

Political Science 4610: Key Questions in Political Theory
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133 S. 36th Street, Room 338

Summary

This course is a basic introduction to certain fundamental topics in political theory, suitable to both advanced undergraduates and graduate students. It aims to provide students with concepts and ideas by which to more clearly make sense of political reality.

Authors studied include Max Weber, Carl Schmitt, Theodor Adorno, Hannah Arendt, Michel Foucault, Jürgen Habermas, Charles Taylor, Chantal Mouffe, Peter Singer, Thucydides, Machiavelli, and Ralph Waldo Emerson, among others.

In general, the course proceeds by elucidating major distinctions, such as: ancient vs. modern; deontology vs. consequentialism; “Athens” vs. “Jerusalem” (or: reason vs. revelation); thinking vs. knowing; liberalism vs. democracy; sovereign power vs. disciplinary power; being secular vs. being a secularist; politics as subset of morality vs. political responsibility as requiring the transgression of morality; the grounds of legitimate authority (tradition vs. legal-rational vs. charisma); etc. Overall, the course has three goals: (i) to introduce students to alternate approaches to the practice of political theory; (ii) to introduce students to numerous relatively self-contained debates important to contemporary political theorists; and (iii) to address major figures from the history of political thought, with an eye toward explaining what makes them vital to political theorists today.

Course Logistics

Course meetings are on Thursdays, from 10:15 AM – 1:15 PM.

For undergraduates, grades will be earned on the basis of three 7-page (double-spaced) papers on each third of the class (30% each) and class participation (10%). The course TA/grader, Audrey Jaquiss, will be the primary evaluator of students’ written work. Graduate students typically will do one longer assignment—such as a journal-length article—to fulfill their work for the course and consult with me to tailor an appropriate plan.

Weekly Topics and Readings

Week 1 (Jan. 16): Athens vs. Jerusalem (or Reason vs. Revelation). Reading: Old Testament, selections; Max Weber, "Science as a Vocation," in *Vocation Lectures*, 1-31

Part I: The Idea of the Political, its Variations, and its Potential Decline

Week 2 (Jan. 23): The Grounds of Legitimate Authority: Legal-Rational vs. Traditional vs. Charismatic Authority. Reading: Max Weber, *Economy and Society*, selections; Weber, "Politics as a Vocation," in *Vocation Lectures*, 32-94

Week 3 (Jan. 30): What is Politics? Reading: Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political* (please note that section 1, pp. 19-25, can be skipped).

Week 4 (Feb. 6): Three Categories of Practical Life: Labor vs. Work vs. Action. Reading: Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, sections 1, 4-7, 11, 13, 24-30, 44-45

Week 5 (Feb. 13): Review / No Class: Students Work on First Paper

FIRST PAPER FRIDAY FEBRUARY 17

Part II: Power and Morality

Week 6 (Feb. 20): Is Politics a Subset of Morality or is Political Responsibility Irreducible to Morality? - Part I. Reading: Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War* (from, *On Justice, Power, and Human Nature*), 1-4, 11-13, 15-58, 66-76, 89-109, 111-123. (Note that the reading on Canvas is a bit longer but only the pages mentioned here are required. Pages 145-160 are not required, but they give an account of the Athenian defeat in the war for those who are interested in how the war ends).

Week 7 (Feb. 27): Is Politics a Subset of Morality or is Political Responsibility Irreducible to Morality? - Part II. Reading: Machiavelli, *The Prince*

Week 8 (Mar. 6): Thinking vs. Knowing. Reading: Hannah Arendt, "Thinking and Moral Considerations"; Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, chs. 1-3, 7, 15

Week 9 (Mar. 13): NO CLASS. SPRING BREAK

Week 10 (Mar. 20): What is Power? Disciplinary Power vs. Sovereign Power. Reading: Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 3-31, 104-131 (skim), 195-228; Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, 78-108

SECOND PAPER DUE FRIDAY MARCH 31

Part III: Justice in the 21st Century

Week 11 (Mar. 27): Democratic Distinctions, Part I: What is the People?—Representative vs. Non-Representative Forms of Popular Empowerment. Reading: Joseph Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*, 235-302; Claude Lefort, *The Political Forms of Modern Society*, 279-280, 303-304; Jürgen Habermas, “Popular Sovereignty as Procedure,” paying special if not exclusive attention to page 486. (Please note, since students will be working on their second papers, the reading assignment for this week is somewhat light.)

Week 12 (Apr. 3): Democratic Distinctions, Part II: Liberalism vs. Democracy? Reading: Corey Brettschneider, *Democratic Rights*, 1-28, 96-161; Chantal Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox*, 1-17

Week 13 (Apr. 10): What are Global Citizens’ Responsibilities for Distant Suffering? Reading: Peter Singer, *The Life You Can Save: How to Do Your Part to End World Poverty*, xi-xv, 3-62, 129-173

Week 14 (Apr. 17) Humanism vs. Humanitarianism—and Beyond. Reading: Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Self-Reliance”; Theodor Adorno, “Resignation”; Peter Singer, *Animal Liberation*, 1-23; Arendt again: “Thinking and Moral Considerations”

Week 15 (Apr. 24): Secular vs. Secularist. Reading: Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 1-22; Jürgen Habermas, “Religion in the Public Sphere of ‘Post-Secular’ Society”; Jeffrey Green, “Never Could Learn to Drink that Blood and Call it Wine”

THIRD PAPER DUE TUESDAY MAY 13