

Contemporary Political Thought

POSC 5314, Fall 2011

Fordham University

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Course Overview

Contemporary political thought straddles the timely and the untimely. On the one hand, thinkers want to understand and intervene in the most important events of our time—such as the ongoing political revolutions in the Middle East and North Africa. On the other, thinkers need to step back and sharpen their conceptual tools and weapons so that they may reenter the fray more effectively. There is no better theoretical pedagogy for that than studying the leading representatives of contemporary schools of political thought—the purpose of this seminar.

Initially, we review a debate—sparked by Jeffrey C. Isaac’s essay, ‘The Strange Silence of Political Theory’—on the tasks facing contemporary political theorists. Then, we begin a journey on how modern and contemporary political theorists envision the foundation of a just social order, particularly by using the idea of a social contract. First, we consider Immanuel Kant’s Enlightenment vision of constitutional and international right. Then, we engage several attacks on Enlightenment political theory by Nietzsche, a British conservative (Michael Oakeshott), and a leading Christian theologian (Joseph Ratzinger). Next, we spend two weeks reading the leading Anglophone political theorist reconstructing Kantian social contract theory: John Rawls. The remainder of the course considers how leading political theorists revise Rawlsian political theory from a feminist perspective (Carole Pateman), a racial perspective (Charles Mills), a Muslim perspective (Andrew F. March), and postmodern perspectives (Christina Beltran, William E. Connolly).

Texts:

Kant, *Toward Perpetual Peace* (Cambridge) 0300110707

Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality* (Cambridge) 052169163X

Oakeshott, *Rationalism in Politics and Other Essays* (Liberty Press) 0865970955

Ratzinger, *Without Roots* (Basic Books) 9780465006274

Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Harvard) 9780674000780

Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (Columbia) 0231130899

Pateman, *The Sexual Contract* (Stanford) 0804714770

Mills, *The Racial Contract* (Cornell) 9780801484636

March, *Islam and Liberal Citizenship* (Oxford) 019533096X

Beltran, *The Trouble with Unity* (Oxford) 9780195375916

Connolly, *A World of Becoming* (Duke) 0822348799

Course Requirements

1. Class participation. Students are expected to attend class with notes, questions, and thoughts about the reading. Don't be a spectator: join the conversation!
- 2, 3, 4. Each student will lead one seminar. Before class, write a 7-8 page essay summarizing and analyzing the material, including current controversies surrounding it. In addition to the primary sources, read recent articles on the author in such journals as *Political Theory*, *European Journal of Political Theory*, *Contemporary Political Theory*, *Polity*, and *Radical Philosophy*. Make a 1-2 page handout that summarizes the material, and speak for about 20 minutes. Ideally, we will be inspired to have a lively discussion.
5. A 20-25 page research paper. Students should consult with the professor about their topics throughout the semester. The essay should have the general format: (1) Specify a problem or question that needs to be addressed. You can raise this problem by pointing to real world controversies, political science literatures, or theoretical debates. The first 3-4 pages should grab the reader's attention and lay out a plan to address the question. (2) Explain how one author on the syllabus addresses the question. Read the material on the syllabus and relevant secondary literature. 8-10 pages. (3) Consider how another author on the syllabus addresses the question. (4) Present your own thoughts about how to answer the question. You can support your thesis by citing the text, political science literatures, or real world events. 3-4 pages. For general advice, see my essay, "Writing Political Theory: Lessons from an Apprenticeship," *PS: Political Science & Politics*, vol. 38, no. 3, July 2005.) Due on December 19 by 5:30 p.m.

Grade Distribution

Class participation	10
Class presentation essay	10
Class presentation	10
Class presentation handout	10
Research paper	60

Classes

1. 9/12 - "The Strange Silence of Political Theory" and responses by Connolly, McClure, Kiss, Gillespie, Benhabib in *Political Theory*, Vol. 23, No. 4 (Nov., 1995)
2. 9/19 - Kant, *Toward Perpetual Peace*, 'Theory and Practice'
3. 9/26 - Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, Section II
4. 10/3 - Michael Oakeshott, *Rationalism and Politics*, "Rationalism and Politics," "On Being Conservative"

5. 10/17 - Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, Preface, Chapters 1, 2-6, 14, 15, 18
6. 10/24 - John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, Chapter 1, §§11, 40
7. 10/31 - John Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, Introduction, Introduction to the Paperback Edition, Lecture IV
8. 11/7 - Carole Pateman, *The Sexual Contract*, Preface-Chapter 4
9. 11/14 - Charles Mills, *The Racial Contract*, Introduction, Chapters 1, 3
10. 11/21 - Andrew F. March, *Islam and Liberal Citizenship*, Introduction, Chapter 6
11. 11/28 - Beltran, *The Trouble with Unity*, Introduction, Chapter 5, Conclusion (Pay particular attention to the discussion of Gilles Deleuze)
12. 12/5 - William E. Connolly, *A World of Becoming*, Chapters 1, 5
13. 12/12 - TBD
14. 12/19 - Meet at my office at 5:30 and walk to dinner in Little Italy (a relaxing way to talk about the themes of the course and the research papers)