

GVPT 241H
Spring 2010
Professor James Glass
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History of Political Theory: Introduction

SUB-THEME: Political Life and Political Theory: Transformation, Action and Violence

Description: This course looks at major themes in the history of political theory, particularly the relationship between the public and the private, and the impact of that relation on the self. We begin with Plato in the classical period; we then turn to modern political theorists such as Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau. We end the course with an introduction to themes in contemporary political theory, with specific reference to the impact of psychoanalysis, the role of genocide on political theorizing, and the approach to the public and the private. We will be concerned with the purposes of action, the impact of transformation on political structure, the impact of the self on public structures, and how concepts of self stand at the center of concepts of power. We will also look at how theories of human nature affect the development and elaboration of political concepts; and how the political theorist responds to disintegration, violence and political rebellion. All political theorists put forward a theory of self or human nature; it is that formulation, the conception of how self works, the role of desire, passion, and individuality, that has a great deal to do with what political concepts are intended to do, and how the political theorist links theories of politics and self to the structure and implementation of institutions, action, and ethics.

Required Texts:

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| Plato: | The Last Days of Socrates |
| Machiavelli: | The Prince |
| Hobbes: | Leviathan (selections) |
| Locke: | Two Treatises of Government (selections) |
| Rousseau: | The Social Contract and Discourses (selections) |
| Marx: | Early Writings |
| Mill, J.S. | On Liberty |

J. Kosinski: The Painted Bird

S. Freud: The Future of an Illusion

Schedule of Readings and Lectures

I. The Classical View: Plato

Reading: Apology

- nature of political life and action
- response of the individual, the gadfly
- nature of persecution
- role of authority

Crito

- role of the state in assuring citizenship
- responsibilities of the citizen
- responsibility of the rebel against authority

Republic (no reading assignment)

- the role of the philosopher and philosophy
- the danger of poetry and tragic poetry
- the importance of reason
- fear of the passions
- the role of the philosopher-king

II. Aristotle and the Rise of Politics and Constitutionalism

No reading assignment

- citizenship and participation
- the obligations of the citizen
- the importance of constitutions
- the disappearance of passion, greed, desire, as threats to the state

III. The Modern Period: Machiavelli and Action

Reading: Machiavelli, The Prince

- the replacement of soulcraft by statecraft

- the role of action and the Prince
- the meaning and significance of corruption
- the transcending of corruption
- violence and its place in political transformation

IV. Hobbes and Power: The Structure of Sovereignty

Reading: Leviathan (selections)

- modern concept of authority
- the fear of politics and passion
- the imposition of force
- the sovereign as perfect ruling reason
- the destabilizing effects of rebellion
- the power of political speech
- the use of geometry as political model

V. Locke and the Appearance of Theories of Citizenship and Property

Reading: Locke, Second Treatise on Government (selections)

- government as protector of property rights
- the purpose of society as the furthering of property interests
- the role of government and the critique of tyranny
- concept of labor and value
- the theory of possessive individualism
- the obligations and role of citizens

VI. Rousseau and the Critique of Property and Inequality

Reading: Discourse on the Origins of Inequality

- Rousseau's critique of the arts and sciences
- Platonic resonance
- attack on property and the division of labor
- the corrupting influences of interest
- Rousseau's theory of the state of nature and its relation to political rule
- inequality and its origins
- economic dynamics behind the origins of inequality
- destructive effects of the politics of inequality

VII. Rousseau and the Power of Community

Reading: The Social Contract (selections)

- the role of consent
- the concept of sovereignty
- the concept of general will
- community and its action
- the individual and the group
- the role of ideology in community

VIII. Marx: Revolution and Transformation

Reading: Marx, Early Writings (selections)

- the theory of revolutionary change
- new theories of labor and value
- the role of the proletariat, alienation
- the vision of a future society
- the interpretation of capitalism and production
- the function of money

IX: Mill: Individuality and Liberalism

Reading: On Liberty

- nature of individuality
- relation between individual and society
- power of public opinion
- conformity
- rights of society
- possessive individualism versus individuality⁸

X. Freud: The Status of Belief and Faith

Reading: S. Freud, The Future of an Illusion

- the nature of psychological experience
- the self and the forces of belief
- internal psyche and external political structure
- illusions and their function

XI: The Contemporary World: Genocide

Reading: J. Kosinski, The Painted Bird

- methods of mass destruction
- mass murder as a form of politics
- twentieth century legacies, mass murder, and technology
- the Holocaust and the annihilation of faith in politics
- individual, group, and state brutality as “normal” forms of politics

Requirements: Students will complete the readings before each discussion section. There will be two midterm, take-home, essays and a Final Examination. The midterms will count each 30% of your grade, and the Final, 40%. Discussion sections are mandatory; you may not miss more than two discussion sections. An explanation and a note must accompany any more absences. Discussion section participation can help your grade, if you are on the borderline between two grades. Students will be required to meet with their discussion leader at least once before each essay is due.