Freedom and the State: The Social Contract

Course Organiser
Dr Alix Cohen
Email: alix.cohen@ed.ac.uk
Office hours: Monday, 11-1pm, DSB 4.13

Course Secretaries
Ann-Marie Cowe (Honours students): philinfo@ed.ac.uk
Becky Verdon (MSc students): pplspgooffice@ed.ac.uk

This course aims to introduce students to central questions in political philosophy, through engagement with the work of several significant political philosophers: Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Immanuel Kant and John Rawls. The topics with which we will be most deeply concerned include the legitimacy of the state; the limits of the state’s authority; the basis of rights of resistance or rebellion; the relevance of consent to political authority; the nature and value of freedom; the relationship between politics and human nature; and social justice. We will also, as often as we can, attempt to relate the views of these philosophers to contemporary debates.

Program of lectures and reading
Week 1 (14/01)
Lecture 1: Political Legitimacy and the Social Contract Tradition

Reading:

Week 2 (21/01)

Primary Reading: Leviathan, Part I, chs. 11, 13-16.

Secondary Reading:

Seminar question: If human nature is, or were, as Hobbes describes it, does it follow that life in the state of nature would be ‘solitary, poore, nasty, brutish and short’?

Week 3 (28/01)
Lecture 3: Hobbes on the Covenant, the Sovereign and the Right to Rebel
Primary Reading: *Leviathan*, Part II, chs. 17-22, 29.

Secondary Reading:


Seminar question: How, according to Hobbes, do individuals living in the state of nature manage to arrive into political society? Is his account convincing? What are the problems with it?

**Week 4 (4/02)**

Lecture 4: Locke on the State of Nature, the Law of Nature and Property

Primary Reading: Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, chs. 1-5

Secondary Reading:


Seminar question: Are Locke’s views on property defensible?

**Week 4 (7/02) – Note Thursday class**

Lecture 5: Locke on Consent, the State and the Right to Rebellion

Primary Reading: Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, chs. 6-19; David Hume, ‘Of the Original Contract’

Secondary Reading:


**Week 5 (11/02) – no teaching for this course (lecturer away)**

**Week 6 (18/02) – no teaching (Flexible Learning Week)**

**Week 7 (25/02)**
Lecture 6: Rousseau on the State of Nature, Human Nature and Inequality

Primary Reading: *Discourse of the Origins of Inequality.*

Secondary Reading:

Seminar question: Do you agree with Rousseau’s criticism of Hobbes’ state of war?

Week 8 (4/03)
Lecture 7: Rousseau on the Social Contract, the General Will and the State

Primary Reading: *The Social Contract.*

Secondary Reading:

Seminar question: Is participation in the General Will consistent with the non-renunciation of one’s freedom?

Week 9 (11/03)
Lecture 8: Kant on the State of Nature, the Social Contract and Property

Primary Reading: *Political Writings*, pp. 54-60 (‘What is Enlightenment?’), pp. 73-87 (‘Theory and Practice, §2’)

Secondary Reading:
*Easy*: ‘Kant’s Social and Political Philosophy’ in the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy.

Seminar question: What is the point of Kant’s idea of rational possible unanimity? Is it a useful test of rightfulness?

Week 10 (18/03)
Lecture 9: Public reason, the Right to Rebel and punishment

Primary Reading: *Political Writings*, pp. 132-164 (‘Metaphysics of Morals’).
Secondary Reading:
**Easy:** Section 3.3, ‘Kant’s Account of Reason’ in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy.*

Seminar question: Why are revolutions illegitimate for Kant?

**Week 11 (25/04)**
Lecture 10: The Original Position


Secondary Reading:

Seminar question: Is Rawls’ account of the original position more plausible than traditional accounts of the state of nature?

**Week 12 (1/04)**
Lecture 11: The Theory of Justice and Civil Disobedience


Secondary Reading:

Seminar question: What is Rawls’ account of civil disobedience? Is it sufficient for its purpose?

**Reading list**

**Primary text**

You will be required to read substantial extracts from the following works:

Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*
John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*
Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality* and *The Social Contract*
Immanuel Kant, *Political Writings*
John Rawls, *Theory of Justice*

You can use separate editions of these works, as long as they are unabbreviated. But note that the translation of Rousseau and Kant’s books will probably be different from the translations that I will be using in the lectures, and that the page references for most of the works will also be different.

The separate editions I particularly recommend, if you want to buy them, are:

For Rawls: *Theory of Justice*, Harvard University Press [you can choose between the original edition (1971) and the revised edition (1999)].

On Learn, I will also provide links to online versions of these texts.

**Secondary texts**

**General introductions**

A recommended secondary text for this course, which deals with Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau, and contains a number of accessible articles and extracts of articles on various aspects of each of them, is:

Nigel Warburton, Jon Pike and Derek Matravers (eds), *Reading Political Philosophy: Machiavelli to Mill* (Routledge and Open University Press, 2000)

The second recommended text, which has very good chapters on Hobbes, Rousseau, Locke and Rawls, is:


As you can see, these texts do not deal with Kant, so look at the specific reading in the Kant section for references.

Additional introductions you may want to have a look at are:


**Histories of Political Thought**
A number of works on the history of political philosophy contain useful chapters on the thinkers discussed in this course. They include:


Hobbes
A useful introductory text is:


Book length treatments include:


A highly detailed examination of Hobbes’ derivation of the state from the state of nature is:


Locke
A good introductory text is:

D. A. Lloyd Thomas *Locke on Government* (Routledge, 1995)

You might also try:

Richard Ashcraft, *Locke’s Two Treatises of Government* (Allen and Unwin, 1987), esp. ch. 2

Rousseau
Three useful general introductions and commentaries:

Any of the following are also useful:

Kennedy F. Roche, *Rousseau: Stoic and Romantic* (Methuen, 1974)
Stephen Ellenburg, *Rousseau’s Political Philosophy: An Interpretation from Within* (Cornell UP, 1976)

**Kant**

For general introductions with particular sections on Kant’s political philosophy:

Paul Guyer, *Kant* (Routledge, 2006), chs. 7-8
Paul Guyer (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Kant and Modern Philosophy* (CUP, 2006), esp. the chapter on the Kantian state by Robert Pippin.
Allen Wood, *Kantian Ethics* (CUP, 2008), chs. 11-12
Allen Wood, *Kant* (Blackwell, 2005), chapter 9 is partly on political philosophy.

For more detailed commentaries:

Katherine Flikschuh, *Kant and Modern Political Philosophy* (CUP, 2000)
Patrick Riley, *Kant’s Political Philosophy* (Rowman and Littlefield, 1983)
Howard Williams, *Kant’s Political Philosophy* (St Martin’s Press, 1983)
Howard Williams, *Essays on Kant’s Political Philosophy* (U of Chicago Press, 1992)

**Rawls**

The best introduction is:

S. Freeman, *Rawls* (Routledge, 2007)

You may also try:


For more online resources on Rawls, see [http://cepa.newschool.edu/het/profiles/rawls.htm](http://cepa.newschool.edu/het/profiles/rawls.htm)

**Useful websites**


Political philosophy – links and texts: [http://www.swif.uniba.it/lei/filpol/filpole/lintexe.htm](http://www.swif.uniba.it/lei/filpol/filpole/lintexe.htm)

Kant on the web: primary texts, translations, research articles, etc. ([http://www.hkbu.edu.hk/~ppp/Kant.html](http://www.hkbu.edu.hk/~ppp/Kant.html))

On Kant’s ethics and Kantian ethics: [http://ethics.sandiego.edu/theories/Kant/index.asp](http://ethics.sandiego.edu/theories/Kant/index.asp)

Philosophy bites - podcasts on philosophy: [http://www.philosophybites.libsyn.com/](http://www.philosophybites.libsyn.com/). I particularly recommend the following:


**Online reading for primary texts**

The original text of Hobbes’ *Leviathan* online: [http://oregonstate.edu/instruct/phl302/texts/hobbes/leviathan-contents.html](http://oregonstate.edu/instruct/phl302/texts/hobbes/leviathan-contents.html)


The full online text of Locke’s *Second Treatise of Government* revised in modern English: [http://www.earlymoderntexts.com/lo2tr.html](http://www.earlymoderntexts.com/lo2tr.html)

The original text of Locke’s *Second Treatise of Government* [http://oregonstate.edu/instruct/phl302/texts/locke/locke2/2nd-contents.html](http://oregonstate.edu/instruct/phl302/texts/locke/locke2/2nd-contents.html)


A translation by Ian Johnston of Rousseau’s second *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*: [http://records.viu.ca/~johnstoi/rousseau/seconddiscourse.htm](http://records.viu.ca/~johnstoi/rousseau/seconddiscourse.htm)
Excerpts from Kant’s *Metaphysics of Morals*: [http://praxeology.net/kant7.htm](http://praxeology.net/kant7.htm)


Translation by Mary Gregor of Kant’s essay ‘What is Enlightenment?’: [http://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/ethics/kant/enlightenment.htm](http://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/ethics/kant/enlightenment.htm)


**Undergraduate Assessment:**
This course will be assessed on the basis of:

*Participation*

- 10% of final grade

*Mid-Term Essay*

- 40% of final grade
- Due date: **Thursday 28th February 2019, by 12pm (mid-day)**

*Final Essay*

- 50% of final grade
- Date: **Thursday 25th April 2019, by 12pm (mid-day)**

**Postgraduate Assessment:**

*Participation*

- 10% of final grade

*Essay*

- 90% of final grade
- Date: **Thursday 25th April 2019, by 12pm (mid-day)**
*Participation component (10% of the mark)*

Everyone (except those doing coursework dissertations) will have to do a group presentation. Details will be explained during the first class, but the idea is to set up specific opportunities for student participation through group work on applied case-studies that you will prepare together outside of the classroom and present in class during the seminar portion of the course. I will ask you to choose one of the philosophers covered in the course and apply his account to a current affair case from the news (e.g. the relationship between the freedom of citizens and the state; government plans regarding freedom on the internet; travel ban in the USA; EU citizens’ rights after Brexit, etc.) The intended benefit of this approach is, first, in encouraging both group work and presentation skills in a philosophical context; and second, in helping you apply theoretical knowledge to practical cases, and thereby make connections between what you learn at university and your point of view as members of a political community.