

J.P.Sommerville

HISTORY 600: UNDERGRADUATE SEMINAR

THE FOUNDATIONS OF MODERN POLITICAL THOUGHT



SPRING SEMESTER, 2016

Mondays 1:20-3:15, 5257 Mosse Humanities

INTERESTED STUDENTS: PLEASE EMAIL jsommerv@wisc.edu

This course will survey the development of European political and social ideas from the end of the Middle Ages to the Enlightenment in the eighteenth century. These centuries were a crucial period in the evolution of attitudes that have shaped the modern world, and that still exercise a profound influence on our lives. Amongst the broad themes which the course surveys are the development of the idea of state sovereignty, the growth of the notion of international law, the links between attitudes towards the family and gender on the one hand and state power on the other, the history of the notion that individuals or groups may legitimately resist or even depose tyrannical rulers, and the arguments used for and against toleration in an age of bitter religious disputes.

We shall discuss ideas that were commonplace amongst large numbers of people as well as the more abstruse theories of philosophers. The views of famous political thinkers will be located against the background of the wider social, economic, intellectual and political history of their times. Amongst the theorists whose ideas we will examine are Thomas More, Machiavelli, Hobbes, Locke, and Pufendorf.

The course has two main aims:

- (1) to introduce students to the most important and influential ideas about the nature, purposes, and objectives of the state and society which were current in Europe from about 1500 to 1800 (and which have decisively shaped how people have thought about these questions ever since), and to show how these ideas developed in response to social, economic and political forces (and not just as attempts to give detached and objective answers to timeless and abstract questions);
- (2) to improve students' skills in analyzing and criticizing political arguments and theories, both in discussion and on paper.

Students will

1. attend classes and contribute to discussion (this will count for 30% of the grade);
2. write two papers of 10-15 pages (inclusive of bibliography and notes; topics to be arranged with me; each paper will count for 25% of the grade); due dates: 3/14; 5/2;
3. give one classroom presentation (lasting for about 20 minutes) to introduce a week's discussion (this will count for 20% of the grade);
4. complete the History major assessment survey that you receive at the start of the semester.

Students are strongly encouraged to discuss their papers with me either during my Office Hours or by

appointment.

You can email me directly:

jsommerv@wisc.edu

Required texts:

(All of these are available free on the Internet; in most cases, there are also many easily available and inexpensive editions).

Thomas More, <i>Utopia</i>	Niccolo Machiavelli, <i>The Prince</i>
Thomas Hobbes, <i>Leviathan</i>	John Locke ◆ <i>Two Treatises of Government</i> (The text is a pdf (Adobe Acrobat) file) ◆ <i>Second Treatise</i> ◆ <i>A Letter concerning Toleration</i>
Sir Robert Filmer, <i>Patriarcha</i>	
Samuel Pufendorf, <i>On the Duty of Man and Citizen</i>	<i>The English Levellers</i> ed. Andrew Sharp
Jean Bodin, <i>Six Books of the Commonwealth</i>	Thomas Paine, <i>Common Sense</i> and <i>The Rights of Man</i>

Recommended readings:

J. H. Burns and Mark Goldie, eds., *The Cambridge History of Political Thought 1450-1700* Quentin Skinner, *The foundations of modern political thought* (2 volumes)

Richard Tuck, *Philosophy and government 1572-1651*.

George Klosko, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Political Philosophy*.

A good collection of biographies of British people is available in the [Oxford Dictionary of National Biography](#) .

Course Timetable

(Follow hyperlink for details of each week's discussion)

Term Papers

(questions and reading list)

