

contemporary political theory

GOVT 339
Spring 2012

MW 2:40-4:00
PAC 422

Christopher Anderson
MW 4:00-5:00

203-710-8633
PAC 220

This course provides an introduction to some of the major thinkers and ideas in (primarily) Western political philosophy since 1900. We will explore perennial themes in politics: the nature of justice, liberty, and community; the origins of political society and of the will to power; the source and limits of political obligation and the justifications and cause of revolution; the relationship of God and morality to politics; and the quality of our own knowledge of politics.

The course has two primary objectives. First, the course is designed to acquaint you with some of the main ideas of a few of the more profound thinkers on politics in the late modern era. While this might make you slightly more interesting at cocktail parties (the value of which should not be underestimated), more importantly, it can provide a profound insight and critique of the functions and possibilities of politics. Many of the thinkers we read in this course were instrumental in shaping the politics of our time, many of them offer penetrating critiques of late modern politics, and all of them might help us understand how our politics works or might work.

The second objective is even more important than the first. It is a goal of this course to inspire you to challenge your own political beliefs. While each of these theorists has attracted a number of disciples down to the present day, the idea is not to convert anyone to existentialism, feminism, liberalism, or any other "ism," but rather to encourage you to use the writings of Camus, Freud, Rawls, and the others to evaluate your own political conceptions. These philosophers offer powerful arguments about human nature—what kinds of lives and politics people are capable of; the scope of the political realm in human life—what things are of public concern and what should be kept private; and how to discern appropriate political action—how to do the right thing. Reflecting on these and other arguments touching at the foundations of politics, we as individuals might find some of them convincing, some of them ridiculous. But the hope is that the examination of why these arguments are or are not compelling to us will challenge and thus enrich our own evolving ideas about politics.

Assignments

15% Epiphanies, Anti-epiphanies & Class participation – Weekly

- Your first post on the discussion board each week should be an epiphany or an anti-epiphany – a discussion of an idea that you find enlightening or horrifically wrong. Begin this entry with a short quotation or paraphrase from the week's assigned reading (with an informal citation of page number) followed by your own reflections on the idea.
 - Subsequent comments on discussion board may be reflections on other ideas from the reading or reactions to the comments of other students.
 - If you are quiet, talk a lot on the discussion board.
 - If you are not quiet in class, minimal discussion board 2 entries per week, including at least 1 Epiphany or Anti-epiphany.
-

15% Group paper, 10-15 pages – Date TBD

Groups of 2 or 3 students will work together on a paper on the theorist of the week. The paper will cover these areas:

- | | |
|--|---------------------------------|
| 1. Brief Biography | 4. Influence (on others) |
| 2. Significant Influences | 5. Major Criticisms (by others) |
| 3. Major Arguments (in assigned text(s)) | 6. Assessment (your own) |
-

10% Group presentation-- Date TBD

The groups that are writing a paper together will also offer a presentation. The presentation will summarize the first 5 sections of the paper. At the conclusion of the presentation, the group will direct discussion for the remainder of the class. *Creativity in presentations and in discussion direction is encouraged.*

20% Essay 1, 6-7 pages – Feb. 29

- Choose a topic and discuss how we should understand that topic with reference to at least two theorists from the course.
 - I recommend reviewing your discussion board entries to help to think about a topic. You might consider topics like justice, power, anger, passion, reason, etc.
 - A good essay not only involves an account of selected theorists on the issue in question, but also involves both a contrast of their ideas and a critical assessment of their value. Your object in the essay is to use a few theories to help us, you and me, come to a better understanding of how we should think about the topic you have chosen to address.
-

20% Essay 2, 6-7 pages, May 9

- Same assignment as Essay 1, except that at least one of the theorists must be from the second half of the course.
-

20% Final Exam

Policies

Absences. Absences from class will negatively affect your participation grade.

Late Assignments. Extensions on paper assignments will be granted in exceptional circumstances. In other cases, your grade will be reduced by a half letter grade per day late, i.e. an A paper becomes an A- if it is one day late, Week + if it is two days late, and so on.

Academic Integrity The internet can be an excellent source of background information, but it cannot be the source for writing for your assignments. When in doubt, always provide the full citation for all work that you used in your writing process, journal articles, and online summaries.

Plagiarism, or any other violations of standards of academic integrity, will be dealt with through formal disciplinary action.

For more information on Wesleyan's academic policy, see http://www.wesleyan.edu/acaf/policy/sc_plagiarism_complete.html

Cell phones and laptops. Please do not use either during class (for texting or any other purpose).

Our friend the Wikipedia: I love the Wikipedia and I can't wait to be able to access it by touching a button installed on the side of my head. Use Wikipedia as a source of information at the beginning of the research process but never ever use information that you find only in the Wikipedia and do not cite Wikipedia in your papers. Remember the adage: "If it's in the Wikipedia, it just might be true."

Schedule

Week 1 Jan. 30 Feb. 1	Kant, <i>What Is Enlightenment?</i> 1784* Marx and Engels, <i>Communist Manifesto</i> (excerpts), 1848.* Leo XIII, <i>Libertas Praestantissimum</i> (excerpts), 1888.* Leo XIII, <i>Rerum Novarum</i> (excerpts), 1891.* Weber, <i>Science as a Vocation</i> (excerpts), 1918.*	Week 8 Apr. 2 Apr. 4	Habermas, <i>The Theory of Communicative Action</i> , 273-338.† Habermas, <i>The Future of Human Nature</i> . Ratzinger and Habermas, <i>The Dialectics of Secularization: On Reason and Religion</i> . Presentation 5 (Mon), Paper 5 (Wed)
Week 2 Feb. 6 Feb. 8	Nietzsche, <i>Genealogy of Morals</i> . Marinetti, "The Futurist Manifesto," 1909.*	Week 9 Apr. 9 Apr. 11	Rawls, <i>Justice as Fairness, A Restatement</i> , Rorty, "Human Rights, Rationality, and Sentimentality" in <i>Truth and Progress: Philosophical Papers</i> , vol. 3, pp. 167-185.† Presentation 6 (Mon), Paper 6 (Wed)
Week 3 Feb. 13 Feb. 15	Freud, <i>Civilization and Its Discontents</i> . Presentation 1 (Mon), Paper 1 (Wed)	Week 10 Apr. 16 Apr. 18	Mackinnon, "Method and Politics," in <i>Toward a Feminist Theory of the State</i> , 106-125.† Chodorow, <i>Feminism and Psychoanalytic Theory</i> , 23-162. Presentation 7 (Mon), Paper 7 (Wed)
Week 4 Feb. 20 Feb. 22	Camus, <i>The Rebel</i> , 3-35, 62-80, 100-132, 177-258, 272-306. Presentation 2 (Mon), Paper 2 (Wed)	Week 11 Apr. 23 Apr. 25	Brown, <i>States of Injury</i> . Presentation 8 (Mon), Paper 8 (Wed)
Week 5 Feb. 27 Feb. 29	Oakeshott, <i>Rationalism in Politics and Other Essays</i> , 6-69, 184-218, 407-437. Presentation 3 (Mon), Paper 3 (Wed) Essay 1 (Wed) <i>Group 3 students have an extra week for Essay 1</i>	Week 12 Apr. 30 May 2	Nhat Hahn, <i>The Art of Power</i> . Suzuki, "Zen and the Samurai," in <i>Zen and Japanese Culture</i> , 61-73.† Presentation 9 (Mon), Paper 9 (Wed)
Week 6 Mar. 5 Mar. 7	Schmitt, <i>The Concept of the Political</i> Mouffe, "Deliberative Democracy or Agonistic Pluralism?" * Fanon, <i>The Wretched of the Earth</i> , 1-28.† Presentation 4 (Mon), Paper 4 (Wed)	Week 13 May 7 May 9	Haidt and Joseph, "Intuitive Ethics: How Innately Prepared Intuitions Create Culturally Variable Virtues," <i>Daedalus</i> (Fall 2004): 55-66. * Essay 2 (Wed)
Week 7 Mar. 26 Mar. 28	Foucault, "Truth and Power," <i>The Foucault Reader</i> , pp. 51-75. † Foucault, <i>Madness and Civilization</i> .	Exam week	Final exam

* On Moodle.

† On E-Res.