Course Overview

We live in an interesting time. To understand our time, and perhaps to change it, we turn to political theory. Political theory articulates the concepts and principles that we use to interpret and evaluate political phenomena. The aim of this course is to produce a map of contemporary political theory. We do this by surveying several profound and influential theorists of our time.

The course begins with Friedrich Nietzsche. Nietzsche’s work at the end of the nineteenth century problematized traditional groundings of political morality and issued a challenge, or an invitation, to “philosophers of the future.” In the body of the course, we consider how six theorists think about politics after Nietzsche. Initially, we analyze how John Rawls reworks Kantianism to construct a liberal political conception of justice. Then, we examine how Hannah Arendt appeals to the civic republican tradition to revalorize the *vita activa*. Next, we contemplate how Leo Strauss returns to classical political philosophy to justify a conservative, aristocratic politics. Afterwards, we observe how Charles Taylor transforms Hegelianism to defend an ethics of authenticity and a politics of recognition. Then, we consider how Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari democratize Nietzsche to conceive a rhizomatic politics. Finally, we consider how William E. Connolly combines elements from Anglo-American and Continental philosophy to envision a pluralism appropriate to late-modernity.

For each theorist, we pose six questions:

1) What is their biography?

2) What philosophical problems do they address?

3) What political problems do they address?

4) a) What is their theory of human nature?
   b) What is their theory of politics?

5) How do justify their theories?

6) What do we think of their theories?
Course Requirements

First Assignment: Given the centrality of Nietzsche to contemporary political thought, it is necessary for us to understand the main elements of *On the Genealogy of Morality*. The first assignment is an 5-7 page essay in which you (1) describe Nietzsche’s conception of human nature, (2) describe Nietzsche’s conception of politics, and (3) evaluate Nietzsche’s conceptions of human nature and politics – i.e., are they worth endorsing or not? (See the template at the end of the syllabus for guidance on how to structure the essay.) Due September 12.

Second Assignment: Contemporary political theorists often have an ambiguous relation to Nietzsche. On the one hand, few adhere to Nietzsche’s aristocratic conceptions of human nature and politics – especially after the experience of National Socialism. On the other, most political theorists acknowledge that it is impossible to be a Platonist, a Christian, a Machiavellian, a Kantian, a Humean, a Hegelian, and so forth, in the same way after Nietzsche. The second assignment is an 5-7 page essay about Rawls, Arendt, or Strauss in which you (1) describe his or her conception of human nature, (2) describe his or her conception of politics, and (3) evaluate his or her conceptions of human nature and politics – i.e., are they compelling or not? Due October 26.

Third Assignment: The third assignment is the same as the second only about Taylor, Deleuze and Guattari, or Connolly. Due December 12, noon, in my mailbox in the Department of Government.

Class Participation: Throughout the semester, students are expected to come to class prepared with detailed notes and questions on the material. The last class on each theorist will be devoted to a discussion of his or her relevance to the contemporary world. Early in the semester we will divide the class into groups. Each student will present to the class, and turn in to me, a 3-4 page paper in which you evaluate how the theorist under consideration provides helpful or harmful advice on a timely debate or topic. Each group should meet with me before they write their presentations. Possible debates or topics include:

- America’s foreign policy
- America’s welfare policy
- The importance of patriotism
- The need for strong communities
- The public financing of elections
- Religion and politics
- The role of the president/Supreme Court/
  legislature/media in a democracy
- Developments in popular culture
- School curricula
- Environmental protection
- Techniques of thought

Final Grade Distribution:
25% - Each essay
25% - Class participation

Note: Students may rewrite the first or second essay for up to a one letter grade improvement. The deadline for the revised essay is one week after the essays are returned. Include a short
summary of the revisions you have made. Students are encouraged to schedule appointments at the Writing Center and to meet with me at least once during the semester.

Texts

Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality* (Cambridge)
John Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (Columbia)
Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago)
Leo Strauss, *Introduction to Political Philosophy* (Wayne)
Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self* (Harvard)
Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* (Minnesota)
William Connolly, *Neuropolitics* (Minnesota)

Class Schedule

1. August 29 – Introduction to the Course: Nietzsche’s Challenge
   *On the Genealogy of Morality*, Preface

2. August 31 – No class: American Political Science Conference

3. September 5 – Nietzsche on Master and Slave Morality
   *On the Genealogy of Morality*, First Essay

4. September 7 – Nietzsche and the Project of Moving Beyond Good and Evil
   *On the Genealogy of Morality*, Second Essay

5. September 12 – Rawls and the Project of Political Liberalism
   *Political Liberalism*, Lecture I

6. September 14 – Rawls’s Moral Psychology
   *Political Liberalism*, Lecture II

7. September 19 – Rawls’s Political Constructivism
   *Political Liberalism*, Lecture III

8. September 21 – Rawls and the Contemporary World

9. September 26 – Arendt and the Project of Revalorizing the *Vita Activa*
The Human Condition, Prologue, Chapter I (entire); Chapter II, §§4-6

10. September 28 – Arendt’s Critique of Modern Society

The Human Condition, Chapter III, §§11-13; Chapter IV, §§18-23

11. October 5 – Arendt on the Vita Activa

The Human Condition, Chapter V, §§24-27; Chapter VI, §§40-45

12. October 10 – Arendt and the Contemporary World

13. October 12 – Strauss and the Project of Revitalizing Classical Political Philosophy

Introduction, “What is Political Philosophy?,” “On Classical Political Philosophy”

14. October 17 – Strauss’s Critique of Modern Political Philosophy

Introduction, “The Three Waves of Modernity”

15. October 19 – Strauss’s Vision: Progress or Return?

Introduction, “Progress or Return? The Contemporary Crisis in Western Civilization”

16. October 24 – Strauss and the Contemporary World

17. October 26 – Taylor and the Project of Redefining Modernity

Sources of the Self, Part I

18. October 31 – Taylor’s History of the Modern Identity

Sources of the Self, §§ 5, 6, 13, 18, 22

19. November 2 – No Class: Association for Political Theory Conference

20. November 7 – Taylor, the Ethics of Authenticity, and the Politics of Recognition

Sources of the Self, § 25
* “The Politics of Recognition”

21. November 9 – Taylor and the Contemporary World

22. November 14 – Deleuze and Guattari and the Project of Thinking Rhizomatically
A Thousand Plateaus, Plateau #1

23. November 16 – Deleuze and Guattari’s Theory of Human Nature
   A Thousand Plateaus, Plateau # 6

23. November 21 – Deleuze and Guattari’s Theory of Politics
   A Thousand Plateaus, Plateau # 9

24. November 28 – Deleuze and the Contemporary World

25. November 30 – Connolly and the Project of Rethinking the Body/Brain/Culture Network
   Neuropolitics, Chapter 1

26. December 5 – Connolly and Immanent Naturalism
   Neuropolitics, Chapter 4

27. December 7 – Connolly and the Contemporary World
A Template for a Political Theory Essay

A Title that Indicates Your Topic and Thesis

1. Introduction

[State the question or topic that you are going to address and provide a map of your essay’s argument.]

2. Political Theorist X’s Theory of Human Nature

[A political theorist’s conception of human nature lays the foundation of his or her political theory. In this section, describe how the political theorist under consideration characterizes human nature. How does he or she differentiate human beings from animals? How does he or she differentiate human beings from one another? How does he or she justify, or defend, his or her conception of human nature? This section should be about 40% of the length of the essay.]

3. Political Theorist X’s Theory of Politics

[In this section, explicate the main elements of the political theorist’s conception of politics. Who or what, according to the political theorist, should govern? What principles (or rules) should political actors follow? How does the political theorist justify his or her conception of politics? This section should be about 40% of the length of the essay.]

4. Conclusion

[In the conclusion, evaluate the theorist’s conceptions of human nature and politics. Are they worth endorsing? Why or why not? This section should be about 20% of the length of the essay.]

Questions to ask yourself before you turn in your essay:

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<tr>
<th>Substantive Questions:</th>
<th>Stylistic Questions:</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. Have I entered the political theorist’s thought well? Have I read his or her work at least twice? Have I outlined (preferably by hand) his or her key arguments?</td>
<td>1. Is the essay well-organized? Does the introductory paragraph explain what I am going to argue? Does each paragraph have a topic sentence?</td>
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<td>2. Have I thought about how the theorist responds to earlier philosophers (e.g., Plato, Machiavelli, Kant, Nietzsche)?</td>
<td>2. Is my interpretation of the theorist supported by evidence from the text? Are there adequate citations and quotations?</td>
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<td>3. Have I thought about how the theorist may be criticized by his or her contemporaries or by later generations?</td>
<td>3. Have I read the essay slowly to find spelling and grammatical mistakes?</td>
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<td>4. Have I written with passion as well as intelligence?</td>
<td>4. Have I read the essay aloud to determine if the narrative flows?</td>
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<td>5. Have I shown the essay to others and solicited their advice?</td>
<td>5. Have I inserted page numbers, provided a bibliography, and stapled my essay?</td>
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<td>6. Have I inserted page numbers, provided a bibliography, and stapled my essay?</td>
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