

# PSCI 452-001:

## Modern Political Theory

Summer 2019 | MTWR 9:45-11:45 am

Classroom: Ramona Wood Room 301

**Professor:** Dr. Benjamin Gross

**Office:** Brewer Hall 220B

**Office Hours:** M/T/W/R 1:00–3:00 pm  
and by appointment

**E-mail:** Bgross@jsu.edu

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? In fact, it seems if [philosophy](#) is good for anything, it is as a subject matter to [laugh](#) at. If political philosophy does not directly lead to a job like engineering, nursing, or accounting, then why even 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 interact with others 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, and are there any limits to toleration? Is the Western way of life the most just or does radical Islam offer a more just law? 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 is devoted to examining.

The lyrics of Tomas Kalnoky show a major theme of modernity is death. Death is a fact of life that can motivate the modern scientific project, escape from the state of nature, or 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 aimed 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 examine, understand, and 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](#)

## Optional (but helpful) Texts:

- \* *The Key Texts of Political Philosophy: An Introduction*. Thomas L. Pangle and Timothy W. Burns (Eds.) Cambridge University Press: [9780521185004](#)

## Assignments and Grading:

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

## Grading Scale:

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

## Assignment Details:

### **Daily Reading Quizzes:**

To facilitate students with readings, there are daily reading quizzes. These quizzes are five multiple choice questions. They are intended to help guide your readings. They are not intended to be difficult, if you have read the assigned readings. Quizzes are administered via Blackboard and are untimed. Quizzes will be posted on Blackboard by 1 pm on the day prior to their due date. Quizzes are due by 9 am of the due date of the reading. Thus, for a Wednesday reading assignment, the reading quiz will be posted on Blackboard by 1 pm on Tuesday. The reading quiz is then due by 9 am on Wednesday. This also means that for a Monday reading quiz, the quiz is posted by 1 pm on Thursday and is not due till 9 am on Monday. Each student will have their two lowest quiz grades dropped.

### **Class Participation:**

We come to best understand political thought through examination, questions, and conversations. We all have some insights regarding questions of what is good, what is justice, and what is progress. As such, this course demands active participation from all students. Participation grades are divided into two portions:

#### *Small Group Participation*

You will be divided into groups of three or 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 will 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 instructor.

#### *General Class Participation*

For the most part, general participation in class consists of asking questions, responding to questions from your classmates and the instructor, engaging in discussions and friendly debates with classmates and/or the instructor, reading passages aloud, and sharing observations. In order to successfully participate, therefore, students will need to complete the required reading for that day's class prior to the class session.

**Short Daily Paper:**

Each student will compose three one-page papers. Prompts for the paper will be provided at least one day in advance. Papers are due on the due dates listed below. Students must submit a digital copy of their daily paper (via SafeAssign through the Blackboard page) **AND** a physical copy to the professor for the assignment to be considered on-time. The digital copy must be submitted by 9:45 am on the assigned date and the physical copy will be submitted to the instructor during 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 thought. Interpreting political thought 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 Times New Roman font, 1-inch margins, and one-sided document. Students should put their identification information in the header of their document. The instructor 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 5/20	Due 5/21	Due 5/22	Due 5/28
Paper 2	Due 5/29	Due 5/30	Due 6/3	Due 6/4
Paper 3	Due 6/5	Due 6/6	Due 6/10	Due 6/11

**Human Nature Paper:**

All students will have a special one-page paper to complete prior to class on Thursday, May 16<sup>th</sup>. 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 should 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 will begin the semester with 10% of their final grade completed. To keep this 10% of their grade, all students must do is engage in professional behavior within class. Students will lose points from their professionalism grade when the engage in unprofessional behaviors and activities. These behaviors and activities, as well as how many points are lost for engaging in them, can be found in the professionalism addendum in the “Syllabus” section of our Blackboard page.

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

**Interpretive Essay:**

Students are required to complete one 1,500-1,750 word essay. The interpretive essay is due Thursday, June 13<sup>th</sup>. The essay, in many regards, is a longer and larger version of a short weekly paper. More information regarding the essay prompt and requirements will be provided to the class in a hand-out on Thursday, May 30<sup>th</sup>.

**Final Exam:**

The final exam consists of several questions from different formats. These include multiple choice, identifying who said what, short answers, and essay questions. Students will assist in the creation of the exam on Thursday, June 13<sup>th</sup>.

**Classroom Behavior:**

Courtesy and regard for one another will guide classroom behavior. Since this course concerns politics and human rights, discussion can be passionate at times. During class, we will treat everyone with respect; especially during dialogues. 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 our dialogues, I ask you all to respect the viewpoints of your fellow students. Viewpoints, however, should be challenged.

During our dialogues, I ask you all to respect the viewpoints of your fellow students.

Students are expected to 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 (although due to [findings](#), I strongly suggest against this) or are otherwise inattentive/disruptive in class will be asked to leave the class, lose professionalism points, and will be 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 business day a written assignment is late, the assignment loses half a letter grade (e.g., B+ to B). 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 drop their two lowest quiz scores, there are no make-up quizzes. If you are unable to attend the final exam period for a religious observation, university approved reason, or emergency, please inform the professor immediately. Students must have proper documentation for a make-up exam. Make-up exams must be scheduled at a date and time mutually agreed upon. Make-up exams will be comprised of different questions that evaluates students on the same material as the final exam.

**Academic Integrity:**

This course will 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 will be addressed in compliance with the procedures laid out in JSU's [student handbook](#) (see pages 57 & 71-76).

**Accommodations:**

I am more than happy to accommodate any student with a documented disability. If you have a disability that may have some impact on your work in this class, and for which you may require adjustments or accommodations, please see a staff member in [Disability Support Services](#) (139 Daugette Hall, (256) 782.8380, [dss@jsu.edu](mailto:dss@jsu.edu)) so that such accommodations can be considered.

Please speak with Disability Support Services (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.

**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 (256) 782-8838, [veterans@jsu.edu](mailto:veterans@jsu.edu), or at 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 your course instructor no later than the first week of class to discuss the class attendance policy. The instructor 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 determined by the university. 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 Blackboard site and/or e-mailed to your JSU e-mail address. Be sure to check Blackboard 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. All e-mails that can be answered via the syllabus will receive the response: "Please refer to your syllabus."

In order to help response time, please include an appropriate subject line in your e-mail. Furthermore, please take 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 18 4 clas 2day" or using emojis to represent words/ideas.

**How to be Successful in this Class:**

The best way to be successful is to be prepared. Being prepared means reading all of the assignment carefully and, most likely, reread the assignment prior to class. These texts are carefully constructed arguments, which sometimes only become visible after multiple interactions. 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. Take [physical notes](#). 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>
T-5/14	Introduction & approach	<b>NO READING</b>
<b>Is Modernity In Crisis?</b>		
W-5/15	Is modernity a problem?	<b>TSZ: pp. 121-37</b>
R-5/16	What is the education for modern humans?	<b>TSZ: pp. 137-47; 160-63; 170-72; 174-77</b>
<b>What is Modern Political Philosophy?</b>		
<i>Virtue vs. Virtù</i>		
M-5/20	What is a principality and how is it acquired?	<b>P: pp. 3-33</b>
T-5/21	How should one rule a principality?	<b>P: pp. 34-65</b>
W-5/22	What is the nature of a prince?	<b>P: pp. 65-105</b>
<i>Natural and Individual Rights</i>		
R-5/23	What is nature? What is art?	<b>L: pp. 1-35</b>
T-5/28	What is the natural state of humans?	<b>L: pp. 50-63 &amp; 74-88</b>
W-5/29	How do humans create a stable society?	<b>L: pp. 89-118</b>
R-5/30	What challenges do the state face?	<b>L: pp. 210-33</b>
<i>Natural and Individual Rights: Part Dux</i>		
M-6/3	What is human? What is the state of nature?	<b>TT: pp. 137-39; 141-43; 170; 182-83; 204-7; 267-85</b>
T-6/4	What causes the beginning of society?	<b>TT: pp. 285-330</b>
W-6/5	What causes humans to create a stable society?	<b>TT: pp. 330-55</b>
R-6/6	What are the rules of a stable society?	<b>TT: pp. 355-63; 374-80; 398-428</b>
<i>History and Nature</i>		
M-6/10	What is a human being?	<b>SD: pp. 37-71</b>
T-6/11	Why is the state of nature misunderstood?	<b>SD: pp. 71-90</b>
W-6/12	What is the history of our society?	<b>SD: pp. 91-117</b>
<b>What Have we Learned about Modern Political Philosophy?</b>		
R-6/13	Reflection and Final Exam Review	<b>NO READING</b>
M-6/17	What does modern thought look like in practice?	<b>CM: pp. 203-41</b>
T-6/18	<b>FINAL EXAM</b>	<b>NO READING</b>