

GR8118: Interpretation and Criticism of Political Ideas

**Department of Political Science
Columbia University
Fall 2016**

Meets: Mondays, 6-8pm, International Affairs Building Room 501A.

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Office Hours: Mondays, 2-4 pm, or by appointment.

This is a graduate seminar designed to introduce students to the interpretive and critical problems raised by reading and writing about political thinkers who lived a long time ago or far, far away. The first part of the course will consider approaches to the history of political thought influenced by Karl Marx, Leo Strauss, Quentin Skinner, and Hannah Arendt, amongst others. Readings will include both major methodological statements and important examples of these different schools of thought. In the latter part of the course, we will shift focus to the rising subfield of comparative political theory, asking whether, and how, methods developed to analyze and learn from the history of political thought can be applied to the study of texts written outside western Europe and North America. Major questions for consideration in both parts of the course include: How do the intellectual and political contexts within which political thinkers live, think, and write influence the content of their ideas? What do we have to do in order to understand the ideas contained within a given piece of political thinking? Can, and should, we attempt to apply historical or non-western ideas to problems in contemporary western politics and political theory?

Assignments

All students taking the course, including auditors, will be asked to begin one or two seminar meetings with a brief presentation introducing readings and posing questions for discussion. Students taking the course for credit will also write a review essay (around 20 pages). The review essay should: identify a recent book, article, or small number of books and articles on any issue in the history of political thought or comparative political theory; describe the main argument or arguments of the work or works in question, paying particular attention to the author's method; and then criticize the work from an alternative methodological perspective, drawing from primary and secondary sources as appropriate.

Readings

Except where otherwise noted, all readings can be found on JSTOR or have been placed on reserve at Lehman Library.

Class Schedule:

Mon 9/12

- Hannah Arendt, “Conversation with Gunter Gaus” in *The Portable Hannah Arendt* (Penguin, 2000), 3-23. (will distribute pdf).
- Sheldon Wolin, “Political Theory as a Vocation”, *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 63, No. 4 (Dec., 1969), 1062-1082.
- Jeffrey Green, “Political Theory as Both Philosophy and History: A Defense Against Methodological Militancy” *Annual Review of Political Science*, vol. 18 (2015) 425–41.
- Patchen Markell, “Unexpected Paths: On Political Theory and History” *Theory and Event*, vol. 19, no. 1 (2016).

Mon 9/19

- Leo Strauss, “What is Political Philosophy?” in *What is Political Philosophy? And Other Studies* (Chicago 1988), 9-55.
- Leo Strauss, “Persecution and the Art of Writing” in *Social Research*, Vol. 8, No. 4 (Nov., 1941), 488-504.
- Leo Strauss, “On a Forgotten Kind of Writing”, in *What is Political Philosophy? And Other Studies*, 122-32.

Mon 9/26:

- Leo Strauss, *The City and Man* (Chicago, 1964), 1-138.

Mon 10/3

- Quentin Skinner, “Seeing things their Way”, “Interpretation, Rationality, and Truth”, “Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas”, in *Visions of Politics, Volume I: Regarding Method* (Cambridge, 2002), 1-7, 27-144.
- J.G.A. Pocock, “The State of the Art” in *Virtue, Commerce, and History* (Cambridge, 1985), 1-36. (will distribute pdf)

Mon 10/10

- Quentin Skinner, *Visions of Politics, Vol. II: Renaissance Virtues* (Cambridge 2002), 1-9, 118-212.
- Nathan Tarcov, “Quentin Skinner’s Method and Machiavelli’s *Prince*”, *Ethics*, vol. 92, no. 4 (July, 1982), 692-709.

Mon 10/17

- Karl Marx, “Preface to the *Contribution to a Critique of Political Economy*” and “The German Ideology, Part 1” in Robert Tucker, ed., *The Marx-Engels Reader* 2nd edition (New York, 1978), 3-6, 146-200.
- Louis Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes Toward an Investigation)” in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* Trans. Ben Brewster (New York, 1971), 127-86. (will distribute pdf)
- Richard Ashcraft, “Political Theory and the Problem of Ideology” *The Journal of Politics*, Vol. 42, No. 3 (August, 1980), 687-705.
- Ellen Meiksins Wood, *Citizens to Lords: A Social History of Political Thought From Antiquity to the Late Middle Ages* (London, 2008), 1-27. (will distribute pdf)

Mon 10/24

- C.B. Macpherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism* (Oxford 1964), 1-106, 194-271.

Mon 10/31

- Uday Singh Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire: A Study in Nineteenth-Century British Liberal Thought* (Chicago, 1999), entire.

Mon 11/7: No Class Meeting – Columbia University Holiday

Mon 11/14

- Friedrich Nietzsche, “On Truth and Lie in an Extra Moral Sense” in Walter Kaufman, ed., *The Portable Nietzsche* (New York, 1954), 42-7. (will distribute pdf).
- Michel Foucault, “Truth and Power” and “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History” in Paul Rabinow, ed., *The Foucault Reader* (New York, 1984), 51-75, 76-100. (will distribute pdf).
- William Connolly, *The Terms of Political Discourse* (Princeton, 1993), 1-44. (will distribute pdf).

Mon 11/21

- Susan Buck-Morss, *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History* (Pittsburgh, 2009), entire.

Mon 11/28

- Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (London, 1975), 267-379.
- Strauss-Gadamer Correspondence (will distribute pdf).

Mon 12/5

- Fred Dallmayr, “Beyond Monologue: For a Comparative Political Theory” *Perspectives on Politics*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (Jun., 2004), 249-257.
- Farah Godrej, “Towards a Cosmopolitan Political Thought: The Hermeneutics of Interpreting the Other” *Polity*, Vol. 41, No. 2 (Apr., 2009), 135-165.
- Roxanne L. Euben, “Comparative Political Theory: An Islamic Fundamentalist Critique of Rationalism” *The Journal of Politics*, Vol. 59, No. 1 (Feb., 1997), 28-55.
- Leigh Jenco, “Histories of Thought and Comparative Political Theory: The Curious Thesis of ‘Chinese Origins for Western Knowledge’, 1860–1895”, *Political Theory* vol. 42 no. 6 (2014), 658–681.
- Andrew March, “Is there a Paradox of Learning from the Other? Four Questions and a Proposal” *The Muslim World* (Forthcoming).

Mon 12/12

- Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London, 1983), 1-144.

Review Essays due by email to jds2266@columbia.edu on Wed 12/23 at 5pm.