33-50
- March 2 Paine, *Rights of Man*, in *Romanticism and Revolution*, pp. 70-88

Midterm due in class

Week 9

Spring break

Week 10

- March 12 Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Men*, in *Romanticism and Revolution*, pp. 51-69
- March 14 Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, in *Romanticism and Revolution*, pp. 89-106
- March 16 Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, in *Romanticism and Revolution*, pp. 106-122

Week 11

- March 19 Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, pp. 1-15, 32-44, and 73
- March 21 Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, pp. 106-113 and 201-222
- March 23 Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, pp. 146-164
- Douglass, "What to the slave is the 4th of July?"*

Week 12

March 26 in-class film screening: Chaplin's *Modern Times*

March 28 in-class film screening: Chaplin's *Modern Times*

March 30 in-class film screening: Chaplin's *Modern Times*

Week 13

April 2 Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*, in *Selected Writings*, pp. 54-68*

April 4 Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*, in *Selected Writings*, pp. 68-79*

April 6 Marx and Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, in *Selected Writings*, pp. 157-176 and 186*

Week 14

April 9 Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, pp. 29-78

April 11 Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, pp. 79-94

April 13 Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, pp. 7-28

Week 15

April 16 Arendt, "Truth and Politics"*

April 18 Arendt, "Truth and Politics," continued

April 20 Arendt, "What is Freedom? "*

Exam week

April 23 *Take-home final exam due*

TBA *Final paper due*

Required texts

Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism* (Monthly Review, 978-1583670255)

Hobbes, *Leviathan* (Hackett, 978-0872201774)

Locke, *Second Treatise of Government* (Hackett, 978-0915144860)

Machiavelli, *Selected Political Writings* (Hackett, 978-0872202474)

Mee and Fallon, eds., *Romanticism and Revolution: A Reader* (Wiley-Blackwell, 978-1444330441)

Rousseau, *The Basic Political Writings* (Hackett, 978-1603846738)

Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (Hackett, abridged edition, 978-0872204942)

Optional texts

Arendt, *Between Past and Future* (Penguin, 978-0143104810)

Marx, *Selected Writings* (Hackett, 978-0872202184)

If you're buying the texts for the first time, please use the listed editions. (If you already own a different edition, that's fine - just make sure it includes all of our reading!) There are used copies available online for considerably less than market price - try [Bookfinder](#). I have put as many of the titles as possible on reserve with the library.

Course requirements

Regular attendance is expected, barring illness or emergency.

Quizzes (15 points): Four quizzes will be given in class over the semester. I will announce them in the previous class meeting. The lowest of the four grades will be dropped.

Midterm paper (25 points): The midterm paper will be due at the beginning of the Friday meeting of week 8, on March 2. You will need to submit a copy to the class site via the class site beforehand and hand in a hard copy to June Ann. Further details will be given as the assignment approaches.

Final paper (35 points): The final paper will be due during exam week (precise date TBA).

Take-home final exam (25 points): An open-book exam will be distributed on the final day of class. You will have three days to complete it; it will be due on April 23 at 4 pm.

Late assignments

A two-day extension for either the midterm or the final paper (but not the final exam) can be requested for any reason, as long as it is done at least one week in advance of the regular due date, via email.

Late assignments will lose one-third of a letter grade (i.e., an A- becomes a B+) for every day that they are late, including weekends, except in cases of illness or other documented emergencies.

Assignments not submitted will receive an F. All assignments must be submitted in order to pass the course. I reserve the right to alter any reading or writing assignments during the semester.

Academic honesty

Integrity is essential to all of the work you do as a college student. I take academic honesty very seriously. Anyone found cheating or plagiarizing will automatically fail the related assignment(s). All work done is held to the Vanderbilt Honor Code. All issues of cheating and plagiarism will be documented and reported to the Undergraduate Honor Council. The best way to avoid any trouble is simply to ask me any questions you have about what does and does not constitute plagiarism – it can seem like a very confusing subject, but we can get

a handle on it rather easily. Please ask me any questions you have as they arise! You can also consult the [Student Handbook](#).

Technology

Laptops and tablets are permitted for note-taking purposes, so long as they do not become distractions for yourself or for others. Phones are *verboden* (forbidden). Please turn off the sound on all devices.

Discussion and classroom decorum

It is to be expected that you will encounter a variety of arguments, opinions, and perspectives over the semester, a number of which you may disagree with. Polite, reasoned disagreement is welcomed - even encouraged! - but please maintain a respectful tone, particularly when addressing your colleagues.

As an instructor, one of my responsibilities is to help sustain a safe learning environment on our campus. I also have a mandatory reporting responsibility and am required to share with the University information regarding sexual misconduct or information about a crime that is related to me.

Academic resources

Aside from meeting with me during office hours, please feel free to make use of the [Writing Studio](#).

Accessibility services

I am committed to the full inclusion of all students, as is the University. Students should contact the [Equal Opportunity, Affirmative Action, and Disability Studies Department](#) if they are considering applying for academic accommodations. Please also speak with me if you have a disability or other condition that might require accommodations or modification of any of these course procedures.

Personal resources

For students dealing with anxiety, depression, distress, or other concerns, the [Psychological and Counseling Center](#) (615.322.2571) can offer resources.

For students dealing with domestic violence, harassment, stalking, retaliation, or sexual violence, resources available through Vanderbilt are listed [here](#). Vanderbilt's [Project SAFE](#) also offers a 24 hour hotline (615.322.SAFE (7233)). Be sure to check which services offer confidentiality and which do not. Resources outside of Vanderbilt include the [National Domestic Violence Hotline](#) (1.800.799.7233) and [RAINN's National Sexual Assault Telephone Hotline](#) (1.800.656.HOPE). One option for legal advice is [Equal Rights Advocates](#) (1.800.839.4ERA).

General grading rubric for papers

A (100-90): demonstrates careful and thorough reading of the text; answers all parts of the question(s); provides a clearly articulated thesis; outlines the way in which thesis will be explicated; defends and supports thesis in the body of the paper using textual evidence; considers counter-arguments, if appropriate; argues, does not summarize; structurally elegant; writing is clear and straightforward. Excellent work.

B (89-80): demonstrates familiarity with the text, though may rely more on lecture and discussion than on own reading, or may demonstrate a cursory reading; provides a solid thesis but may not explain how it will be defended, support it thoroughly with textual references, or develop arguments as fully as they ought to; may make selective use of text to support claims; structurally, individual points may feel disconnected from one another. Writing is clear but with room for improvement. Good, but not excellent, work.

C (79-70): a weak, if appropriate or topical, thesis that either does not require a strong defense or relate entirely to the original question(s); demonstrates minimal passing acquaintance with the material; evidence may be drawn primarily from lecture; substance of paper may tend toward summary of the text rather than critical engagement; does not attend to counter-arguments; individual paragraphs may be well-crafted but the paper overall lacks a sense of cohesion and attention to detail. Fair, but not good, work.

D (69-60): does not provide a clear thesis; may not respond to the question(s); does not support claims with evidence; emphasizes opinion or summary over analysis; paper lacks structure; does not otherwise demonstrate mastery of the concepts presented and analyzed in class; lack of organization makes paper difficult to follow; neglect of grammar, style, and writing.

F (59-0): does not provide a thesis or respond to the question(s); may be purely opinion or summary of text(s); no attempt to convey an interpretation of the material; lacking structure, coherence; no attention paid to grammar, style, and writing.

Percent	Letter Grade
94 - 100	A
90 - 93	A-
87 - 89	B+
83 - 86	B
80 - 82	B-
77 - 79	C+
73 - 76	C
70 - 72	C-
67 - 69	D+
63 - 66	D
60 - 62	D-
< 60	F

Some suggestions for studying political theory

No highlighters. Mark up your books, but use a pen or pencil instead of a highlighter so you can jot down notes in the margins or on sticky notes; underline key passages; and summarize arguments in your own words. Use page flags to make finding important, confusing or interesting passages easy. If you find an idea recurring through a text that seems important, keep track of the page numbers by creating your own “index,” on a blank page in the book or in your notes. Write a keyword or phrase at the top of the page every so

often that will remind you of what's happening in the text below and allow you to find specific passages more easily during discussion.

Read slowly! These texts cannot be skimmed or breezed through if you really want to understand them. They will likely take longer to read and digest than more expository texts, like textbooks, or something you might read for pleasure outside of class. Be sure to give yourself adequate time. Do not feel compelled to read all of the assigned reading in one sitting – break it up into manageable chunks and give yourself (for example) an hour to work through a fifteen to twenty page section. The only way to read poorly is to read too quickly.

Take notes. After every reading assignment write down its main argument, its strengths and its weaknesses. Note what its “big idea” or concept is. Taking notes will help you understand a text, especially difficult ones, and make it easier to return to a work later. Writing down questions that arise as you're reading can be especially helpful. If you can include page numbers, do so.

Think big! These texts ask the big questions in order to get a grip on the big picture: are politics and morality incompatible? Why have societies premised on the equality of human beings produced so much inequality? How can we attain knowledge and how will we know if our knowledge is correct? And so on. Your goal in reading these works is to ask and answer these questions as well, using the texts to help you. Ask yourself what question the author is trying to answer and how they are setting about doing so.

Context matters. Who was originally intended to read this work? Do you know anything about its reception? Does the context in which the work was created have any obvious effects on its content? What assumptions, beliefs, and claims underlie it? Why (and how) do we still read it today?

Discuss the texts with others! You will be surprised at the many different interpretations your fellow students will have of the same text. Your understanding of the text – even a text you think you fully understand – will be greatly improved by talking over these interpretations. Use class time, study groups, forums on the class site, and email to discuss the texts.

Comprehension must come before critique. You need to understand an argument before critiquing it. Even if you do ultimately reject an argument, can you think of who might find it persuasive and why? On what grounds do you reject it?

Ask your questions. If you don't understand a passage or even the main argument of a text, don't sit in silence. Ask about it in class. Chances are other students have the same question – or they might have an answer. If you understand a text but have a question about its larger historical, political, or social significance, ask that, too. Asking questions always provokes discussion about a text, and therefore helps you understand.