

Early-Modern (West-European) Political Thought

Course description:

An advanced-level undergraduate seminar, with some changes, a graduate course

Learning objectives:

1. Think critically about the concept “early-modern” and the boundaries of geography, topic, and chronology within our understanding of “early-modern”
2. Advance critical writing skills with consistent practice and feedback
3. Bring critical thinking and context of crises of authority/authorities to analyzing contemporary issues

Assignments:

Weekly response paper, except for the week you are presenting

Presentation

Final paper

On translation: many of the texts for this course are assigned as translations, as the original languages vary from Latin, French, Spanish, and more. You do not need to have proficiency in any of those languages to succeed in or enjoy this course. For this reason, please use the version I have assigned for the course as your main copy of the text. It is important that we can all be on the same page, literally and figuratively, in our discussions. If you would also like to refer to another translation (because translation is always interpretation), or to the text in its original language, please feel free to bring that copy to class as well.

Introduction

Week 1

The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages, Geraldine Heng (excerpts)

Modernity?

Week 2

Summa Theologica, Thomas Aquinas (excerpts)

The Prince, Machiavelli

Divine right of kings

Week 3

The King's Two Bodies, Ernst Kantorowicz (excerpts)

Patriarcha, Robert Filmer

English theorists responding to the Civil War and its aftermath

Weeks 4-5

Hobbes, contract, covenant, and state-building

Leviathan, Thomas Hobbes (Week 4, Parts 1-2, Week 4, Parts 3-4)

Week 4 secondary sources:

“A Genealogy of the Modern State” Quentin Skinner

“Hobbes and the Epic Tradition of Political Theory” Sheldon Wolin

Wayward Contracts: The Crisis of Political Obligation in England, 1640-1674, Victoria Kahn (excerpts)

Week 5 secondary sources:

"Mosaic Leviathan" Alison McQueen

"Authorization and Representation in Hobbes's Leviathan" AP Martinich

"From Moses to Adam: The Making of the Covenant of Works" McGiffert

Week 6

Locke's debates

First Treatise, John Locke

The Hebrew Republic, Eric Nelson

Week 7

An Essay on Human Understanding, John Locke

Commentaire philosophique, Pierre Bayle

Continental theorists responding to the Wars of Religion

Week 8

The Theological-Political Treatise, Baruch Spinoza

Radical Enlightenment, Jonathan Israel (excerpts)

"Spinoza and the General Will" David Lay Williams

Week 9

De iure belli ac pacis, Grotius (excerpts)

Week 10

The Social Contract, Jean-Jacques Rousseau

Civil Religion, Ronald Beiner

Week 11

Selected poetry, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz

Spanish Imperialism and the Political Imagination, Anthony Pagden

Al Hambra Decree, 1492

Colonialism, coloniality

Week 12

The Apocalypse of Settler Colonialism, Gerald Horne

"English Women's Writing and Indigenous Medical Knowledge in the Early Modern Atlantic World" Edith Snook

Towards modernity?

Week 12

The Black Atlantic, Paul Gilroy (excerpts)

Déclarations des droits de la femme et de la citoyenne, Olympe de Gouges