

PS 17W: Introduction to Political Theory
Spring, 2003

Modern Perspectives on Property —

TR 8-9:15, 319E HH Development East
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Office Hours: TR 9:30-10:30, & by appointment
www.personal.psu.edu/cdl123/property.htm

Welcome to political theory. In this course, we will be exploring some of the modern era's major ideas on the meaning and organization of property. In so doing, we will discuss all of the touchstones of political thought more generally: the relations between persons, relations between individuals and institutions (such as states, law, cultures, ideologies, and corporations), and the relations between us and "our" things. We will be examining such questions as: What does it mean to own something? What are the origins of property? What (if anything) justifies ownership? What paradigms of property can we conceive which differ from the dominant mode of private property? What interests can legitimately guide restrictions on property?

To attend to these questions, we will read a variety of texts produced by originators, supporters, and critics of widely acknowledged notions of property. These texts may bolster or unseat our ideas about how and why we own things, and how ownership might be justified. In the end, I hope we will all emerge from this course with more thoroughly considered ideas about property so that we might better understand what ownership entails and emerge able to justify the present or any other organization of it.

A few comments on what this class is not. First, this is not an economics course. Though some of the thinkers we will be discussing are or were economists (notably, Marx and Friedman), our readings and discussions will be significantly more focused on the political relations embodied in our relationships with each other and things. We will not be engaging in comparative economic analyses or looking at how GDPs of variously organized economies might compare (or even whether looking at such figures might tell us something meaningful). Instead, I hope we will examine how our understandings of ownership influence our evaluations of the virtues and vices of such systems. Second, this is also not a law course. Type "property" and "syllabus" into a web search engine, and you'll be greeted with hundreds of examples of courses on property and contract law. While we will be reading a few Supreme Court decisions, we will not be examining case law in this class. Third, this is not a survey course in the history of political thought. The historical scope of this course is quite limited (covering only the past 300 years or so), and the focus is undeniably narrow.

This is an *introduction* to political theory which emphasizes on the role of property in modern political thought. It will not provide a comprehensive encounter with political theory broadly defined, but it should provide you with an introduction to how people have understood how property influences our lives and a look into some of the main political ideals of recent centuries. As well, it will provide an introduction to what it is like to read and do political theory, an activity which might diverge substantially from the type of reading and thinking you are asked to do in other political science courses.

REQUIRED TEXTS:

- John Locke, *Second Treatise on Government* (Hackett, 1980)
- John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty* (Hackett, 1978)
- Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Basic Political Writings* (Hackett, 1987)
- Karl Marx, *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert Tucker (Norton, 1978). (Do not buy Karl Marx, *Selected Writings* [Hackett, 1994]; some bookstores ordered this by mistake.)
- A Pro-Copy™ coursepack containing numerous other readings

ATTENDANCE & PARTICIPATION:

Students are required to attend class prepared to discuss the reading *everyday*. Note: being “prepared to discuss” the reading is not the same as “having completely understood” the reading; asking questions can be just as valuable as answering them. It does mean that you are expected to have read and thought about the material. We may have irregular quizzes which will be quick and easy if you’ve done the reading. Students should inform the instructor in advance if they plan to miss class.

PAPERS:

This is a writing-intensive class. Students will produce 6 (six) papers for this class: 4 short thought papers and 2 longer essays. Students cannot opt to skip a paper and forfeit the appropriate points. *Failure to complete all 6 papers will constitute failure to complete the class.*

THOUGHT PAPERS: These short papers are just that – short: 500 to 1,000 words (which is 1-2 pages, double spaced). In them, you will offer commentary on one or all of the texts from that week. The content of these papers is entirely up to you, though they should demonstrate that you have read and thought about the assigned texts. Feel free to write these papers telling me why the text is valuable or wrongheaded, how it applies to your life, how you see its principles demonstrated in current events, how its form/content upset or pleased you, what it made you think about, etc. They are not summaries of the readings. *Do not restate the argument from the reading*; rather, tell me what you think about the reading or what the reading means to you. If you have any trouble coming up with a topic for one or all of these thought papers, see the instructor *before it is due*. They are always due at any time before the beginning of class on Thursday for the weeks which they are assigned.

Group A: thought papers due weeks 2, 5, 10, 13

Group B: thought papers due weeks 3, 6, 12, 14

ESSAYS: The longer papers will be more substantial treatments of a particular theme. They should be in the neighborhood of 2,000-2,500 words (which is, roughly, 6 to 8 pages, double spaced, 12pt. font, 1” margins). Instructor will provide possible paper topics as the time approaches, though you are not only welcome *but encouraged* to develop your own paper topic. (If you want to write on something other than a suggested paper topic, talk to the instructor first to make sure your idea is appropriate for the class.)

Essay #1: due Tuesday, 3/6

Essay #2: due by 2pm, Wednesday 5/7.

Academic dishonesty will be dealt with severely. If you have any questions about what constitutes plagiarism, ask the instructor.

Papers are due at the beginning of class on the indicated days. These must be hard (paper) copies. *Late papers and submissions by email will not be accepted without prior arrangement with the instructor.*

GRADES:

Grades will be determined as follows:

Each of the major papers will account for 30% of your final grade (60% total).

Each though paper will account for 5% of your grade (20% total).

Quizzes, attendance, and class participation will account for 20% of your final grade.

This class is not graded on a curve; I would be thrilled if each student in the class earned an A. I therefore urge you to work with your colleagues when it might be helpful.

EXTRA CREDIT

Extra credit points can be used to improve your overall score on the thought papers. The general format for extra credit will be to produce another thought paper on something appropriate (but not assigned) for this class. Some examples would be a recent news item, a local political event, or even an element of popular culture. If we read something you find particularly interesting, instructor has numerous supplemental readings that you could read and comment on.

NOTE: You cannot merely produce a 5th thought paper on an assigned reading for extra credit. Please see the instructor if you have any concerns about whether an idea is appropriate for extra credit, or if you are having trouble coming up with your own idea.

CLASS SCHEDULE

Readings are to be completed for the day listed (example: you should have read chapters 5-6 of Locke by the time you show up to class on Tuesday, 1/21).

1/14: hello & introduction.

under Locke & key

1/16: Locke, *2nd Treatise on Government*, chapters I-IV.

1/21: Locke, *2nd Treatise on Government*, chapters V-VI.

1/23: Locke, *2nd Treatise on Government*, chapters VII-X.
group A thought paper this week

1/28: Locke, *2nd Treatise on Government*, chapters XI-XIV.

1/30: Locke, *2nd Treatise on Government*, chapters XV-XIX.
group B thought paper this week

putting Locke to work

2/4: US Declaration of Independence, Constitution, and Bill of Rights (CP)
Federalist Paper #10 (CP).

2/6: Slaughterhouse cases (1873), majority and dissenting opinions (CP)
Lochner v. New York (1905), majority decision (CP)
Muller v. Oregon (1908), majority decision (CP)
West Coast Hotel Co. v. Parrish (1937), majority decision (CP).

19c liberalism

2/11: JS Mill, *On Liberty*, introductory.

2/13: JS Mill, *On Liberty*, applications.
group A thought paper this week

2/18: JS Mill, *Principles of Political Economy*, Book II, Chapter I, sections 1-3 (CP).

2/20: JS Mill, *Principles of Political Economy*, Book II, Chapter II (CP).
group B thought paper this week

property as dupery

2/25: JJ Rousseau, *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*, preface, and part 1.
2/27: JJ Rousseau, *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*, part 2.

property as theft

3/4: PJ Proudhon, *What is Property?*, selections from chapters 1, 2, & 4 (CP).
3/6: K Marx, *The Manifesto of the Communist Party*.

FIRST PAPER DUE IN CLASS TODAY

3/10-3/14 spring break

property as fetish

3/18: K Marx, *Wage Labor & Slavery*.
3/20 K Marx, *Econ. & Philos. Manuscripts*, Alienated Labor, Private Property and Communism.
3/25: K Marx, *Capital*, chapter 1, sections 1, 2, and 4.
3/27: No reading, watch "Fight Club."
group A thought paper this week

property as bondage

4/1: HD Thoreau, *Walden*, chapter 1 (CP).
4/3: No class. Start reading for next week.

living, breathing property

4/8 F Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and The State*.
4/10 Dredd Scott decision (CP)
J Madison's letter to R Evans (CP).
group B thought paper this week

4/15 V Shiva, "Reduction and Regeneration" & "Homeless in the 'Global Village'" (CP).
4/17 M Pollan, "Power Steer" (CP).
group A thought paper this week

property as freedom

4/22: M. Friedman, *Capitalism & Freedom*, chapters I and XI (CP).
4/24: R. Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, Chapter 7, Section I (CP).
group B thought paper this week

privatizing the public

4/29: H Schiller, *Culture, Inc.*, chapter 5 (CP).
5/1: B Drew, "Celebration: A New Kind of American Town" (CP).

Final papers due on my desk in N58 Burrowes by 2pm, Tuesday 5/6

The Pennsylvania State University encourages qualified persons with disabilities to participate in its programs and activities. If you anticipate needing any type of accommodation in this course or have questions about physical access, please tell the instructor as soon as possible.