

1-2013

## PSCI 550.01: Political Theory Seminar - Approaches to Political Theory

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### Recommended Citation

Grey, Ramona, "PSCI 550.01: Political Theory Seminar - Approaches to Political Theory" (2013). *Syllabi*. 817.  
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Spring 2013  
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**Political Theory Seminar:**  
**Approaches to Political Theory**

Course Description:

Whether we have reached, as Judith Shklar conceded, *'the end of political theory,'* is a question that continues to plague political theorists. Political theory's impending demise is, however, complicated by the fact that political theorists have never agreed to what it is they do, or should be doing, and their disagreements affect the way they approach political questions. But rather than rehashing an old debate, one that resurrects what John Gunnell has called "the myth of the tradition of political theory," perhaps we ought to consider applying a different conceptual framework for understanding political theory, one that does *not* focus on the causes that political theorists have championed or condemned, or on how political theory has been affected by specific events (real or imagined). Instead, I propose this semester that we raise an even more fundamental question: ***what is the purpose of political theory?*** A fundamental question precisely because what people take to be the purpose of political theory determines what they study, who they study, and how they study it.

Course Objectives: after successfully completing the course work, the student should be able to:

1. Distinguish between normative, scientific/historical, and analytical inquiry, and recognize how political theorists often combine each of these types of inquiry in their work.
2. Develop concise, analytic essays on the assigned readings. Specifically with regards to an analytic perspective, students will consider their own position with respect to different approaches to studying political theory (i.e. what consequences follow when one emphasizes text over context when studying political theory.)
3. Evaluate a political theory in terms of its analytic, empirical, and normative claims, and its strengths and/or weaknesses.

Course Grading:

PS 550 will be taught as a seminar. Short essays (about 6 per student) will be assigned and critiqued in class (50% of course grade.) Class participation (20% of course grade) will be evaluated according to each student's contribution to discussions on reading assignments. The final (30%) will be a take-home essay examination.

In addition, students will be expected to assess the merits and weaknesses of their colleague's essays. To give us time to prepare questions, copies of your essay must be distributed the **Friday by 12pm** before you are scheduled to orally present it. Late essays will not be accepted. Each Political Science M.A. **graduate student** must also complete a political theory field exam. The final & field exams will be **take home** & due on **Wednesday May 15<sup>th</sup> by 5pm.**

Required Tests:

Leo Strauss, *Natural Right & History*

Erich Fromm, *Sane Society*

John Gunnell, *Political Theory & Interpretation*

John Rawls, *Political Liberalism*

B.F. Skinner, *Beyond Freedom & Dignity*

Brian Berry, *Why Social Justice Matters*

Arendt, *The Human Condition*

M. Ignatieff, *The Needs of Strangers*

\* Classical works of: Plato, Aristotle, St. Augustine, Machiavelli, Locke, Burke, Rousseau, Hobbes, J.S. Mill, Marx — to be assigned on an individual basis.

January 28<sup>th</sup>

Introduction to the Course: Approaches to Political Theory

Read: Andrew Hacker, "Capital and Caruncles: The 'Great Books' Reappraised," *American Political Science Review*, (September 1954): 775-786;

Sheldon Wolin, "Political Theory: Trends & Goals," *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, vol. 12, 1968.

Recommended Readings:

Judith N. Shklar's *After Utopia: the Decline of Political Faith*, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1957.

Russell Jacoby, *The End of Utopia*, New York: Basic Books

Daniel Sabia, "Political Education and the History of Political Thought," *The American Political Science Review*, vol. 78, no. 4 (December 1984): 985-999.

February 4<sup>th</sup>

Methods of “Classical” Justice-Seeking: Plato, Aristotle, St. Thomas Aquinas, Machiavelli, Locke or Marx  
Read & Review: Plato’s *Republic*, Aristotle’s *Politics*. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Treatise on Law*, *Summa Theologica*, Questions 90-97, Machiavelli, *The Prince*, Locke, *Second Treatise on Government*, Marx’s *Communist Manifesto*

Essays (**due 2/1 by 12pm**): Please describe what constitutes ‘justice’ for one of these thinkers, and how and where do they find this justice?

February 11<sup>th</sup>

***Conservative Justice-seeking***

Read: Strauss, *Natural Right & History*; ***Read one of the recommended readings as well.***

Essays (**due 2/8 by 12pm**): What for Strauss is the purpose of political theory? According to Strauss, what is ‘historicism’ and how has it harmed political theory?

Essays (due **2/8 by 12pm**): John Gunnell finds that “many of the commentaries on the history of political theory have become a kind of political theory which itself requires interpretation.” If so, then what does Strauss’ depiction of theory’s decline reveal about his own political perspective?

Recommended Readings:

Alfred Cobban, “The Decline of Political Theory,” *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 68, no. 3 (September 1953), 321-337

Diggins, *Up From Communism: Conservative Odyssey In American Intellectual History*, 1975

John Gunnell, “The Myth of the Tradition,” *The American Political Science Review*, vol. 72, no. 1 (March 1978): 122-134.

John Gunnell, *Political Theory, Tradition & Interpretation*  
Q. Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*

Strauss, *What is Political Philosophy?*, see title chapter  
"Strauss, Philosophy, and Politics," (Symposium) *Political Theory*, August 1987

\*\*\*Rothman, Stanley, 'The Revival of Classical Political Philosophy: A Critique,' *The American Political Science Review*, 56 (June 1962), 341-52.  
 Herbert Storing (ed.) *Essays on the Scientific Study of Politics*  
 A. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*  
 Ernest Fortin, "Gadamer on Strauss," *Interpretation*, Jan. 1984  
 Shadia Drury, *The Political Ideas of Leo Strauss* (1988)  
 Drury, *Leo Strauss and the American Right* (1997);  
 George Bruce Smith, "Leo Strauss and the Straussians: An Anti-democratic Cult?", *PS: Political Science & Politics*, vol. 3 No. 2 (June 1997);  
 Seymour Hersh, "Selective Intelligence," *The New Yorker*, 12 May 2003;  
 David Schaefer, "The Legacy of Leo Strauss: A Bibliographic Introduction," *The Intercollegiate Review*, Summer 1974: 139-148.

\*\*\* **February 18<sup>th</sup> President's Day** \*\*\* **No Class** \*\*\*

February 25<sup>th</sup>

***Liberal Justice-Seeking***

Read: Rawls, *Political Liberalism*; **Choose one of the recommended readings as well.**

Essays (**due 2/15 by 12pm**): Rawls could be characterized as the 'liberal justice-seeker.' How does his form of justice-seeking contrast with, say, Plato and Marx?

Essays (**due 2/15 by 12pm**): Rawls appears to engage in a very different form of 'justice-seeking' than Strauss. What kind of justice is he seeking? At what point, does he slip in an analytical inquiry into political language?

Essays (**due 2/15 by 12pm**): Rawls is very concerned with addressing the problem of democratic unity. What is the nature of this problem (is it political, ethical, practical, all of the above?) How does Rawls attempt to solve it?

Recommended Readings:

Cowley, *Exile's Return*, 1959

Frankel, *The Case for Modern Man*, 1955

---- "Reconsiderations: John Rawls & Our Plural Nation," *The New York Sun*, 11 June 2008:

<http://www.nysun.com/arts/reconsideration-john-rawls-and-our-plural-nation/79738/>

Sandel, Michael, *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Cambridge UP, 1998  
Thomas Pogge, *John Rawls: His Life & Theory of Justice*

March 4<sup>th</sup>

***Political Theory as Empirical Inquiry***

Read: Skinner, *Beyond Freedom and Dignity*

Essays (due **3/1 by 12pm**): What claims (findings/hypothesis/laws/arguments) does Skinner make that may be called scientific? What claims (etc.) does he make that he calls scientific, but are anything but? What model of science should we adopt when studying human behavior?

Essays: (due **3/1 by 12pm**): Is more scientific or empirical knowledge always better for individuals and/or society? Is there any tension between a social science and a science that is not social (e.g. democratic theory and a science of human behavior)? Discuss with reference to Skinner's views on these questions.

Essays: (**due 3/1 by 12 pm**): "Skinner's work is more like theology than like science." Discuss Novak's comment.

Recommended Readings:

J. Weinberger, "Science and Rule in Bacon's Utopia: An Introduction to The Reading of the *New Atlantis*," *American Political Science Review*, vol. 70 (September 1976): 865-85

Steven Smith, "Political Science and Political Philosophy: An Uneasy Relation," *PS: Political Science and Politics*, vol. 33 (June 2000): 189-91

William O'Donohue, and Kyle Ferguson, *The Psychology of B.F. Skinner*, 2001

J.W. Krutch "Ignoble Utopia," in *The Measure of Man*, 1953, 55-76

Skinner, "Freedom, Control, and Utopia" in Payton Richter, *Utopias: Social Ideals and Communal Experiments*

March 11<sup>th</sup>

***Normative Inquiry & Empiricism***

Read: Fromm, *The Sane Society*; **Choose one of the recommended readings as well.**

Essays (**due 3/8 by 12pm**): Fromm, in common with other writers on the left, has a concept of alienation.

What is it? Has the concept of alienation become outdated, too blunt as an analytical tool?

Essays (**due 3/8 by 12pm**): "What is good or bad for man is not a metaphysical question, but an empirical one that can be answered on the basis of an analysis of man's nature and the effect which certain conditions have on him." (266 -*Escape From Freedom*) Critics, like John Schaar, find many problems with Fromm's "empirical" view of human nature as a basis for his political theory. How might one go about defending Fromm's *diagnosis & prescriptions*? Is one easier to 'empirically' defend than the other? Why, Why not?

Recommended Readings:

Richard Ashcraft, "Political Theory and the Problem of Ideology," *The Journal of Politics*, vol. 42, no. 3 (August 1980): 687-705.

Birnback, *Neo-Freudian Social Philosophy*, 1961

Bartlett & Schodall, "Fromm, Marx, and the Concept of Alienation," *Science and Society*, Summer 1963

Fromm, *Man For Himself*

*Anatomy of Human Destructiveness*

Tucker, *The Marxian Revolutionary Idea*

Kariel, "The Normative Pattern of Erich Fromm's Escape From Freedom," *Journal of Politics*, vol. 19, 1957

Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man*

Schaar, *Escape From Authority: The Perspectives of Erich Fromm*, 1961

Wells, *The Failure of Psychoanalysis: From Freud to Fromm*, 1963

March 18th

***Fromm's Humanist 'Science of Man'***

Essays (due **3/15 by 12pm**): Is there such a thing as a "just price" or a "fair wage?" For Fromm what constitutes a "moral" economic system and how does it provide for a just society? What differences and similarities do you find between Fromm and Rawls' conceptions of justice?

Essays (due **3/15 by 12pm**): Does it make any sense to you to distinguish (as Fromm does) between interests and real interests? How does the inquiry into interests verses real interest change the kinds of questions a thinker can explore?

Recommended Reading:

Briggs, "From Slaves to Robots," *New Statesman and Nation*, 23 June 1956

Burston, *The Legacy of Erich Fromm*, 1991

Ellul, *The Political Illusion*

*The Technological Society*

H.P. "The Insane Society," *Dissent*, vol. 3, Winter 1956

Spitz, "The Appeal to the Right Man," in *Democracy and the Challenge of Power*, 1958

Sykes, "The Americanization of Erich Fromm," *The Hidden Remnant*, 1962

Riesman, *The Lonely Crowd*

March 25<sup>th</sup>

***Contemporary Justice-Seeking***

Read: Brian Berry, *Why Justice Matters*

Essays (**due 3/22 by 12pm**): Please compare/contrast Fromm and Barry's diagnosis of our modern predicament. Does one thinker make a more compelling, relevant, or moral case for political change than the other? Why.

Essay (**due 3/22 by 12pm**): "What is the purpose of abolishing inequalities in nurture except to reveal and make more pronounced the inescapable inequalities in Nature." Discuss Michael Young's observation with reference to Barry's prescription for social justice. If it applies, what are the political and social implications?

Recommended Readings:

Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Notre Dame UP, 1984

Brian Berry, *The Liberal Theory of Justice: a critical examination of the principal doctrines in A Theory of Justice by John Rawls*, Oxford Press, 1973

Martha Nussbaum, *Frontiers of Justice: Disability, Nationality, Species Membership*, Harvard Press, 2005

Andrew Smookler, *The Illusion of Choice*

**\*\*\*\*\* April 1<sup>st</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> Spring Break \*\*\*\*\***

April 8<sup>th</sup>

***Normative & Analytical Inquiry: Arendt***

Read: Arendt, *The Human Condition* & see one recommended reading below.

Essays (**due 4/5 by 5pm via email**): Arendt is critical of Marxism, yet how does her indictment of modern society



parallel Fromm's? Is her diagnosis of *modern alienation* prone to the same analytic &/or empirical weaknesses?

Essays (**due 4/5 by 5pm via email**): Arendt argues that in the beginning of the modern period, work had displaced both contemplation and action in the hierarchy of men's activities; but by the nineteenth century labour had replaced work as the supreme activity. How did this triumph of *animal laborans* come about according to Arendt?

Recommended Reading:

Special Issue on Hannah Arendt, *Social Research*, 1977

Kateb, "Freedom & Worldliness in the Thought of

Hannah Arendt, " *Political Theory*, Spring 1977

Kateb, *Hannah Arendt*

Canovan, "The Contradictions of Hannah Arendt's Political Thought," *Political Theory*, February 1978

Levin, "On Animal Laborans and Homo Politicus in Arendt, *Political Theory*, November 1979

Arendt, *On Revolution*

*Between Past and Future*

*The Life of the Mind*

Young-Bruehl, "Reflections on Hannah Arendt's Life of the Mind," *Political Theory*, May 1982

Whitfield, *Into The Dark: Arendt and Totalitarianism*

Dallmayr, "Ontology of Freedom," *Political Theory*, May 1984

Arendt, *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*

Raaflaub, "Democracy, Oligarchy and the Concept of the Free Citizen in Late Fifth Century Athens,"

*Political Theory*, November 1983

Canovan, "A Case of Distorted Communications," *Political Theory*, February 1983

April 15<sup>th</sup>

***Arendt's Analytical Inquiry into Politics cont.***

Read: *The Human Condition*

Essays (**due 4/12 by 12pm**): How does Arendt's distinction between public and private relate to her distinction between work and labor. . .or does it?

Essays (**due 4/12 by 12pm**): What do you see as the analytical weaknesses of Arendt's *distinction between*

*public and private?* On the other hand, what do you find are the strengths of her distinction?

Recommended Readings:

Emily Hauptmann, "A Local History of 'The Political,'" *Political Theory*, vol. 32, no. 1 (February 2004): 34-60.

Pitkin, "Justice: On Relating Private and Public," *Political Theory*, August 1981

Martineau, Wendy & Squires, Judith, "Addressing the 'Dismal Disconnection': Normative Theory, Empirical Theory & Dialogue Research," *Political Studies*, vol. 60 (2012): 523-538.

April 22<sup>nd</sup>

*Slack Day*

April 29<sup>th</sup>

***Analytic Approach to Theory: John Gunnell***

Read: John Gunnell, *Political Theory & Interpretation*

Essays **(due 4/26 by 5pm)**: While are the key characteristics do you find in Gunnell analytical approach to political theory? What to do you find are the strengths & weaknesses of his approach?

Essays **(due 4/26 by 5pm)**: What it's clear Gunnell prefers to engage in critical analysis, what, if any, kind of 'justice' or moral values can be derived from his theory?

Recommended Readings:

John Gunnell, "Desperately Seeking Wittgenstein," *European Journal of Political Theory*, vol 3, no. 3, (January 2004): 77-98.

Marc Stears, "The Vocation of Political Theory," *European Journal of Political Theory*, vol. 4, no. 4 (October 2005) 325-350.

George Sabine, "What is a Political Theory," *The Journal of Politics*, vol. 1, no. 1 (February 1939): 1-16.

Sheldon Wolin, "Political Theory as a Vocation," *American Political Science Review*, vol. 63, no. 4 (December 1969): 1062-1082.

Judith Shklar, "Review." *Political Theory*, vol. 1, no 15 (February 1987).

May 6<sup>th</sup>

***Analytical Inquiry & Conclusion***

Read: M. Ignatieff, *The Needs of Strangers*

Essays (due **5/3 by 12pm**): Ignatieff appears to move between all three approaches to political inquiry. Does his work stress one approach more than another?

Essays (due **5/3 by 12pm**): John Stuart Mill identified three tasks that should constitute the vocation of political theory: first, theorists should identify the fundamental or ultimate principles that help determine moral standards in our thinking about politics; second, theorists must also engage in some form of empirical inquiry into the conditions necessary for realizing political ideals; third, (and more controversial) the same theorists must persuade others that their vision of politics is the best, and motivate people to take actions that will make the world a reflection of their theory. How well does Ignatieff satisfy all three tasks? Do you agree that theorists should concern themselves with this third task? If so, why; if not, why not?

**Final & Field Exam (MA grads) due Wednesday, May 15<sup>th</sup> at 5pm**