



## Summer School in Modern Political Theory

Faculty of Political Science, University of Zagreb

# Politics and Morality in Modernity

July 16<sup>th</sup>-21<sup>st</sup>, 2020, Grožnjan, Croatia

**Deadline for application:**  
**June 10<sup>th</sup>, 2020**

*The Summer School in modern political theory will be held in Croatia in the town of Grožnjan (Istria) from July 16<sup>th</sup> to 21<sup>st</sup>, 2020.*

*Summer school provides an opportunity for 14 graduate students, doctoral researchers and young researches working in the field of modern political theory to exchange research and teaching ideas and discuss relevant theoretical problems from the tradition of modern political thought. The lecturers will be distinguished scholars in the field, presenting their critical reevaluation of the relation between politics and morality in modernity.*



The striving towards emancipation of politics from morality is one of the key traits of political modernity. Conceived as a distinctive human activity, politics is neither burdened with the achievement of a “virtuous life”, as in classical antiquity, nor subjugated to religious prescriptions, as in medieval Christian philosophy. The prolonged experience of endemic civil wars, enhanced by the religious and political fragmentation on the threshold of modernity, undermined the medieval ideas of the *Respublica Christiana* and *pax Christiana* and

threatened the stability of existing political orders in Europe. The incipient modern thought met this challenge by setting the purpose of the political in the founding and preserving the political community and in securing the peace and security among its members. However, despite its seemingly modest nature, this purpose proved to be incompatible with the fulfilment of the traditional moral requirements. Nevertheless, the progressive detaching of politics from morality did not result in a complete break between the two. Rather than absolute separation, we witness a redefinition of their relationship, resulting in a “differentiated unity”. On the one hand, the notion of politics as an autonomous sphere and activity gives rise to the idea of “civic” or “political virtue” and prompts the development of a new sort of “the art of ruling”, adjusted to the needs of the nascent state. On the other hand, politics remains related to the broader moral outlook, i.e. morality retains its regulative significance for politics.

It was Machiavelli who contrived the project of a divorce between politics and morality in its initial and most shocking form. Turning from the mere *immaginazione* to the *verità effettuale della cosa*, Machiavelli discovered a new continent of politics freed from the normative restraints of a tradition embodied in Greek philosophy and Christianity. Machiavelli operated what, at least *prima facie*, appears as a radical break with the past and thereby set the stage for the subsequent articulations of the relationship in question. What they share is a somewhat ambiguous intention of defending the new autonomy bestowed on politics while simultaneously reintroducing its connection with morality.

The basis of Thomas Hobbes’s pioneering theory of state is to be found in natural laws, governing the actions of both the sovereign and his subjects. Conceived as rational precepts directing the way towards establishing and preserving peace, laws of nature are at the same time God’s commandments laid down in Scripture. It is worth noting that Hobbes calls the science of natural laws “the true and only Moral Philosophy”. Not without similarities Locke understands natural law as a moral law, decreed to all human beings by God, and binding on them not only in the state of nature, but in civil condition as well, where the sovereign, entrusted with authority, is made accountable to his subjects for its enforcement.

Based on the foundations of early modernity, classical political economy offered a new moral perspective, rooted in optimistic expectations of the emerging commercial society. Emphasizing the self-regulatory capacity of market mechanisms, the new science of the 18<sup>th</sup> century envisaged a system in which the pursuit of individual self-interest brings about social harmony and increases general opulence, which in the long run benefits every member of society. This meant not only the abandonment of the traditional view of general interest as resulting chiefly from the operation of the ruler’s “visible hand”, but the dissociation of general interest from the moral disposition of the individuals as well. “Morality” becomes the trait of the market system itself, independent of the virtuous conduct of agents, or even effected by the attitude which earlier tradition considered unethical.

With German Idealism we reach a new stage of reflection on the relation between politics and morality. Kant grounds both juridical and ethical legislation in the supreme principle of morality, relating the laws of the former to external actions, which are independent of the moral motivation of the will. Juridical duties are thus the ones an individual can be compelled to fulfil by the state authority. But as juridical laws are moral laws for external actions, there exists indirect ethical duty to obey them, just as conversely, “legality” contributes indirectly to “morality”, by removing impediments to purely ethical conduct. For Hegel on the other hand, there can be no more separation between “morality” and “legality” in Kantian sense. “Sittlich” or “ethical” are objectively valid institutions and practices of collective life in which reason is historically actualized. The term “morality” is

nevertheless retained for the standpoint of internal self-determination of the will and the right of subjectivity to find its ends realized in the external world. Both morality and ethical life are however integral parts of the Idea of Right, as rationally structured and historically evolved totality of actualized freedom.



The aim of this year's summer school is to reconsider the relationship between politics and morality in the modern tradition of political thought. Special attention will be given to three problem areas:

- 1) The emancipation of politics from morality and the rearticulation of their relationship in early modern political thought (Machiavelli, Hobbes, Locke)
- 2) Moral origins of classical political economy and morality in commercial society (Ferguson, Hume, Smith)
- 3) Morality, Law and Politics in classical German philosophy (Kant, Fichte, Hegel)



**Participation fee:** No fee

**Costs:** Complete costs are covered by organizers (full board accommodation, travel costs from Zagreb to Grožnjan and back).

**Grants:** 14 students.

**Conditions of eligibility:** Applications are welcome from undergraduate, graduate and doctoral students as well as from young researchers in humanities and social sciences. Each participant is expected to present a short paper as a part of the discussion of the main topic of the summer school. The applicants must provide a CV and a motivational letter by the deadline indicated above.

**Guidelines for participants:** Lectures should last 45 min and student presentations should not exceed 20 min of duration. The working language of the summer school is English.

**Contact address:**

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