

GVPT 743: "Contemporary Political Theory"  
Fall, 2009  
Dr. Glass

#### Course Description:

Government 743 is an introduction to contemporary social and political theory; it is an effort to understand and interpret major trends of theory and analysis in the past century. The theorists we look at are concerned with what are major theoretical and political concepts in the contemporary world, for example, power, violence, revolution, transformation, genocide, constitutionalism, democracy and civil society. These issues stand at the core of contemporary thinking about political and public life. But there is no overarching political theory; there is no 'paradigm' that can be considered unquestioned or that sets the standard for all social and political discourse. While liberalism and democracy are central to any analysis of contemporary political theory, there have been philosophical and moral approaches to the public world that discuss problems and contradictions in liberal theory. We will look at some of these critiques and the direction they take. The course then is intended to be comprehensive; it is meant as an introduction to contemporary approaches to thinking about interrelationships that link the political, social and psychological worlds. The course also examines the proposition that psychological ways of thinking about human experience lie at the core of political action, the meaning of political concepts and the development and origin of political moralities.

#### Reading List: All Books are Required

Nietzsche, Will to Power  
R.D. Laing. The Politics of Experience  
Freud, Civilization and Its Discontents  
Stern, Terror in the Name of God  
Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth  
Marcuse: An Essay on Liberation  
Robert Lifton, The Nazi Doctors  
Warren, Democracy and Association  
Browning. Ordinary Men  
Lear, Radical Hope  
Arendt, On Revolution  
Weber, the Sociology of Religion

#### Schedule of Readings;

1: Power: The Nietzschean Revolution

## Nietzsche, Will to Power

- Where does power come from?
- What does power fight?
- What is the future of power?
- the Nietzschean self

## 2. The Unconscious: Power Turned Inwards

### Freud, Civilization and Its Discontents

- the importance of the inner world
- the 'political' structure of conscience
- the place of aggression and destruction

## 3. "Reason": Its presence in the Mass Murdering Process

### Browning: Ordinary Men

- what kinds of actions are allowable? restraint
- the relation between passion, restraint and conscience
- human brackets on violence

## 4. The Nature of Action in the Public Space

### Arendt: On Revolution

- the power of hate
- the role of the other
- the power of the 'social'

## 5. Unreason and Reason: Madness and Disrupting Constitutions

### Laing: The Politics of Experience

- the role of unreason in the self
- how to judge or misjudge madness
- culture's fear of madness and the madman

## 6. Madness and Science: The Power of the Professions

### Robert Lifton, The Nazi Doctors

- the scientific legitimating of violence
- moral perspectives and their origin
- the power of phobia in political policy and perception

## 7. Belief, faith and Charisma: Their Roles in History and Renewal

Weber, The Sociology of Religion

- the concept of charisma, both psychological and political
- belief and faith and their impact on politics
- political movements and transformation

## 8. Purity and Political Transformation: New Selves Through Violence

F. Fanon: The Wretched of the Earth

- purity, morality and violence
- the politics of associating 'cleansing' the self and violence
- restoration of the collective self through violence
- terror, torture and group permutations of violence

## 9. Modern Images of Redeemed Selves: The Righteousness of Terror

J. Stern: Terror in the Name of God

- terror and religious consciousness
- the 'self' of the terrorist
- terror and reason

## 10. Democracy: Barriers Against Domination and Terror

Warren, Democracy and Association

- association and the protection of democracy
- the relation between social associations and political power
- civil society as bulwark against tyranny

## 11. Psychological Fears, Cultural Breakdown and Rebirth

Lear, Radical Hope

- ways civil society can be undermined

- the psychological power of culture and psyche
- adaptation versus rebellion

## 12. Art: New and Liberated Selves

Marcuse: An Essay on Liberation

- transcending civil society through art
- art as a form of democratic cleaning
- art and the transcendence of phobic powers in the self

Assignment: Students will be expected to attend seminar and write a term paper of 25 pages dealing with the course material; it will be due at the end of the semester.