Revolution and Modern Political Thought
FALL 2014, Government 150W 06

Professor Ross Carroll
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Class time: TR 3:30-4:50pm
Office: Blow Hall 151
Classroom: Morton Hall 4
Office Hours: Wed, 9am-12 and by appointment

Course Description

The concept of revolution stands at the center of our understanding of modern politics. Journalists and political scientists routinely use the term ‘revolution’ to capture phenomenon as disparate as the Arab Spring and the Tea Party movement, while the roster of celebrated revolutionaries has included communist guerrillas (Che Guevara) and conservative US Presidents (Reagan). Yet the casualness with which the language of revolution is employed conceals the fact that few concepts in the history of political thought have had their meaning as heavily disputed. Focusing primarily on the American and French revolutions of the late eighteenth century we will trace the troubled conceptual career of revolution, posing the following questions as we go: What distinguishes a revolution from a mere rebellion, revolt or other tumultuous event? What sources of authority or legitimacy have modern revolutionaries drawn upon? Are revolutions inextricably associated with political violence and if so how can that violence be tempered? Are attempts to remodel society in accordance with some rational scheme necessarily doomed to fail? Accompanying us in our engagement with these questions will be a group of eighteenth and nineteenth century political theorists and polemicists who came to grips with the phenomenon of revolution, its promises and its dangers, like few others before or since: John Locke, Thomas Paine, Edmund Burke, Abbé Sieyès, the Marquis de Condorcet, Benjamin Constant, Mary Wollstonecraft, Alexis de Tocqueville, Karl Marx and Hannah Arendt. The course concludes with a set of reflections on contemporary attempts to revive and reinterpret the eighteenth century revolutionary tradition in contemporary American and world politics.

Core Objectives

The overriding aim of the course is to prepare students for the challenges (and pleasures!) of college-level writing. To achieve this aim, a substantial portion of class time will be devoted to the nuts and bolts of drafting, composing and revising academic prose. Students will learn elementary skills such as choosing a viable yet interesting research topic, analyzing primary texts, evaluating secondary sources, and availing of the library resources at Swem. We will strive particularly hard to root out three myths that work continuously to impair the progress of student writers. The first is that writing and
thinking are distinct tasks that can be divided up sequentially. Whenever we say to ourselves ‘I have to get my ideas sorted out in my head before I can start writing’ we are enthralled to this myth. In this seminar we will learn to regard writing as deeply intertwined with thinking. Rather than looking at writing as the culminating stage in a research project, you will come to appreciate the gains in clarity of thought to be had from writing in the early stages of research, even (or especially) before you feel ready to commit words to paper.

The second myth we will dispel is that revising a paper primarily involves correcting grammatical errors, typos, or formatting mistakes. In this class we will move beyond this narrow understanding to look at re-vision as precisely that; a literal ‘re-visioning’ of one’s argument, analysis, and even basic approach to the assignment. Revision in this more substantive sense is not easy (who ever wants to part ways with a thesis or paragraph that took hours to construct?) but it is an essential moment in the crafting of a persuasively rendered argument. Finally, an equally pernicious myth is that the need to revise indicates a failure on the student’s part to ‘get it right first time round.’ We will come to appreciate revision, not as a remedy for some flaw, but as a necessary part of the writing process that all writers worth their salt (from undergraduates to seasoned Professors) must go through. Honest self-evaluation and the constructive criticism from our peers, we will learn, are to be avidly pursued rather than feared.

The other major aim of the course is to familiarize students with a range of texts that are vital to understanding modern revolution and the conceptual difficulties it gives rise to. Students will learn not only to exegetically reconstruct the arguments of these texts but to use them as a starting point for critical reflection on the nature, legitimacy, promises and pitfalls of modern revolution.

Course Materials

All of the books you will need are available to buy at the campus bookstore on Duke of Gloucester street. Other readings, marked with an asterisk (*) in the reading schedule below, will be made available on Blackboard in the folder for that week.

Books to purchased (Acquire only the editions listed below):

Thomas Paine, Rights of Man, Common Sense, and other Political Writings Mark Philp ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009)

Course Policies
Reading: In order to get the most out of this class it is absolutely essential that you keep up with the readings each week. Always bring the assigned reading to class, as we will frequently turn to specific passages in the text over the course of our discussion. The texts for this class are not ‘quick reads’; nor can you glance over their paragraphs quickly to catch their leading ideas. You must assign enough time to read the assigned texts closely and carefully.

Laptops and other devices: Excepting cases of documented medical need, students may not bring laptops to class as they distract others and make it next to impossible to focus on our discussion. On days when the readings have been made available on Blackboard you may use tablet devices (provided that they are not used for any other purpose such as checking e-mail, social media sites etc.). Cell phones should be silenced completely (not merely put on vibrate).

Attendance: You may be absent three times from class without penalty and without needing to provide an explanation. Any further absences will result in a gradual lowering of your participation grade unless accounted for by approved documentation.

Late Papers: The deadlines listed in this syllabus should be treated as firm. Late written work will lose a third of a letter grade for each day overdue. If you encounter difficulties with a deadline owing to religious observance, a medical emergency, or a family emergency please get in touch as early as you can. The earlier you get in touch, the easier it will be to make accommodations or alternative arrangements.

Academic Integrity: Anyone found to have been plagiarizing or otherwise acting academically dishonest will receive an automatic F grade for the class and be reported to the Honor Council. In case you are in any doubt about what the William and Mary Honor Code entails you can read the full statement of it here: http://www.wm.edu/offices/deanofstudents/services/studentconduct/documents/studiantethandbook.pdf

Office hours: Make a habit of attending office hours. It is required that you attend at least once in order to discuss your final paper topics. My office is all the way over in Blow Hall in office 151 but at least the trip will give the Government majors among you an excuse to escape Morton! If you are unable to make it to my regular office hours (9am-12 on Wednesdays) e-mail me to see if we can find a mutually convenient time to meet.

E-mail: To keep e-mail traffic at a manageable level, I’ll ask you to limit your e-mail inquiries to logistical and administrative issues. I check my email fairly regularly, and I will try to respond to your messages within 24 hours. If you have substantive questions on the content of the course, please do attend my office hours and I’ll happily go over them with you in person then.

Evaluation

The breakdown of grades in the seminar will be as follows:
15%: Participation
10%: Weekly Blackboard Discussion Questions
20%: Two Response papers (10% each)
5%: Bibliography
10%: Abstract
10%: Oral Presentation
30%: Final Research paper

15%: Participation: This is a seminar, so please arrive prepared to actively discuss the assigned readings with your peers. I will occasionally begin our sessions with a short presentation to frame questions and themes for our collective consideration, but generally I will not be lecturing. Intellectual disagreement is encouraged but be sure to show respect to your interlocutors.

10%: Weekly Blackboard discussion questions: On weeks where you are not submitting a response paper (see below), each student will post one contribution to discussions that I will create on Blackboard. The contribution can take the form either of a question you yourself wish to pose about the material or an answer to a question already under debate. The responses will give me a chance to gauge your reactions to the material before we meet and the questions you pose will help direct our discussions in class. Blackboard contributions should be posted by 1pm on the day of class to give me a chance to read them. Note: please do not merely second another student’s response. “Ditto” or “I basically concur with X” are not (on their own at least) adequate interventions into a discussion. You may of course express disagreement or agreement but be sure to make your own contribution to the conversation. You may not post retroactively on an earlier week’s readings.

Response Papers (10% x2): Over the course of the semester each student will write two (3-4 page) papers in response to a chosen set of readings. These response papers should frame the discussion of that week’s seminar by addressing a theoretical or conceptual problem arising from the texts under consideration. Students in these response papers must engage and quote the text closely using Chicago manual of style citation (for a quick guide to Chicago style visit http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html). The response should present a critical position on the material but also consider potential objections (we will call this ‘planting a naysayer’). The response papers should be delivered into my mailbox in Morton Hall by 1pm on the day of class. The first response paper should be related to a set of readings in Parts I or II of the course (see reading schedule below). The second should pertain to readings in Parts III, IV or V.

Bibliography (5%): On October 16th you will submit a provisional bibliography listing (in proper Chicago style) the primary texts and secondary sources you intend to consult in the course of researching your final paper. You may of course use the primary sources we are reading in class but you must also include outside sources that we have not consulted. You should start reading these materials before you turn in your bibliography, but by no means are not expected to have finished them.
10%: Abstract: On November 4th you will submit a one page abstract of your paper indicating what (tentatively) you intend to argue and how your approach or thesis differs from at least one secondary source you have consulted.

10%: Oral Presentation: Each student will present their research work-in-progress in Week 12. The presentation should be no more than 10 minutes in length. In it you will explain the problem or puzzle you have been engaged with, indicate your hypothesis or primary claim, and describe the evidence you have been gathering to support that claim.

30%: Final Research paper: The first (as near to complete as possible) draft of the final paper is due on November 25th for peer review. Your revised, polished research paper of 12-15 pages, incorporating feedback from your peers, is due on December 10th.

PLEASE NOTE: ALL ASSIGNMENTS MUST BE TURNED IN TO PASS THE CLASS. YOU MUST RETAIN COPIES OF ALL WRITTEN WORK UNTIL FINAL GRADES FOR THE CLASS ARE SUBMITTED.

Grading Standards:

A paper in the A-category displays exceptional grace and demonstrates a high degree of mastery over the fundamentals of academic writing: it establishes and advances a clear and innovative thesis; employs a logical and progressive structure; analyzes evidence insightfully and in depth; draws from well-chosen sources; and is written in a clear, sophisticated style. Everything that appears in the essay is there in support of the argument.

A B-range paper resembles an A-range paper in some ways, but may exhibit a vague or inconsistently argued thesis; employ a generally logical but somewhat disorganized or undeveloped structure; include well-chosen but sometimes unanalyzed and undigested evidence; use sources in a correct but limited fashion; or be written in an unsophisticated or grammatically problematic style.

A C-range paper resembles a B-range paper in some ways, but may also feature a confusing, simple, or descriptive thesis; lack a coherent structure; fail to present enough evidence, or present evidence that is insufficiently analyzed; drop in sources without properly contextualizing or citing them; and be written in a generally unclear, simplistic, or technically flawed style.

A D-range paper resembles a C-range paper but may include a purely descriptive or obvious thesis; display an unfocused, confusing, or rambling structure; and draw on little analyzed evidence and sources. A D-range paper has trouble engaging with the assignment and may not show awareness of the conventions of academic discourse and style. It does, however, show signs of attempting to engage with the issues, topics, and sources of the assignment.

An F paper is similar to a D-range paper but is significantly shorter than the assigned length and addresses the assignment superficially. The assignment may have been
substantially misunderstood and the paper’s diction may be so poor that one cannot
discern what the argument is supposed to be.

Writing Centers

The Writing Resources Center is located in Swem Library. I strongly recommend that
you avail of it. They offer in-person consultations in the first floor of Swem and Skype
consultations by appointment in the afternoons and evenings. Go to
http://www.wm.edu/as/wrc/forstudents/index.php to get more information and make
an appointment online.

Schedule of Reading

Week 1: Introduction
August 28: Introduction

PART I: THEORIZING THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

“On the subject of the history of the American Revolution, you ask who shall write it?
Who can write it? And who shall ever be able to write it? Nobody…”
Thomas Jefferson to John Adams, August 10th, 1815

Week 2: John Locke and the Right of Resistance
September 2: Locke Second Treatise of Government, chapters 2-3, 7-13
September 4: Locke, Second Treatise of Government, chapters 14,18-19

Week 3: Thomas Paine Appeals to the People
September 11: Thomas Paine, Common Sense

Week 4: Jefferson’s Revolution and the Relations Between Generations
September 16: Thomas Jefferson’s “Original Rough Draft” of the Declaration of
Independence*
 American Declaration of Independence (July 4th 1776)*
 Jeremy Bentham, “Short Review of the Declaration” (1776)*
 Edmund S. Morgan, Inventing the People: The Rise of Popular Sovereignty in
 England and America, chapters 10 and 11*
 September 18: Jefferson, “Letter to James Madison, September 6, 1789”*
 Jefferson, “Letter to John Wayles Eppes, June 24, 1813” *
 Jefferson, “Letter to William S. Smith, November 13, 1787”*
 Jefferson, “Letter to Samuel Kercheval, July 12, 1816”*
PART II: POPULAR SOVEREIGNTY AND THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

Week 5: Sieyès, Popular Sovereignty, and Revolutionary Emergency
September 23: Abbé Sieyès, “What is the Third Estate?”*
September 25: Abbé Sieyès, “Debate between Sieyès and Tom Paine”*
Condorcet, “On revolution. On the meaning of the word ‘revolutionary’”*

Week 6: Benjamin Constant and the Limits of Popular Sovereignty
September 30: Benjamin Constant, Selections from Political Writings*
October 2: Benjamin Constant, “Liberty of the Ancients Compared with that of the Moderns” (1816)*

PART III: THE BURKE-PAINE DEBATE

Week 7: Burke’s Critique of the Revolution in France
October 7: Edmund Burke, Reflections on the Revolution in France
October 9: Edmund Burke, Reflections on the Revolution in France

Week 8: Research Workshop
October 14: FALL BREAK - NO CLASS
October 16: Research session at Swem library [no reading]
   Hand in Bibliography

Week 9: “Governing from the Grave?”: Paine Responds to Burke
October 21: Edmund Burke, Reflections on the Revolution in France
October 23: Thomas Paine, Rights of Man

PART IV: REVOLUTIONIZING MANNERS, MOEURS AND SENTIMENTS

Week 10: Wollstonecraft’s Revolution in Female Manners
October 28: Mary Wollstonecraft, An Historical and Moral View of the Origin and Progress of the French Revolution
October 30: Mary Wollstonecraft, A Vindication of the Rights of Woman

Week 11: Alexis de Tocqueville and the Global Democratic Revolution
November 4: Alexis de Tocqueville, Democracy in America
   Hand in Abstract
November 6: Alexis de Tocqueville, Democracy in America
Week 12: Oral Presentations
November 11: Oral Presentations
November 13: Oral Presentations

PART V: THE CONTESTED LEGACY OF REVOLUTION

Week 13: Whose Revolution? Frederick Douglas and Karl Marx
November 18: Frederick Douglas, “What is the Fourth of July to the Negro?”*
November 20: Karl Marx, The Communist Manifesto

Week 14: Hannah Arendt and the Revolutionary Tradition
Submit Drafts for Peer Editing
November 27: Thanksgiving [no class]

Week 15: Peer Editing
December 2: Peer Editing
December 4: Peer Editing

FINAL PAPER DUE: DECEMBER 10TH

The instructor reserves the right to alter the syllabus during the semester.