University of Wisconsin-Madison

Methods of Political Theory
Political Science 839
Fall 2017

Instructor: R. Avramenko
Office: 203 Meikeljohn House
Office Hours: by appointment

Course: PS839
Location: North Hall 422
Time: M 3:30 – 5:25

Course Objective:
This seminar is designed for graduate students training to study and to teach philosophical texts as a vocation. After first exploring the purpose of political theory generally speaking, the course then focuses on the major approaches to texts. Each method will be explored from two angles—first, we will analyze the theoretical underpinnings with an eye to the nuts and bolts of the method. Second, we will study the method in practice. Over the course of the semester we will consider the exegetical approach of the Straussian school, the historical approach of Quentin Skinner (the Cambridge School), phenomenological hermeneutics (Martin Heidegger), hermeneutics (Hans-Georg Gadamer), deconstruction (Jacques Derrida), genealogy (Michel Foucault), and finally, the cross-cultural approach of Comparative Political Theory. Other schools that may be considered include the analytical tradition and vantagism.

Required Texts:
Martin Heidegger, Basic Writings
Leo Strauss. What is Political Philosophy? And Other Studies. (ISBN: 0226777138)

Please purchase these particular editions and translations. This is a text-based course and full participation requires that we navigate and explore the text together—that we be on the same page, so to speak.

Requirements:
Seminar Participation: 10%
Presentations and papers (4 @ 5-10 pp.): 80%
Syllabi: 10%
1. Participation:
First, this course assumes all students have read, sometime in recent history, Plato’s *Republic* and Machiavelli’s *Prince* and *Discourses*. If you have not, please read soon.

Second, this a seminar. This means its effectiveness depends on two things: reading and participation. The grading schema is therefore designed to encourage both. The participation is based on attendance, preparedness, and participation in discussion. Carefully reading the assigned material before each class will go far to ensuring a full participation grade.

2. Presentations:
Students will be responsible for five presentations (2-3 students per week). On the students’ assigned day for presentation they will serve as our resident hermeneuts. That is, students will be our experts on the text. The task is not to talk for the whole class, but rather to facilitate the discussion, to present what are perceived to be the major themes and statements in the text, and to be the experts guiding us in our interpretation and discussion.

The week following the conclusion of that section of the class, students will submit a 4-6 page paper. In short, there will be about 25 pages of writing for the semester.

3. Syllabi:
Near the end of the semester, students will create two syllabi. These syllabi will demonstrate how they would teach this class. One syllabus shall be for a graduate level class, the other for undergraduate. The syllabi should polished and complete, and ready for inclusion in your teaching portfolio.

Schedule:

**September 11: What is Political Theory?**

**Required:**

i) Leo Strauss, “What is Political Philosophy?” in *What is Political Philosophy? And Other Studies*, pp. 9-27.


**Suggested Readings:**


v) John Gray, “After the New Liberalism”


September 18: The Chicago School
A) Theory

ii) Leo Strauss, “On a Forgotten Kind of Writing” in What is Political Philosophy? And Other Studies (pp. 221-232).

iii) Allan Bloom, “The Study of Texts” in Giants and Dwarves (pp. 295-314).


September 25: The Chicago School
B) Practice


October 2: The Cambridge School
A) Theory


Suggested Readings:


**October 9: The Cambridge School**

**B) Practice**


iii) Quentin Skinner, on The Rediscovery of Republican Values (in *Visions of Politics* Vol. II).


**October 16: Phenomenological HermeneuticsⅠ**

**A) Theory**

i) Martin Heidegger, *Introduction of Being and Time*, in *Basic Writings*


**Suggested Readings:**

i) Leo Strauss, “Philosophy as Rigorous Science and Political Philosophy”


iii) Jan Patočka, "Qu'est-ce que la phénoménologie?" In: *Qu'est-ce que la phénoménologie?*, ed. and trans. E. Abrams (Grenoble: J. Millon 1988), pp. 263–302

**October 23: Phenomenological Hermeneutics**

**A) Practice**


**October 30: Hermeneutics**

**A) Theory**


ⅠFor background readings in phenomenology, see Edmund Husserl, *Ideas: General Introduction to Pure*


**Suggested Readings:**


**November 6: Hermeneutics**

**B) Practice**


**November 13: Deconstruction**

**A) Theory**


**November 20: Deconstruction**

**B) Practice**


**Suggested Readings**

i) Fred Dallmayr, “Hermeneutics and Deconstruction: Gadamer and Derrida in Dialogue.”


**November 27: Genealogy**

**A) Theory**


ii) Michel Foucault, “Truth and Power,” in *The Foucault Reader* (pp. 51-75)

iii) Michel Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,” in *The Foucault Reader* (pp. 76-100)

iv) Michel Foucault, “What Is an Author,” in *The Foucault Reader* (pp. 101-120)

v) Michel Foucault, “We ‘Other Victorians,’” in *The Foucault Reader* (pp. 292-300)

**December 4 (Syllabi due)**

**A) Practice**

i) Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* (pp. 3-31, 104-131, 135-169, 195-228)

ii) Richard Avramenko, “Of Homesteaders and Orangemen: An Archeology of Western Canadian Political Identity”

**December 11: Comparative Political Theory**

**A) Theory**


**Suggested Reading:**


B) Practice

Suggested Reading:

Other Approaches:
1. Vantagism
   Theory
   Practice

2. Analytical Political Theory

Theory
   i) Williams, Bernard. “Political Philosophy and the Analytical Tradition”

Practice
   i) John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*