

## **MODERN POLITICAL THEORY: KANT TO GANDHI**

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**Sarah Lawrence College**  
**2006-7, Syllabus for Spring Term**  
**Tuesdays and Thursdays, 9:30-11:00**  
**Heimbold 210**

**Course Description:** This term we focus on the way the discourse of modern political theory, developed in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, is extended and at the same time transformed in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. There are important changes in both the subject and the style of the works we study. The social contract and natural law traditions focus primarily on basic issues of political right, such as how to understand the grounds of legitimate government, its appropriate scope, the nature and limits of political obligation, and the status and content of individual and political rights. While we take one glance backwards at the implications of this tradition for a variety of political issues at the beginning of this term by considering some of Kant's essays, we quickly turn to Hegel who, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, begins to shift attention away from these abstract normative issues and into the more concrete institutional forms that give shape to the modern state. Having sympathetically reconstructed the unfolding of a series of ideas stretching from the claim that legitimacy requires that all persons in a society be able to consent to at least its most fundamental laws (Hobbes and Locke) to the conclusion that free and equal persons would only consent to a form of government in which they are not only subject to but also authors of the laws (Rousseau and Kant), we shift to the question of whether these ideas can be realized in—or instead require the transformation of—the main social structures of modern societies: a centrally organized state, industrial capitalism, representative government, a public sphere structured by mass communication media, the patriarchal family, Judeo-Christian morality, bureaucracy, the systematic use of violence in empire and war. Hegel, Marx, and Weber and (to a lesser extent) Mill, Nietzsche, and Gandhi construct their theories in efforts to understand the most systematic but less obvious and apparent aspects of these institutions. There is usually normative content to their theories as well, but it tends to emerge from their analyses of these broader social trends, since—with the possible exception of Mill—their primary emphasis is not on telling us how to act politically. Instead, they aim to explain the hidden logic and dynamics of institutions and practices that escape the comprehension of those whose lives they structure. Whereas the earlier thinkers were mainly concerned to elaborate the normative logic of Enlightenment ideas, their successors reflect critically on these ideas and the social and historical contexts in which they arose. Thus they are able to pose again the question of the legitimacy of modernity, this time from a more critical vantage. Further, Marx, Mill and Weber conceive of themselves as social scientists, not as philosophers or general intellectuals. So we also wrestle with a number of epistemological problems concerning the status of social knowledge. Finally, a consideration of the questions of the value of the modern Western system of values as a whole (Nietzsche) and of alternative forms of modernity and of whether the exclusion of large portions of humanity from this discourse can be remedied from within (Gandhi) helps to open vantages from which to reflect on the strengths and limits of this entire tradition.

**Requirements and Grading:** As with last term, there are three main requirements this term: regular informed participation in class discussion and conferences based on careful reading and critical thought; an interpretive essay of seven to ten pages; and either completion of a term-long conference paper (of roughly fifteen to twenty pages) or satisfactory progress on a yearlong conference project. Interpretive essays are due two weeks after the end of class discussion of the thinker(s) on which they focus. The conference paper will count for forty percent of the grade, participation for forty, and the interpretive essays for twenty. (Though not marked on assignments, grades are available upon request.) Extensions will be granted only in the case of a genuine emergency. In the absence of an extension, late assignments will be penalized one third of a grade per day late. Three unexcused class absences are allowed per term. Additional absences will result in loss of class credit. Unexcused conference absences will not be rescheduled and may also lead to loss of credit.

**Special Needs:** I encourage students with disabilities, including invisible disabilities like chronic diseases and learning or psychiatric disabilities, to contact me regarding specific needs.

**Texts:** Please use only the editions listed below, which are available through the Sarah Lawrence Bookstore. They can also be purchased on line, often for a considerable discount. I recommend web-sites that link independent bookstores, especially since it is often possible to get these texts used in near-new condition. (Advanced Book Exchange [[www.abe.com](http://www.abe.com)], Fetch Book [[www.fetchbook.info](http://www.fetchbook.info)], Alibris [[www.alibris.com](http://www.alibris.com)] and Amazon's used book service [[www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com)] offer this service.) I list editors, publishers and ISBN numbers below to assist you in getting the correct editions.

- Immanuel Kant, *Practical Philosophy*, Mary Gregor, trans. & ed., Cambridge, 0521654084
- G.W.F. Hegel, *Reason in History*, Robert S. Hartman, trans., Library of the Liberal Arts/Bobbs-Merrill, 0-672-60200-8
- G.W.F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of Right*, T.M. Knox, ed. & trans., Oxford, 0-19-500276-8.
- Robert C. Tucker, ed., *The Marx-Engels Reader*, Norton, 0-393-09040-X
- John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty and Other Essays*, John Gray, ed., Oxford, ISBN-10: 0192833847.
- Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality: A Polemic*, Maudemarie Clark, trans., Hackett, ISBN-10: 0872202836.
- Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, A. Giddens, ed., Routledge, ISBN-10: 041525406X.
- H.H. Gerth & C. Wright Mills, eds., *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, Oxford, ISBN-10: 0195004620.
- Mahatma Gandhi, *Selected Political Writings*, Dennis Dalton, ed., Hackett, ISBN-10: 0872203301.

**WEEKLY READING ASSIGNMENTS:**

**Week 1 KANT**

Immanuel Kant, *Practical Philosophy*, Mary Gregor, trans. & ed.,  
“What is Enlightenment,” pp.11-22.  
“Theory and Practice,” pp.273-310.

**Week 2 KANT and HEGEL**

Immanuel Kant, *Practical Philosophy*, Mary Gregor, trans. & ed.,  
“Toward Perpetual Peace,” pp.311-352.

Hegel, “The Master-Slave Dialectic” (on reserve)  
Hegel, *Reason in History* (entire).

**Week 3 HEGEL**

*The Philosophy of Right*, pp. 10-13 and paragraphs 33-39, 44-45, 56-57, 65-67,  
105-106, 131, 141.

**Week 4 HEGEL**

*The Philosophy of Right*, paragraphs 142-149, 153-162, 181-190, 194, 198, 204-  
205, 207, 215, 217, 236-247, 250-256.

**Week 5 HEGEL**

*The Philosophy of Right*, pp. 10-13 and paragraphs 257-266, 287-289, 296-298,  
300-303, 306-309, 317-318, 324-325, 328.

**Week 6 MARX**

Robert C. Tucker, ed., *The Marx-Engels Reader*, pp. 469-491, 499-500, 26-65, 70-  
105.

**Week 7 MARX**

Robert C. Tucker, ed., *The Marx-Engels Reader*, pp. 3-8, 146-200, 133-145, 512-  
532, 537-541, 629-664, 294-329, 336-373, 388-411, 422-442.

**Week 8 MARX**

Robert C. Tucker, ed., *The Marx-Engels Reader*, pp. 203-17, 294-329, 336-373, 388-411, 422-442.

**Week 9 MILL**

John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty and Other Essays*,  
*On Liberty*, pp. 1-26, 36-43, 51-94, 101-104, 116-118, 122-8.

**Week 10 MILL**

John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty and Other Essays*,  
*Considerations on Representative Government*, pp.205-227, 299-304, 310-315, 326-337, 411-414, 420-426,  
*On the Subjection of Women*, pp. 471-473, 480-487, 493-495, 517-525, 557-564

**Week 11 NIETZSCHE**

*On the Genealogy of Morality*, First and Second Treatises

**Week 12 NIETZSCHE**

*On the Genealogy of Morality*, Second and Third Treatises

**Week 13 WEBER**

Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, entire.

**Week 14 WEBER**

Weber, "Objectivity' in Social Science and Social Policy," pp. 49-112 (on reserve).

*From Max Weber:*

"Class, Status and Party," 180-95

"Bureaucracy," 196-205, 212-21, 224-35

"Charisma and its transformation," 245-51.

"Science as a Vocation," pp. 129-56.

"Politics as a Vocation," pp. 77-85, 111-28.

**Week 15 GANDHI**

Gandhi: *Selected Political Writings*, (selections).