

CSS 271

Sophomore Colloquium:

Modern Social Theory from Hobbes to Weber

FALL 2025

M/W 1:20-2:40 FRANK301

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Office hours: In Person in PAC 230

and on Zoom by appointment

Office hours Zoom link:

<https://wesleyan.zoom.us/j/9380136158>

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 15<sup>th</sup> century, and coming into full flower in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. The principal academic content of this course is a selection of the major social and political theories published between 1651 and 1919.

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.

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 READINGS

*Princeton Readings in Political Thought* (PRPT), Mitchell Cohen ed. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Princeton: Princeton University Press (2018).

**\*\*Buy a USED copy of this book in the summer so that you can prepare for class on the first day. Please bring your book to class EVERY session we are using it.**

W.E.B DuBois. *The Souls of Black Folk*, Common Classics, 2018. You can buy this at the bookstore or online.

You do not need to purchase the Wollstonecraft text from the bookstore. An excerpt is included in the textbook.

## Classroom Expectations

*Late Papers* The assignments of the CSS sophomore year move at a quick pace. Getting behind only makes things work, so please make every effort to hand in work on time.

*Academic Integrity* The internet can be an excellent source of background information, but it cannot be the source of writing for your assignments. When in doubt, always provide the full citation for all work that you used in your writing process, including Wikipedia, journal articles, and online summaries. Plagiarism, or any other violations of standards of academic integrity, will

be dealt with through formal disciplinary action. For more information on Wesleyan's academic policy, see [http://www.wesleyan.edu/acaf/policy/sc\\_plagiarism\\_complete.html](http://www.wesleyan.edu/acaf/policy/sc_plagiarism_complete.html)

*AI Policy:* Generative artificial intelligence (AI) is omnipresent right now. From auto-correct to ChatGPT, there are many tools at our disposal to easily access existing knowledge on a topic. If you use AI resources for any of your assignments, you must acknowledge it in the references and *include any search queries you used*. If I suspect that most of the text is generated by AI, I will ask you to walk through the argument orally.

*Cell phones* Please do not use your cell phones during class (for texting or any other purpose).

*Laptops* This class is meant to steep you in the language and orientation of political theory. This is easier to do when you are not being bombarded with many sources of information. To help in this process, I request that laptops/phones/tablets/kindles not be used in class, except in accordance with documented accommodations requests. We will be working with the hard copy of the readings in class.

*Students with Disabilities* It is the policy of Wesleyan University to provide reasonable accommodation to students with documented disabilities. Students, however, are responsible for registering with Disabilities Services, in addition to making requests known to me in a timely manner. If you require accommodations, please make an appointment with me as soon as possible and no later than the third week of the semester, so that appropriate arrangements can be made. Further information regarding disability services can be found at <http://www.wesleyan.edu/deans/disability-students.html>

*Religious/Spiritual Observances* Faculty make every effort to deal reasonably and fairly with all students who, because of religious obligations, have conflicts with scheduled exams, assignments, or required assignments/attendance. If you anticipate that your religious/spiritual observance may conflict with academic obligations, I can work with you to make reasonable arrangements. Should you require additional support or guidance, please feel free to reach out to Rabbi David Teva, Director of the Office of Religious and Spiritual Life at [dleipziger@wesleyan.edu](mailto:dleipziger@wesleyan.edu) or any of the chaplains in the Office of Religious and Spiritual Life at <https://www.wesleyan.edu/orsl/index.html>.

## Assignments

Readings should be done for the day assigned. Preceptorials will go over these readings and you should be familiar with the major concepts in the text *before* class. I would also recommend going over your notes and looking back at the text after class to fill in the gaps in your understanding.

There are four types of assignments:

- 1) **Short papers** (5 pages): These papers will answer a specific question about one author using quotations from the text. The format of the paper should be as follows: the first paragraph should put forth a thesis statement that makes an interpretive claim about the text. It should be a claim that another person would be able to disagree with, not something descriptive or self-evident. Then there should be three ideas from the text that are used to support the thesis statement and each one should be supported by at least one quotation with analysis of that quotation. There should then be a consideration of critiques of the thesis statement. Lastly, the final paragraph should synthesize how you proved your thesis statement and indicate some further implications of the concept.
- 2) **Comparative papers** (8 pages) answer a question that asks you to compare two authors. This is more similar to what you will be asked to do on the comprehensive exam in May. The format of the paper remains the same, just with more pieces of evidence from multiple texts. There will be 2 comparative papers this semester, one due at the end of fall break and the other in December.
- 3) **Quizzes:** There will be short quizzes given at the beginning of class that ask questions about key concepts from the texts.
- 4) **In-class writing:** One of the most important skills you are developing this semester is the ability to craft coherent and persuasive essays in political theory under time pressure and without the assistance of AI tools. To that end, we will have three in-class writing sessions where you will be asked to compose two essays, blue-book style, during class time. More details to come.

NOTE: Those readings marked with an asterisk(\*) will be available on Moodle.

Sept 8	Thomas Hobbes Day 1. (QUIZ) <i>Princeton Readings in Political Thought</i> (PRPT) Read pages 176-184 (to “Of Other Laws of Nature”)
Sept 10	Thomas Hobbes Day 2 PRPT 184-207
Sept 15.	John Locke Day 1 (PAPER)

	PRPT 213-243
Sept 17	John Locke Day 2
Sept 22	Jean-Jacques Rousseau day 1 (QUIZ)
	PRPT 270-297
Sept 24	Jean-Jacques Rousseau Day 2
Sept 29	IN CLASS WRITING
Oct 1	Immanuel Kant Day 1.
	PRPT 355-359
Oct 6	Mary Wollstonecraft Day 1 (PAPER)
	PRPT 347-354
Oct 8	Mary Wollstonecraft Day 2
Oct 13	Jeremy Bentham 1. (QUIZ)
	PRPT 365-368
Oct 15.	John Stuart Mill Day 1
	PRPT 369-387
Oct 20	FALL BREAK
	Comparative paper #1 due on Tuesday, Oct 21 at 11:59pm
Oct 22.	John Stuart Mill Day 2
Oct 27	IN CLASS WRITING
Oct 29	Karl Marx. Day 1
	PRPT 428-436
Nov 3	Karl Marx Day 2. (QUIZ)
	PRPT 437-454
Nov 5	Karl Marx Day 3
Nov 10	W.E.B DuBois Day 1 (PAPER)
	<i>The Souls of Black Folk</i> , Forethought, Ch 1,3,4,9

Nov 12	W.E.B. Du Bois Day 2
Nov 17	Friedrich Nietzsche Day 1 (QUIZ) PRPT 455-474
Nov 19	Friedrich Nietzsche Day 2
Nov 24	IN CLASS WRITING
Nov 26	No Class—Thanksgiving Break
Dec 1	Max Weber Day 1 (QUIZ) PRPT 508-518
Dec 3	Max Weber Day 2 “Science as Vocation” *
Dec 8	Review and Writing Workshop for final paper
Dec 10	Review

Comparative Paper #2 due Dec 17 at 11:59pm