Freedom and the State: The Social Contract

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 (15/01)
Lecture 1: Political Legitimacy and the Social Contract Tradition

Reading:

Week 2 (22/01)

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 (29/01)
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 (5/02)**
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 5 (12/02)**
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 6 (19/02)**
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 7 (26/02)**
Lecture 7: Rousseau on the Social Contract, the General Will and the State

Primary Reading: *The Social Contract*.

Secondary Reading:
- **Easy:** Wolf (2006): 77-93.


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

**Week 8 (5/03)**

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 9 (12/03)**

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?

*(19/03) – no teaching*

**Week 10 (26/03)**

Lecture 10: The Original Position

**Primary Reading:** Rawls, *Theory of Justice,* sections 1-4.

**Secondary Reading:**

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

**Week 11 (2/04)**
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 Locke: Locke: Two Treatises of Government
For Kant: Political Writings, Cambridge University Press, Reprint in 2007, Edited by H. S. Reiss.
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:

Andrew Levine, Engaging Political Philosophy (Blackwell, 2002).

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:

Jonathan Wolff, An Introduction to Political Philosophy (OUP, 1996)
Jean Hampton, Political Philosophy (Westview Press, 1997)

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:

George Sabine, A History of Political Theory (Dryden Press, 1973)
John Plamenatz, Man and Society, vols. 1 and 2 (Longman, 1963)

Hobbes
A useful introductory text is:

Glen Newey, Hobbes and Leviathan (Routledge, 2002)
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)

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

Philosophy bites - podcasts on philosophy: http://www.philosophybites.libsyn.com/. I particularly recommend the following:
- Quentin Skinner on Hobbes and the state:  
- Melissa Lane on Rousseau and civilization:  
- John Dunn on Locke and toleration:  

Online reading for primary texts

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

The full online text of Hobbes’ *Leviathan* revised in modern English:  
http://www.earlymoderntexts.com/f_hobbes.html

The full online text of Locke’s *Second Treatise of Government* revised in modern English:  
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

A translation by G. D. H. Cole of Rousseau’s *Social Contract*:  
http://www.constitution.org/jjr/socon.htm

A translation by Ian Johnston of Rousseau’s second *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*:  
http://records.viu.ca/~johnstoi/rousseau/seconddiscourse.htm

Excerpts from Kant’s *Metaphysics of Morals*: http://praxeology.net/kant7.htm

Translation by W. Hastie of Part I of Kant’s *Metaphysics of Morals*:  
http://philosophy.eserver.org/kant/science-of-right.txt

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

W. Hastie’s translation of Part II of Kant’s essay on ‘Theory and Practice’:  
http://oll.libertyfund.org/?option=com_staticxt&staticfile=show.php%3Ftitle=358&chapter=56090&layout=html&Itemid=27
W. Hastie’s translation of Part III of Kant’s essay on ‘Theory and Practice’:
http://oll.libertyfund.org/?option=com_staticxt&staticfile=show.php%3Ftitle=358&chapter=56093&layout=html&Itemid=27