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PSC 550.01: Political Theory Seminar - Approaches to Political Theory

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Political Science 550
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Fall 2008
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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 inquiry?*** 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 a normative, a scientific/historical, and an analytical approaches, and recognize how political theorists often combine each of these approaches in their work.
2. Develop concise, analytic essays on the assigned readings. Specifically with regards to an analytic perspective, the student 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 **Monday by 12pm** before you are scheduled to orally present it. Late essays will not be accepted. Each **graduate student** must also complete a political theory field exam. The final & field exams will be **take home** & due on **Thursday December 11th by 12pm.**

Required Tests:

Leo Strauss, *Natural Right & History*
Erich Fromm, *The Sane Society*
B.F. Skinner, *Beyond Freedom & Dignity*
Brian Berry, *Why Social Justice Matters*
Arendt, *The Human Condition*
Berlin, *Four Essays on Liberty*
M. Ignatieff, *The Needs of Strangers*

August 26th Introduction to the Course: Approaches to Political Theory
Read: Andrew Hacker, "Capital and Carbuncles: 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.

September 2nd

Political Theory as Normative Inquiry

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

Essays (**due 9/1 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 **9/1 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

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

September 9th

Strauss: the Conservative Justice-seeker?

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

Essays (*due **9/8 by 12pm**): It's argued that the Bush administration neo-conservatives are students of Leo Strauss. In what sense, can we say they understand and/or misunderstand Strauss's conception of "natural right"?

Essays(**due 9/8 by 12pm**): Jeffery Hart lists one variety of conservative thought as "Natural law conservatism," which deduces principles of behavior from the fact of 'human' nature as distinct from other kinds of nature, and on that account resists moral change based on fashion, historical accident, or false analogies between human nature and other kinds. Conservatism of this kind, he thinks, "is found in Aristotle, Aquinas, Burke, and today in *Leo Strauss* (italics added.) Discuss Hart's thesis. Do you agree with it, why, why not?

Recommended Readings:

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.

September 16th

Political Theory as Empirical Inquiry

Read: Skinner, *Beyond Freedom and Dignity*

Essays (due **9/15 by 12pm**): Is Skinner a political theorist?, and if he is, what makes him so?

Essays: (due **9/15 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?

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

September 23rd

Political Theory & Scientific Inquiry

Read: start Fromm's *The Sane Society*

Essays: **(due 2/29 by 1 pm)**: If Skinner had his way, we must choose between science and democracy. Is he correct? Why, why not?

Essays: **(due 2/29 by 1 pm)**: "Skinner's work is more like theology than like science." Discuss Novak's comment.

Recommended Readings: see other secondary sources on Skinner as well

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*

September 30th

Normative Inquiry & Empiricism

Read: Fromm, *The Sane Society*; **Choose**

one of the recommended readings as well.

Essays **(due 9/29 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 "use of an 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?

Essays (**due 9/29 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 for either empirical investigation or as an analytical tool?

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

October 7th

Fromm's Humanist Vision of Freedom

Essays (due **10/6 by 12pm**): Is there such a thing as a "just price" or a "fair wage?" Would you join Fromm (& Barry?) in establishing a "moral" economic system?

Essays (due **10/6 by 12pm**): Does it make any sense to you to distinguish (as Fromm does) between interests and real interests? If the separation of interests from real interests elitist, and therefore unacceptable?

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*

October 14th

Brian Berry & Justice-Seeking

Read: Brian Berry, Why Justice Matters; **and see Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, Chap. 1 sections 1-4; Chap 2 sections 11-17; and all of Chap. 3.**

Essays (**due 10/13 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.

(due **10/13 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?

Essays (**due 10/13 by 12pm**): Rawls could be characterized as the 'liberal justice-seeker.' How does his form of justice-seeking contrast with, say, a Barry or an Erich Fromm?

Recommended Readings:

Andrew Smookler, *The Illusion of Choice*

October 21st

Normative & Analytical Inquiry: Arendt

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

Essays (**due 10/20 by 12pm**): 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 10/20 by 12pm**): 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

October 28th

Arendt's Analytical Inquiry into Politics cont.

Read: *The Human Condition*

Essays (**due 10/27 by 12pm**): How does Arendt's distinction between public and private relate to her distinction between work and labor. . .or does it?

Essays (**due 10/27 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:

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

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

******* No Class on November 4th: Election Day & November 11th Veterans Day *******

November 18th ***Analytical Inquiry: Negative & Positive Liberty***

Read: Berlin, *Four Essays on Liberty* and one secondary source below.

Essays (due **11/17 by 12pm**): Based upon your reading Berlin's analysis of negative and positive freedom, what appears to be the purpose and goals of political inquiry for the analytical thinker?

Essays (due **11/17 by 12pm**): When responding to his critics, Berlin insisted he never meant to give the impression that he preferred one conception of freedom to the other. His task was to clarify the meaning of freedom, not judge the value of either positive or negative freedom. But does Berlin avoid mixing normative claims with his analysis of these two conceptions of freedom? Discuss

Recommended Readings:

Crowder, G. "Negative and Positive Liberty, *Political Science*, Dec. 1988.

John Diggins, *The Promise of Pragmatism*, 1994

Paul Franco, "Oakeshott, Berlin, and Liberalism," *Political Theory*, vol. 31 (August 2003): 484-507.

John Gray & Zbigniew Pelczynski, *Concepts of Liberty in Political Theory*, see Chap. 14, "On Negative & Positive Liberty"

Graeme Garrard, "The Counter-Enlightenment liberalism of Isaiah Berlin," *Journal of Political Ideologies*, vol. 2 (October 1997):281-295.

Kristjansson, K. "What Is Wrong with Positive Liberty?," *Social Theory and Practice*, Fall 1992

Hayman, S. "Positive and Negative Liberty," *Chicago-Kent Law Review*, 1992

Michael Walzer, "Liberalism and the Art of Separation," *Political Theory*, vol. 12 (August 1984): 315-330.

November 25th **Berlin & the Analytic Approach Continued**

Essays (due **11/24 by 12pm**): ‘Berlin’s contribution to our understanding of freedom is to demonstrate the error of assimilating liberty to morality, and of supposing that morality forms a coherent system.’ Discuss.

Essays (due **11/24 by 12pm**): ‘As a complete theory of liberty positive freedom leaves much to be desired, but as a series of valid insights and a corrective to negative freedom, it is worthy of consideration.’ (Putterman). Discuss with reference to Berlin’s analysis of negative & positive liberty.

December 2nd **Analytical Inquiry & Contemporary Theory**

Read: M. Ignatieff, *The Needs of Strangers* and see another secondary source below.

Essays (due **12/1 by 12pm**): Ignatieff appears to move between all three approaches to political inquiry. Does his work stress one approach more than another?

Essays (due **12/1 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?

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).