

PSCI 452-001:

Modern Political Theory

Spring 2020 | TR 12:45-2:15 pm

Classroom: Brewer Hall 228

Professor: Dr. Benjamin Gross

Office: Brewer Hall 220B

Office Hours: M 1-5 pm; T 4-5 pm; W 3-4 pm; R 9 am-noon & 4-5 pm; and by appointment

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Would you be upset if I told you we were dying?
And every cure they gave us was a lie?
Oh! They mean it when they say we're dead and doomed
And every single symptom brings us closer to the tomb
And who will take the credit for our swift impending fall
Because it's not my fault
- Tomas Kalnoky, "Would You be Impressed" (2007)

Course Rational:

What is the purpose of studying political philosophy? When was the last time a job application asked those applying if humans are social by nature? It seems if [philosophy](#) is good for anything, it is as a target for [laughter](#). If political philosophy does not directly lead to a job like engineering, nursing, or accounting then why study it?

These are questions a parent, legislature, or even you might ask concerning political philosophy. And these questions are worth asking. Yes, it is highly unlikely your job application will ask you to take and defend a position regarding if humans are social by nature. Your job, however, will require you to interact with other humans.

If we are social by nature, then we should interact in a way aligning with our nature. But, what is that nature? And what if we are not social by nature; what do we do then? What should the purpose of social interaction be? Are we social for mere survival or something more? Depending on the answers to these questions, we can gain guidance for our social interactions. While your job application may not ask if humans are social by nature, the question has implications for how to thrive in your workplace.

Political philosophy is devoted to trying to answer questions regarding human nature. Are chastity, temperance, and piety (serious religious devotion) virtues? Is [toleration](#) a desirable idea; are there any limits to it? Is the Western way of life the most just or are there better ideas? Is modern science the solution to our problems or will it produce the lowest of all forms of humanity? These are only some of the questions political philosophy examines.

The lyrics of Tomas Kalnoky show a major theme of modernity is death. Death is a fact of life that motivates the modern scientific project, escape from the state of nature, and formation of a tolerate society. Modernity, which comes forth around the 1600s due to the thought of [Machiavelli](#), is a loaded sociological, historical, and political term. In brief, modernity is the shift from examining how humans ought to be to how humans are. By lowering the bar, modern thinkers aim to satisfy our "low but solid" bodily needs (health, safety, income, and even comfort) by means of destroying our capacity to long for anything higher (justice, nobility, dignity, glory, and – perhaps – truth).

Modernity promises us comfort and safety if we agree to become less "dangerous" or more domesticated. We replace the active political life with government bureaucracy, business, and the private sphere to enjoy our low but solid needs. Perhaps the greatest achievement of modernity is liberal democracy, which gives us the freedom to read and think. These freedoms make the subject matter of this course some of the most important topics we can examine, as they allow us to scrutinize, understand, and (possibly) justify the foundation for our liberal democratic lives.

We especially need to examine our liberal democratic lives due to the response of those who find it contemptible. Long before radical Islam questioned liberal democracies and their citizens, other critics of liberalism surfaced. Rousseau, Tocqueville, Nietzsche, and others saw dangers existing in liberalism. Even Kalnoky, a product of liberal democracy, finds modern science to be questionable. Medicine is supposed to cure us. Yet, medicine lies to us concerning our true condition; we all must die. How can we truly live as life-affirming beings if we ignore our fate instead of embracing our outcome?

Course Goals:

By the end of the course, you will be able to...

- ...recognize important key authors and texts of modern political thought;
- ...describe what are the foundations of liberalism and liberal democracy;
- ...explain some of the core critiques of liberalism;
- ...clarify how modern political theory differs from other periods of political theory, such as ancient and contemporary thought;
- ...understand different ideas concerning the state of nature and the implications of these differences on what is human nature;
- ...comprehend the various moral and political problems authors of modern political theory confronted;
- ...acquire a greater appreciation for the importance of modern political thought for our contemporary political life;
- ...read a great book, be able to ask questions, and make, analyze, and criticize an argument;
- ...clearly and concisely communicate arguments both verbally and written, which will develop and progress your critical-thinking and problem solving skills.

Required Texts:

- * Machiavelli, Niccolò. *The Prince*. Harvey C. Mansfield (Trans.) University of Chicago Press. ISBN: [9780226500447](#)
- * Hobbes, Thomas. *Leviathan*. Edwin Curley (Ed.) Hackett Publishing Company, Inc. ISBN: [9780872201774](#)
- * Locke, John. *Two Treatises of Government*. Peter Laslett (Ed.) Cambridge University Press. ISBN: [9780521357302](#)
- * Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. *The Political Writing of Rousseau*. John T. Scott (Trans). University of Chicago Press. ISBN: [9780226151311](#)
- * Marx, Karl. *The Portable Karl Marx*. Eugene Kamenka (Ed.) Penguin Publishing Group. ISBN: [9780140150964](#)
- * Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Portable Nietzsche*. Walter Kaufmann (Trans.) Penguin Publishing Group. ISBN: [9780140150629](#)

Assignments and Grading:

Weekly Reading Quizzes	10%
Class Participation	
Small Group Peer Grade	5%
Small Group Professor Grade	5%
General Class Grade	10%
Short Weekly Papers	15%
Human Nature Paper	5%
Professionalism	10%
Interpretive Essay	20%
Final Exam	20%

Grading Scale:

A = 90-100
B = 80-89
C = 70-79
D = 60-69
F = <60

Assignment Details:

Weekly Reading Quizzes:

To facilitate students with reading great books, there are weekly reading quizzes. These quizzes are five multiple choice questions. They help guide your readings. They are not intended to be difficult, if you have read the assigned readings for the week. Quizzes are on Canvas and are untimed. Quizzes appear on Canvas by noon on the Friday prior to the weekly readings. Quizzes are due by 8 am of the Thursday for that week's readings. Thus, the reading quiz for Week 5 goes live by noon on the Friday of Week 4 and is due by 8 am on the Thursday of Week 5. All students will have their two lowest quiz grades dropped.

Class Participation:

We come to best understand political theory through examination, questions, and conversations. As such, the course demands active participation from all students. We all have some insights regarding questions of what is human nature, what is good, and what is justice. Reading, analyzing, and interpreting theory will not only show us how our authors understand these questions but also force us to confront our own opinions. Participation grades are divided into two portions:

Small Group Participation

You will be divided into groups of four. Each member of the group is responsible for preparing a short paper during their assigned period (see the short weekly paper section for more detail). The day you turn in a paper, you lead your group's discussion. All group members are expected to participate in the discussion. At the end of the semester, group members will grade each other's small group participation. Your peer grades account for 50% of your small group participation grade (i.e. 5% of your total grade). The other 50% of the small group participation grade is determined by the professor.

General Class Participation

For the most part, general participation consists of asking questions, responding to questions from your classmates and the professor, and engaging in discussions and friendly debates with classmates and/or the professor. To participate students need to complete the required reading for that day's class prior to the class session.

Short Weekly Paper:

Student will compose three one-page papers. Prompts for the paper are provided one week in advance to students. Papers are due on the Thursday of the assigned week. Students must submit a digital copy of their weekly paper to Canvas **AND** submit a physical copy to the professor for the assignment to be graded and considered on time. The digital copy must be submitted to Canvas by 12:45 pm on the assigned Thursday and the physical copy will be submitted to the professor at the end of the class session. If both of these requirements are not met, the assignment is late.

The intent of the assignment is for students to gain practice composing interpretations of political theory. Interpreting political theory is a different type of writing, which many students are unfamiliar with. Instead of assigning multiple large papers, we will use these small papers as a way to practice, improve, and develop our skills of communicating our interpretations clearly and concisely. As such, the

assignment is **limited to one-page**, double-space, 12-point font, 1-inch margins, and one-sided document. Students should put their identification information in the header of their document. The professor will not grade any material going beyond one page to maintain fairness for all students.

To facilitate small group participation, each group will have four members: A, B, C, and D. One student per group will complete a short paper per week. The student completing the short paper for that week serves as their group’s discussion leader. Students will pick their group letter on the first Thursday of the course in their small groups. The calendar for short paper assignments is listed below:

	Member A	Member B	Member C	Member D
Paper 1	Due 1/16	Due 1/23	Due 1/30	Due 2/6
Paper 2	Due 2/13	Due 2/20	Due 2/27	Due 3/5
Paper 3	Due 3/12	Due 3/19	Due 4/2	Due 4/9

Human Nature Paper:

All students will have a special one-page paper to complete prior to class on Tuesday, January 14th. Students will write a one-page paper answering the prompt: “What is human nature?” Students should provide their own thoughts and reflections to answer this question. There is to be **NO** outside reading, sourcing, or materials. The short paper is asking students to provide their opinion in response to the question through reflecting on their own observations, experiences, and insights. The professor will explain this assignment in detail on the first day of the course.

Professionalism:

All students begin the semester with 10% of their final grade completed. To keep this 10%, students must engage in professional behavior within the course. Students will lose points from their professionalism grade when they engage in unprofessional activities. These include, but are not limited to, coming to class late; using phones, tablets, laptops, or other devices for non-class purposes; engaging in private conversations; reading books, magazines, newspapers, or other materials during class time; and other unprofessional actions. A professionalism rubric addendum explains this part of the course in detail and is on Canvas.

Students are being graded on professional actions in order to prepare them to act professionally in the future career.

Interpretive Essay:

Students are required to complete one 1,000-1,500 word essay. The interpretive essay is due Thursday, April 9th. The essay, in many regards, is a longer and larger version of a short weekly paper. More information regarding the requirements of the essay, essay prompts, and more will be provided to the class in a handout on Thursday, March 12th.

Final Exam:

The final exam consists of questions from different formats. These include multiple choice, identifying who said what, short answers, and essays. The exam is composed with the assistance of students. The final exam is on Tuesday, April 28th at 10:30 am.

Classroom Behavior:

Courtesy and regard for one another should guide classroom behavior. Since this is a course concerning politics, discussion can be passionate at times. During class, we will always treat everyone with respect; especially during debates. This means listening and letting a classmate finish their thought before responding, debating ideas (not people), speaking to each other in a civil tone, and refusing to engage in personal attacks.

During these discussions, I ask you all to respect the ideas of your fellow students. This does not mean, however, that you must agree with these ideas. Political philosophy challenges ideas and ideals; thus, you are welcome to ask your classmates to explain their ideas, to ask them questions you see in their ideals, and so forth.

Students must be attentive during all aspects of class. Students who sleep, read the newspaper, persistently talk with other students, text, use their cell phones, surf the internet, use computers for any other use than note taking or are otherwise inattentive/disruptive in class will be asked to leave the class (as well as lose professionalism points). Students that engage in these behaviors repeatedly are subject to being dismissed from the course, at the professor's request.

Other Policies:

Late Work:

Only written assignments (Human Nature Paper, Short Papers, and the Interpretive Essay) will be accepted after their due date. Every day a written assignment is late, the assignment loses professionalism points (please see the professionalism rubric addendum). **One week after its due date, the professor will no longer accept late written assignments.** Any student, who does not submit their written assignments on time, or within one week after its due date, will receive a zero for that assignment.

Make-up Quizzes & Exams:

Since students are able to drop their two lowest quiz scores, there are no make-up quizzes available. Furthermore, there is only one test (i.e., the final exam) and it is on the last day of the course (final exam period). Thus, there is no make-up exam. If you are unable to attend the final exam period for a university approved reason, please inform the professor and he will arrange for you to take an exam at a different time.

Academic Integrity:

This course does not tolerate academic dishonesty. The professor adheres to and enforces JSU's policy on academic honesty (e.g. cheating, plagiarism, forgery, fabrication, facilitating academic dishonesty, and sabotage). Violations of academic integrity in this course are addressed in compliance with the procedures laid out in JSU's [student handbook](#) (see pages 57 & 71-76).

Accommodations:

I am happy to accommodate any student with a documented disability. If you have a disability that affects your work in this class, and for which you may require adjustments or accommodations, please see a staff member in [Disability Support Services](#) (139 Doughty Hall, (256) 782.8380, dss@jsu.edu) so accommodations can be considered. Please speak with DSS and the professor, as early in the semester as possible. Students that receive accommodation letters or Individualized Post-Secondary Plans (IPP's) should meet with me to discuss the provisions of those accommodations as early in the semester as possible. All discussions will remain confidential.

Religious Observances:

If assigned work conflicts with your religious holidays, please tell me in advance so we can make alternative plans. Informing me of religious obligations after the fact, however, will not count as an excuse.

Title IX:

Title IX of the Educational Amendments of 1972 prohibits discrimination based on sex in any educational institution that receives federal funding. Jacksonville State University does not tolerate sex discrimination of any kind including: sexual misconduct, sexual harassment, domestic violence, stalking or other conduct that is addressed in the university's "Title IX Gender-Based and Sexual Misconduct Policy." This type of conduct may interfere with or limit an individual's ability to benefit from or participate in JSU's educational programs or activities. Anyone with knowledge of this type of conduct are asked to immediately report such incidents to the University Police Department at (256) 782-5050 or the Title IX Coordinator at (256) 782-5769. These incidents may also be reported to an instructor, faculty or staff member, who are required to notify the Title IX Coordinator. If a student wishes to keep the information confidential, the student may speak with a counselor at the Counseling Services office at (256) 782-5475 or a medical provider at Student Health Services (256) 782-5310. For more information about Title IX, please visit the JSU Title IX webpage at www.jsu.edu/titleix.

Military-Connected Student Statement:

The Office of Veteran Services serves all active duty, guard, reserve, veteran, and dependent students at JSU. If you have any questions about Veteran Services please contact them at (256) 782-8838, veterans@jsu.edu, or the physical location in the basement of Daugette Hall. If you are a student currently serving in the military (Active Duty, Guard, or Reserves) with the potential of being called to military service or training during the course of the semester, you are encouraged to contact me no later than the first week of class to discuss the class attendance policy. The professor may make accommodations for this absence or suggest that you take the course at another time.

Questions About Your Grades:

I am happy to take questions about your grade in-person during my office hours/appointments. I do not, however, discuss grades over e-mail or phone due to FERPA regulations, which protects your privacy. See [here](#) for more information. At the end of the semester, your final grade will only change if there is a mathematical error.

Withdraws:

Please be advised, the last date to withdraw from the course without academic penalty is Friday, March 13th. There are other important dates regarding withdrawing from the course with regards to refunding your tuition and if you receive an academic penalty, which can be found [here](#). If you choose to stop attending the course it is your responsibility to withdraw from the course. If you do not withdraw from the course the professor will enter the grade you have earned as your final grade.

Student Notifications:

All notifications for the course will either be posted on the Canvas site and/or e-mailed to your JSU e-mail address. Be sure to check Canvas and your JSU e-mail for all notifications (or set your JSU e-mail to forward to another address).

E-mail Policy:

I will do my best to respond to all e-mails within 24 hours. In your first e-mail to me, please include a picture of “Alf”. This ensures that you have read the syllabus. If your first e-mail lacks “Alf,” you will receive a response saying: “Please refer to your syllabus.” Future questions answered by the syllabus will receive the same response.

In order to help response time, please include an appropriate subject line in your e-mail. Furthermore, please take the time to construct a formal e-mail with proper etiquette and language. I will not respond to e-mails constructed in a manner like, “Yo, Dr B i will b l8 4 clas 2day” or using emojis to represent words/ideas.

How to be Successful in this Class:

The best way to be successful in this class is to be prepared. Being prepared means you will need to read all of the assignment carefully and, most likely, reread the assignment at least once prior to class. These texts are full of carefully constructed arguments, which sometimes only become visible after multiple interactions with the text. By reading the assignments prior to class you will be able to fully participate and get the most out of our classroom experience.

Furthermore, good note taking is vital. Learn to listen carefully. I find students who write down the questions being asked, and then the responses to these questions, are the most successful. If you only write down the answer the note is meaningless, as it lacks the context of the question.

After class review your notes to see if they make sense. By reviewing them sooner than later you will be able to remember things from class to sort out any points of confusion in your notes.

Finally, get together with other students to form study groups. If you get together periodically and go over notes, you are more likely to have a complete set of notes. You will not only be able to go over your notes together to fill in the gaps, but by discussing with each other the topics of the class you might come to new insights.

Tentative Class Schedule:

TSZ = *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*

L = *Leviathan*

SD = *The Second Discourse*

P = *The Prince*

TT = *Two Treatise of Government*

CM = *The Communist Manifesto*

<u>Date</u>	<u>Topic</u>	<u>Reading</u>
1/9	Introduction & approach	NO READING
Is Modernity In Crisis?		
1/14 & 16	Is modernity a problem?	TSZ: pp. 121-37
What is Modern Political Philosophy?		
<i>Virtue vs. Virtù</i>		
1/21 & 23	What is a principality and how is it acquired?	P: pp. 3-33
1/28 & 30	How should one rule a principality?	P: pp. 34-65
2/4 & 6	What is the nature of a prince?	P: pp. 65-105
<i>Natural and Individual Rights</i>		
2/11 & 13	What is the natural state of humans?	L: pp. 50-63 & 74-100
2/20	How do humans create a stable society?	L: pp. 101-118
2/25	What challenges does the state face?	L: pp. 210-33
<i>Natural and Individual Rights: Part Dux</i>		
2/27	What is human? What is the state of nature?	TT: pp. 137-39; 141-43; 170; 182-83; 204-7; 267-85
3/3 & 5	What causes the beginning of society?	TT: pp. 285-330
3/10 & 12	What causes humans to create a stable society?	TT: pp. 330-63; 374-80; 398-428
<i>History and Nature – Self-Criticism of Modernity</i>		
3/17 & 19	Is the state of nature misunderstood?	SD: pp. 37-90
3/31 & 4/2	What is the history of our society?	SD: pp. 91-117
4/7	What does history mean for political life?	CM: pp. 203-41
4/9	What is the education for modern humans?	TSZ: pp. 137-47; 160-63; 170-72; 174-77
What Have we Learned about Modern Political Philosophy?		
4/14	Create final exam	NO READING
4/21	Review for final exam & reflection	NO READING
4/28	FINAL EXAM (10:30 am – 12:30 pm)	NO READING