University of Wisconsin-Madison

Methods of Political Theory
Political Science 839
Fall 2014

Instructor: R. Avramenko
Office: 201c North Hall
Office Hours: T 1:00 – 3:00
Course: PS839
Location: Education 345
Time: T 4:30 – 6:30

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 Foucualt), 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 2: No class – Avramenko in Kazakhstan
September 9: 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 16: 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 23: The Chicago School
B) Practice

September 30: The Cambridge School
A) Theory

Suggested Readings:

October 7: The Cambridge School

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

October 14: Phenomenological Hermeneutics

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”

October 21: Phenomenological Hermeneutics

A) Practice
ii) Martin Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology” in Basic Writings.

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October 28: Hermeneutics
A) Theory

Suggested Readings:

November 4: Hermeneutics
B) Practice

November 11: Deconstruction
A) Theory
November 18: Deconstruction

B) Practice


Suggested Readings

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


November 25: 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 2

A) Practice

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

December 9: Comparative Political Theory

A) Theory


Suggested Reading:


B) Practice

Suggested Reading:
ii) Anthony Parel and Ronald Keith, Comparative Political Philosophy: Studies Under the Upas Tree (Lexington Books, 2003)

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