

SOPHOMORE COLLOQUIUM: MODERN POLITICAL THEORY

CSS 271

Fall 2024

M/W 1:20-2:40 PM | PAC 307

Professor Nina Hagel (she/hers)

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Office hours PAC 408, or on zoom

Sign up at calendly.com/ninahagel

Preceptor: Phoebe Robinson

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Preceptorial Time: TBD

Preceptorial Location: TBD

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

During the sophomore year your tutorials and the colloquium all focus on the emergence and functioning of industrial society, a form of social life that first emerged in northwestern Europe, with roots as early as the 15th century, and coming into full flower in the 19th and 20th centuries. The principal academic content of this course is a selection of the major social and political theories published between 1530 and 1905.

As you will learn in your tutorials, the processes of modernization and industrialization involved enormous changes in every aspect of life. While the changes were in many ways liberating, and welcome to some social groups, they were deeply oppressive to others, and disruptive to all. It is most important for our purposes, although they resulted from the conscious and intentional actions of individuals and groups, that the changes themselves were generally unplanned, often quite unexpected, and no one at the time had a clear understanding of the kind of society or way of life that was emerging.

In many ways one can see these theories as attempts by philosophers and social thinkers to grasp the dramatic transformations that were occurring in their societies. By coming to understand their own societies better, they were able to analyze the different forms of society that were possible and to prescribe a particular form which, in light of their theories, could be seen to be superior to other attainable forms. These theories, then, were critical reflections on society, intended to explain what was going on, to criticize social reality, and articulate ideals for social order and the necessary means for achieving these ideals.

Because of the critical dimension of these theories, they are important not only for what they teach us about how society works and the causes of modernization and industrialization, but also because they themselves become part of the very process of social change itself. For individuals and groups take up these theories, or the ideas inspired by them, draw up political programs, create institutions, and conduct their lives according to them. As these theories become part of society in this way, they often have consequences that are unintended by the theorists who drew them up. Thus, to understand our history and our own form of life requires that we understand the theories that have in part shaped it.

As John Maynard Keynes wrote in his General Theory:

the ideas of economists and political philosophers, both when they are right and when they are wrong, are more powerful than is commonly understood. Indeed, the world is ruled by little else. Practical men, who believe themselves to be quite exempt from any intellectual influences, are usually the slaves of some defunct economist. Madmen in authority, who hear voices in the air, are distilling their frenzy from some academic scribbler of a few years back. I am sure that the power of vested interests is vastly exaggerated compared with the gradual encroachment of ideas. Not, indeed, immediately, but after a certain interval; for in the field of economic and political philosophy there are not many who are influenced by new theories after they are twenty-five or thirty years of age, so that the ideas which civil servants and politicians and even agitators apply to current events are not likely to be the newest. But, soon or late, it is ideas, not vested interests, which are dangerous for good or evil.¹

Thus, when you study the consolidation of the modern state, the development of the institutions of political and legal sovereignty, and the growth of new forms of the state and law, you will be studying social and political processes whose ideas were first articulated by Hobbes; when you investigate the growth of the constitutional state of the 19th century, you will find the ghost of Locke; and when you learn about the socialist movement and the creation and operation of nonmarket industrial economies, you will not have to look hard to see the influence of Marx.

This course, then, has a number of intellectual objectives. First, it will provide a background for the other work you will be doing in the College by presenting some of the theories that are important components of the social and historical processes you will be studying in tutorials. Second, by studying these theories and analyzing their structures and basic assumptions, you should come to see some of the presuppositions that underlie the theories contemporary social scientists use to explain society. This should help you become more reflective about your own assumptions about what is involved in understanding social life. Third, you should come to see, at least in an impressionistic way, the connection between thinking about society in a certain way and holding certain values or principles regarding how society ought to be organized. And fourth, you should come to see that there are a number of fundamentally different and competing ways of thinking about modern society, and what some of these differences involve.

One final note about the role of this colloquium in the CSS. This is the first occasion when your whole class will meet and work together on a common academic project. Thus, it is an opportunity to learn not only about the subject, but also about your classmates. Ideally the colloquium will contribute to the development of a shared sense of membership and common purpose within your class, which can be one of the most valuable and rewarding aspects of the College experience, and something that is hard to find outside of the College setting.

REQUIRED TEXTS

All of the texts can be found in the course reader, which you must purchase and bring to class. As of now, I am not asking you to purchase any texts for class beyond the course reader.

REQUIREMENTS AND EXPECTATIONS

¹ J.M Keynes, *The General Theory of Employment, Interest, and Money* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, n.d.), pp. 383-384.

Assignments: This course requires that you have read the materials before class, active participation, weekly posts to the Moodle forum, 8 argument briefs, a midterm, two papers, and occasional reflective writing.

Weekly Moodle posts. Each week, you will be responsible for answering a question on the Moodle forum. I will assign you a question about this week's reading, and you will write a paragraph or two answering that question *before* class. I will likely cold call you in class to discuss your posts. Responses are due by 8:30 AM *the day of class*.

I encourage you to use the questions I assign in the Moodle forum as *guided reading questions* that signal what I take to be the most central and important ideas in the text, and that preview what our class discussion will cover.

Argument briefs. For this assignment, you will reconstruct a particular argument in outline form. There are eight briefs (one per thinker), and must be submitted onto Moodle by 11 AM the day of class. You are allowed to miss 1 of these assignments (choose it wisely), but anything beyond that will be reported to the co-chairs. The briefs are as long as it takes to reconstruct the argument fully.

I encourage you to think of the arguments as the beginning of study guides that you are making for comps later. We are covering a lot of material quickly, and so learning how to reconstruct an argument will be of utmost importance, and will help to jog your memory later. It will also help you understand and process the material as you go.

Midterm. You will have a midterm on September 18th to test your comprehension of Hobbes and Locke. More details to follow.

Papers. You will write two papers concerning a theoretical question that arises from the class. Paper one will focus on Rousseau and Marx
Paper two will focus on Nietzsche, Weber, and DuBois.

Reflection responses. These are 500 words each. They are a chance to take stock of your own progress and thinking. In the first reflection, you will write about which concept or argument you have found the most compelling and why. In the second reflection, you will answer a series of questions about your paper and writing process. In the third reflection, you will answer a series of questions about your own development as a political theorist throughout this class.

Grades / evaluation / passing the course: Grading and evaluation for the sophomore year are regulated by the CSS handbook. The handbook states the following guidelines:

1. Tutors are required to notify the CSS chair/co-chairs when assignments are late.
2. No grades are given on the weekly written work of CSS Sophomores.
3. At the end of the colloquium, students will receive my written evaluation of their performance in the class. This evaluation will be filed with the CSS office.
4. The only grade posted on students' transcripts for the sophomore year is the one for their written comps, taken in spring.

For the purposes of this course, in order to pass the course, all of the assignments must be completed and passed. I reserve the right to refuse late assignments.

Electronics: No laptops, phones or electronic readers (including iPads or Kindles). The only exception is if you have a note from the accessibility office. I find that electronics inhibit rather than enhance classroom discussions. Please bring a pen and notebook to take notes by hand.

Attendance and Participation: Attendance and participation are both required. Participation includes (1) posing and answering questions in the large group conversations, (2) contributing actively in your small-group discussions, and (3) being an engaged listener. Part of being an engaged listener means that you listen to and consider what your classmates have already said before adding to the discussion. Because I care that we all participate, and because I am genuinely curious about what you think, I will regularly *cold call* you (without warning) during the semester.

As regulated by the CSS handbook, “absence from any Sophomore Tutorial or the Colloquium for any reason or failure to complete a paper on time will be reported to the CSS Co-Chairs and will result in the student being placed on warning within the major. A second absence within that Tutorial or the Colloquium for any reason will result in the student being put under review. Depending on the circumstances, a review for failure to attend class can result in separation from the CSS major.”

Reading: Both in difficulty and in quantity, the reading for this course is demanding. Canonical texts in political theory cannot be skimmed, speed-read, or read when distracted or sleepy. Some are philosophically dense; others are subtle in literary form. They are often written in an idiom quite different from contemporary English or are translated from other languages and epochs. You must set aside sufficient time to read, to struggle with strange formulations, and to ponder what you have read. In order to understand what is going on in class, you also need to keep up with the reading schedule. Reading assignments are to be completed by the time of class on the date listed.

Office hours: I post regular office hours at calendly.com/ninahagel. If these times don't work for you, please reach out and we can find another time. I prefer to discuss administrative matters via email and substantive matters in person or over zoom.

I especially encourage you to meet with me if you have any reservations about participating in class, or if there is anything happening inside or outside of class that is impacting your learning experience.

Zoom policy: My default is not to turn on zoom unless I know that a student has a medical reason for not attending. You must email me *four hours* in advance to ask for the zoom link.

The “hidden curriculum”: There are a lot of unwritten skills, knowledge, and rules that you need to learn in order to succeed at Wes—things like how to cultivate relationships with professors and peers, how to handle setbacks, what resources and opportunities Wes has, cultural norms (e.g. stating your preferred pronouns, addressing/referring to me as Prof. Hagel and not Ms. Hagel). Sometimes it's hard to know where to get this information or even *what* information we need to get. Learning the hidden curriculum might be tricky if you don't already have trusted people who've attended a school like Wes. If this sounds like you, I'd be happy to talk to you more in office hours about it.

Academic Integrity: At its simplest, academic integrity means that the work you submit must be your own unless collaboration is specifically allowed, that you use only those resources allowed, that you express yourself in your own words unless you are quoting, and that you properly acknowledge and cite the ideas, information, and other work that you used or that contributed to your understanding.

Your academic work is governed by Wesleyan's Honor Code, found [here](#), and by any additional standards I set in the syllabus or in individual assignments. The Honor Code provides a fuller discussion of academic integrity and definitions of plagiarism, misuse of sources, and cheating. You are responsible for reading the Honor Code carefully and abiding by its terms.

Violations of academic integrity are serious and can result in severe consequences at both the course and college levels. If I suspect a violation of the code, I cannot impose a sanction of my own—I *must* refer you to the Honor Board. Procedures for suspected violations are explained [here](#).

Generative AI: You may use AI programs e.g. ChatGPT to help generate ideas and brainstorm. However, you should note that the material generated by these programs may be inaccurate, incomplete, or otherwise problematic. Beware that use may also stifle your own independent thinking and creativity.

You may not submit any work generated by an AI program as your own. If you include material generated by an AI program, it should be cited like any other reference material (with due consideration for the quality of the reference, which may be poor).

Any plagiarism or other form of cheating will be dealt with severely under relevant Wesleyan policies.

Students with Disabilities: If you have a disability, or think that you might have a disability, please contact [Accessibility Services](#) in order to arrange an appointment to discuss your needs and the process for requesting accommodations. Accessibility Services is located in North College, rooms 021 or can be reached by email (accessibility@wesleyan.edu) or phone (860-685-2332).

Religious/Spiritual Observance Resources: If you anticipate that your religious/spiritual observance may conflict with academic obligations such as attending class, taking examinations, or submitting assignments, you can work directly with your professor to make reasonable arrangements. If you need additional support or guidance, feel free to reach out to any of the chaplains in the [Office of Religious and Spiritual Life](#). For a list of a religious holidays celebrated by members of the Wesleyan community, go to Wesleyan's [Multifaith calendar](#).

Title IX Resources: If trauma inhibits your ability to fully participate in class, please contact Debbie Colucci, Title IX Coordinator, at dcolucci@wesleyan.edu, or your class dean. Additionally, and if you are comfortable, you can work directly with your professor to make reasonable arrangements.

Resources for Enhancing your Academic Skills:

The office of [Student Academic Resources](#) helps build “soft skills” for academic success. Students especially recommend booking an appointment with the student accessibility coordinator.

The [Writing Workshop](#) has several resources to help you develop as writers.

The [peer advising program](#) works individually with students to provide peer advice regarding topics such as time management, organization, study strategies, and many other academic skills.

[Peer tutors](#) provide supplementary course-content instruction for students who request them. Peer tutoring is provided free of charge; students can receive up to two hours of tutoring each week per course.

This [assignment planner](#) is great for breaking up larger assignments into smaller tasks.

COURSE SCHEDULE

I. Contract and Consent

- Sep. 2 Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Intro, chapters 1-7
Sep. 4 Hobbes, *Leviathan*, chapters 10-16 // *Brief 1: Hobbes on laws of nature*
Sep. 9 Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 17-22, 24, 26, 29-31, review and conclusion
Sep. 11 Locke, *Second Treatise*, chapters 1-9 // *Brief 2: Locke on property*
Sep. 16 Locke, *Second Treatise*, chapters 10-19
Sep. 18 **Midterm**
Sep. 23 Rousseau, *Discourse on Inequality*, Intro, Part I, and notes
Sep. 25 Rousseau, *Discourse on Inequality*, Part II and relevant notes
Sep. 30 Rousseau, *Social Contract*, Books I and II // *Brief 3: Rousseau on the general will*
Oct. 2 Rousseau, *Social Contract*, Books III and IV // *Paper topics posted*
1st reflection response due at midnight

II. Freedom and/or Equality

- Oct. 7 Marx, “German Ideology”
Oct. 9 Marx, “On the Jewish Question” // *Brief 4: Marx on political emancipation*
Oct. 14 Marx, “Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts”
Oct. 16 Marx, “Communist Manifesto” // **Paper 1 due**
Oct. 21 No class – fall break
Oct. 23 Bentham, *Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*, selections TBD
2nd reflection response due at midnight
Oct. 28 Mill, *On Liberty*, chapters 1-2
Oct. 30 Mill, *On Liberty*, chapters 3-5 // *Brief 5: Mill on individuality*
Nov. 4 Mill, *On the Subjection of Women*, selections TBD

III. Power, Knowledge, and Identity

- Nov. 6 Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals*, Essay 1
Nov. 11 Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals*, Essay 2 // *Brief 6: Nietzsche on bad conscience*
Nov. 13 Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals*, Essay 3
Nov. 18 Weber, “Science as a Vocation”
Nov. 20 Weber, “Politics as a Vocation” // *Brief 7: Weber on ethics and politics*
Nov. 25 *Buffer day – kept open in case we need to catch up*
Nov. 27 No class - Thanksgiving
Dec. 2 DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, selections TBD // *3rd reflection response due*
Dec. 4 DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, selections TBD // *Brief 8: TBD*
Dec 11 *Paper 2 due*