

Professor Andrew Poe
MW 12:30-1:50PM in CHAP 203
Office Hours: Mondays and Thursdays, 3:30-5PM in 202 Clark House
Email: apoe@amherst.edu
Phone: 413.542.5159

POLITICAL SCIENCE 10

Unraveling Assumptions: An Introduction to Political Theory

-Introduction-

What government is and how it is practiced relies on a whole host of assumptions. Some of these must be clearly agreed upon at the outset. (For instance, how groups will organize themselves – Will they have representatives or not? How will those representatives be elected? How will they decide policy? How will they enforce it? etc. – requires consent to legitimate nascent polities.) Yet other assumptions remain more disputatious. Answers to such questions as “What is justice?” (Or Freedom? Or Equality?) “Who is a good citizen and why?” “What is a good state?” and “What should my obligations be?” remain under continual debate, even as they – paradoxically – determine much of the world we live in and share with others.

This course is an introduction to political theory, the study that helps us develop working answers to those more contentious questions. The course is divided into three parts: The first examines the problems of foundations – what politics is and where we can find its limits; The second section deals with politics in the more ordinary aspects of our lives – the politics that determine how we interact with our families and friends, and how we choose to live in our more private lives; The third section of the course deals with some of the darker elements consequent to our living together, investigating the costs that may come from sharing our world. Throughout, we will use a variety of resources – philosophic, literary, cultural, cinematic, and historical – to develop ways of engaging our political world, unraveling those very assumptions we choose to live by.

-Course Requirements-

There are **four** requirements for this course:

1. 5-6 page paper on the subject of political foundations. Topics will be distributed on September 27th; papers will be due in class on October 4th – 20%
2. 5-6 page paper on the politics of the ordinary. Topics will be distributed on November 1st; papers will be due in class on November 8th – 20%
3. 8-10 page paper on the problems of living together. Topics will be distributed on December 15th; papers will be due to my departmental mailbox by noon on December 22nd – 40%
4. Attendance and participation in the course – 20%

Late Papers: Except in documented cases of serious emergency, late papers will receive a 1/3 grade penalty for each calendar day the paper is late.

-Texts-

The following books are available for purchase at Amherst Books:

Niccolo Machiavelli – *The Prince*

George Orwell – *The Road to Wigan Pier*

William Faulkner – *Go Down, Moses*

Immanuel Kant – *Groundwork to the Metaphysics of Morals*

Jean-Jacques Rousseau – *The Basic Writings*

Friedrich Nietzsche – *Beyond Good and Evil*

Charles-Louis de Secondat, Baron de Montesquieu – *The Persian Letters*

Hannah Arendt – *Eichmann in Jerusalem*

The remainder of the readings will be available on course e-reserve.

Please Note: There are three films that are required materials for this course. These will stream via the Amherst College Library's website and should be viewed prior to the class for which each is assigned.

-Schedule and Readings-

Introduction

September 8th – What is Political Theory? (Normative/ Historical/ Ontological)

Part 1: We Political Animals

September 13th – Politics and the Political
Reading: Machiavelli's *The Prince* (complete)

September 15th – On Foundations (part 1)
Reading: Selections from *The Book of Exodus*

September 20th – On Foundations (part 2)
FILM for Viewing: *The Searchers* (1956)
Reading: Selections from Michael Walzer's *Exodus and Revolution*

September 22nd – Promises
Reading: Selections from Thomas Hobbes' *Leviathan*

September 27th – Dissent (part 1)
Reading: Plato's *Apology*

September 29th – Dissent (part 2)
Reading: Ralph Waldo Emerson's "Self-Reliance"

Part 2: In Ordinary Spaces

October 4th – Education (part 1)
Reading: Rousseau's "Discourse on the Origin of Inequality," including his "Letter to the Republic of Geneva" up through to the end of Part 1

October 6th – Education (part 2)
Reading: Rousseau's "Discourse on the Origin of Inequality," all of Part 2

October 13th – Work (part 1)

FILM for Viewing: *The Wrestler* (2008)

Reading: Roland Barthes' "The World of Wrestling"

October 18th – Work (part 2)

Reading: Orwell's *The Road to Wigan Pier*, Part 1

October 20th – Work (part 3)

Reading: *Orwell's The Road to Wigan Pier*, Part 2

October 25th – Friendship (part 1)

Reading: Selections from Aristotle's *Politics*

October 27th – Friendship (part 2)

Reading: Michel de Montaigne "On Friendship"

November 1st – Family (part 1)

Reading: From Faulkner's *Go Down, Moses* – "Was," "The Fire and the Hearth," "Pantaloon in Black," and "The Old People"

November 3rd – Family (part 2)

Reading: From Faulkner's *Go Down, Moses* – "The Bear," "Delta Autumn," and "Go Down, Moses"

Part 3: Our Problems Together

November 8th – Moral Imperative(s)

Reading: Kant's *Groundwork to the Metaphysics of Morals*

November 10th – Crime and Punishment

FILM for Viewing: *Match Point* (2005)

Reading: Bernard Williams' "Moral Luck"

November 15th – Judgment as a Political Problem (part 1)

Reading: Selections from Nietzsche's *Beyond Good and Evil*

November 17th – Judgment as a Political Problem (part 2)

Reading: Selections from Nietzsche's *Beyond Good and Evil*

November 29th – Kinds of Terror (part 1)
Reading: Albert Camus's *The Just Assassins*

December 1st – Kinds of Terror (part 2)
Reading: Jean Amery's "At the Mind's Limit"
Hannah Arendt's "Ideology and Terror" (excerpted from *The Origins of Totalitarianism*)

December 6th – On the Uses and Limits of Justice (part 1)
Reading: Arendt's *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, chapters 1-7

December 8th – On the Uses and Limits of Justice (part 2)
Reading: Arendt's *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, chapters 8-postscript

Conclusion

December 13th – Politics and Utopia
Required Reading: Montesquieu's *Persian Letters*, including Montesquieu's preface, letters 1-5, 10-15, 20-21, 24, 26, 41-43, 54, 59-60, 62, 64-65, 112-122, 147-161, and unpublished fragment # 3

December 15th – Conclusion

Some Additional Readings on the Study and Practice of Political Theory

John G. Gunnell, "The Founding of the American Political Science Association: Discipline, Profession, Political Theory, and Politics," *APSR* 100 (4) (Nov. 2006): 479-486

Sheldon Wolin, "Political Theory as a Vocation", *APSR* 63 (1969), 1062-82

Quentin Skinner, "Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas," *History and Theory* 8 (1969), 3-53

Leo Strauss, "What is Political Philosophy?" in *What is Political Philosophy?*

John Rawls, "Four Roles of Political Philosophy," in *Justice as Fairness: A Restatement*

Isaiah Berlin, "Does Political Theory Still Exist?" reprinted in Berlin, *The Proper Study of Mankind*

David Mayhew, "Political Science and Political Philosophy: Ontological Not Normative," *PS: Political Science and Politics* 33, No. 2 (Jun., 2000): 192-193

Jeffrey Isaac, "The Strange Silence of Political Theory" *Political Theory* 1995; 23; 636