PSC 550.01: Political Theory Seminar - Approaches to Political Theory

Ramona Grey
University of Montana - Missoula, ramona.grey@umontana.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.umt.edu/syllabi
Let us know how access to this document benefits you.

Recommended Citation
https://scholarworks.umt.edu/syllabi/7049

This Syllabus is brought to you for free and open access by the Course Syllabi at ScholarWorks at University of Montana. It has been accepted for inclusion in Syllabi by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks at University of Montana. For more information, please contact scholarworks@mso.umt.edu.
Political Theory Seminar: 
Negative & Positive Freedom

"The world freedom is incompletely descriptive. To understand what freedom means, we must know what it is — freedom from or freedom for." Maurice Cranston.

Course Description: Classical and contemporary political philosophers often speak of freedom, (some even make a distinction between liberty and freedom.) But what exactly does freedom mean? There is considerable debate among theorists, and especially among the writers we will examine this semester over whether freedom or "liberty" should be treated as an end (good for its own sake) or a means (to other human ends or values.) This seminar we will examine both forms of freedom, considering how the embrace of negative or positive freedom can influence a thinker's position on what properly belongs to the public verses the private sphere, the relationship between society's good and the individual's interests, as well as what he/she believes are the sources of oppression and its remedy.

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

1. Distinguish between negative and positive freedom, and recognize how this analytical framework influences contemporary political discourse.

2. Develop concise, analytic essays on the assigned readings in contemporary theory. 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 strengths and/or weaknesses.
Course Grading:
PS 550 will be taught as a seminar. Short essays (6-7 per student) will be assigned and critiqued in class (55% of course grade.) Class participation (20% of course grade) will evaluated according to each student's contribution to discussions on reading assignments. The final (25%) 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** before you are scheduled to orally present it. Late essays will not be accepted. The field exam will be on **May 11th at 1:10pm-3:10pm.**

Required Tests:
Hayek, *Road to Serfdom*;
Hayek, selections from *The Constitution of Liberty* (on reserve)
Andrew Schmookler, *The Illusion of Choice*
T.H. Green, "Liberal Legislation & Freedom of Contract" (handout)
Wendell Berry, *Sex, Economy, Freedom & Community*
Leo Strauss, *Natural Right & History*
Erich Fromm, *Escape From Freedom*
Arendt, *The Human Condition*
Berlin, *Essays on Liberty*
Selected readings on Arendt & post-modern feminism (on reserve)

**January 24th**
Introduction to the Course: Negative v. Positive Freedom

**January 31st**
*Liberalism & The Two Concepts of Liberty*
*Read:* Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom; Choose one of the recommended readings as well.*
*Essays (*due 1/27 by 1pm):* What form of liberty, positive or negative, does Hayek embrace and why? What are the problems, if any, do you find in Hayek's conception of liberty?

*Recommended Readings:*
Macfarlane, "On Two Concepts of Liberty, *Political Studies,* vol. 14, no. 1 Fall 1966
Cranston, M. *Freedom*

**February 7th**

**Theories of Liberty & Public Policy/Law**

**Read:** Hayek, *The Constitution of Liberty* (on reserve)
*Colorado v. Connelly* (1986)

**Essays (due 2/3 by 1pm):** What role(s) for the state would Hayek's theory of freedom support? Why?

Essays: How do the opinions in *Colorado v. Connelly* (1986) illustrate the tensions between negative and positive freedom? How would you have ruled in the case, and why?

**February 14th**

**Positive Freedom**

**Read:** T.H. Green, "Liberal Legislation," (handout); **Choose one of the recommended readings as well.**

**Essays (due 2/10 by 1pm):** Is private property truly "private"? If so, why? If not, why not?

Essays (due 2/10 by 1pm): “What we mean by freedom makes sense only when viewed against a background of more and less significant purposes.” What does Green mean, and is he correct?

**Recommended Readings:**
Bevir, M. "Welfarism, Socialism, and Religion...," *The Review of Politics*, Fall 1993
Etzioni, A. *Rights & the Common Good*
February 21st  

**Capitalism, Choice & Liberty**

Read: Andrew Schmookler, *The Illusion of Choice*

Essays (due 2/17 by 1pm): “No wonder we think we are getting what we want. We have been taught to want what we get.” When speaking of democratic government, however, Schmookler insists that it’s only legitimate when the consent of the governed is given “freely.” Can these two statements be reconciled?


February 28th

**Communitarians, Conservatives (Radical?) & Liberty**

Read: Wendell Barry, *Sex Economy, Freedom & Community*; *May choose one of the recommended readings as well.*

Essays (due 2/24 by 1pm): “There are two kinds of freedom: the freedom of the community and the freedom of the individual. The freedom of the community is the more fundamental and the more complex.” What Barry understands here, Carter takes for granted.

Essay (due 2/24 by 1pm): “The danger of the ideal of competition is that it neither proposes nor implies any limits. It proposes simply to lower costs at any cost, and to raise profits at any cost. It does not hesitate at the destruction of the life of a family or the life of a community. It pits neighbor against neighbor as readily as it pits buyer against seller. Every transaction is *meant* to involve a winner and a loser. And for this reason the human community is pitted without limit against nature. For in the unlimited competition of neighbor and
neighbor, buyer and seller, all available means must be used; none may be spared.” – Berry Discuss

Essay: (due 2/24 by 1 pm): “However destructive may be the policies of the government and the methods and products of the corporations, the root of the problem is always to be found in private life.”

Recommended Readings:
W. Barry, What Are People For
Michael Ignatieff, The Needs of Strangers
Lewis Mumford, The Human Condition

March 7th

Negative Freedom v. Classical Political Philosophy
Read: Strauss, Natural Right & History; Choose one of the recommended readings as well.

Essays (due 3/3 by 1 pm): 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 democratic freedom?

Essays (due 3/3 by 1 pm): 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.) In light of your reading, discuss this statement.

Recommended Readings:
Alen Bloom, The Closing of the American Mind
John Diggins, The Promise of Pragmatism, 1994
C.S. Lewis, The Screwtape Letter
Niebuhr, Children of Light / Children of Darkness
Oakeshott, Religion, Politics, and the Moral Life
John Gunnell, Political Theory, Tradition & Interpretation
March 14th

Q. Skinner, The Foundations of Modern Political Thought
"Strauss, Philosophy, and Politics," (Symposium) Political Theory, August 1987
J.G.A. Pocock, The Machiavellian Moment
Herbert Storing (ed.) Essays on the Scientific Study of Politics
A. MacIntyre, After Virtue
Ernest Fortin, "Gadamer on Strauss," Interpretation, Jan. 1984
Gadamer, Truth and Method

Freedom & Critical Theory

Read: Fromm, Escape From Freedom; Choose one of the recommended readings as well.

Essays (due 3/10th by 1pm): "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) What difficulties are involved in making an "empirical" view of human nature the basis of a political theory?

Essays (due 3/10th by 1pm): Fromm, in common with other writers on the left, has a concept of alienation. What is it? Is there any comparable concept in liberal (say Hayek’s) thought? Has the concept of alienation become outdated, too blunt for an analytical tool?

Recommended Readings:
Birnback, Neo-Freudzan 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
Marcuse, One Dimensional Man
Schaar, Escape From Authority: The Perspectives of Erich Fromm, 1961
March 21st

Fromm's Humanist Vision of Freedom

Read: Fromm, *Escape From Freedom*

Essays (due 3/17 by 1pm): Is there such a thing as a “just price” or a “fair wage?” Would you join Fromm (& Schmookler) in establishing a rational economic system? (p. 272 hardback ed.; p. 299 paperback ed. of *Escape From Freedom*)

Essays (due 3/17 by 1pm): Man is rational, says Fromm, not because he always thinks or acts rationally but because he has this need to rationalize whatever he does. (p. 67 hardback ed.; pp. 85-86 paperback ed.) What does Fromm mean? What does it mean (to you) to say that people behave or fail to behave in a rational way?

Recommended Reading:
Briggs, "From Slaves to Robots," *New Statesman and Nation*, 23 June 1956
Ellul, *The Political Illusion*
*The Technological Society*
Riesman, *The Lonely Crowd*

* * * * *March 25th –April 2nd Spring Break* * * * *

April 4th

Freedom, The Public and The Private

Read: Arendt, *The Human Condition; Choose one of the recommended readings as well.*

Essays (due 4/3 by 1pm): 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 4/3 by 1pm): 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
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

April 11th
Arendt cont.
Read: The Human Condition
Essays (due 4/7 by 1pm): How does Arendt's distinction between public and private relate to her distinction between work and labor... or does it?

Essays (due 4/7 by 1pm): How does Arendt's distinction between public and private related to her indictment of negative freedom... or does it?

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

**April 18th**

*Post-Modern Feminism & End of Political Philosophy?*

Read: Mary Dietz, "Hannah Arendt & Feminist Politics," in *Feminist Interpretations & Political Theory,* eds. Shanley & Pateman*; Rosemarie Tong, *Feminist Thought,* "Postmodern Feminism;" *Feminists Theorize the Political,* eds. Judith Butler & Joan Scott,* on reserve; **Choose one of the recommended readings as well.**

Essays (due 4/14 by 1pm) How might a "post-modern" feminist critique Arendt? What, if anything, would they find useful in Arendt's analysis?

Essays (due 4/14 by 1pm): Can feminist political theory avoid assuming "a privileged epistemological perspective" or a generalized "female" freedom in society? Explain. If not, what are the consequences?

**Recommended Readings:**

Michele Barrett, *Women's Oppression Today: Problems in Marxist Feminist Analysis*

Ann Bookmann & Sandra Morgan, *Women & the Politics of Empowerment*

Nancy Chodrow, *The Reproduction of Mothering*

Zillah Eisenstein, *The Radical Future of Liberal Feminism Capitalist Patriarchy and the Case for Socialist Feminism*

Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*

Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature*

Susan Okin, *Women in Western Political Thought*


**April 25th-May 2nd**

*Negative & Positive Liberty Conclusions*
Read: Berlin, "Introduction" and "Two Concepts of Liberty"
Essays (due 4/21 by 1pm): "Berlin's defense of negative liberty leads him into the position of defending the status quo."

Comment

Essays (due 4/21 by 1pm): "Absolute negative liberty, like absolute positive liberty, ends up destroying that which it prizes most—liberty."

Recommended Readings:
Crowder, G. "Negative and Positive Liberty, Political Science, Dec. 1988
Kristjansson, K. "What Is Wrong with Positive Liberty?," Social Theory and Practice, Fall 1992

Final Due – May 11\textsuperscript{th} by 1:10 pm.