Course Description

Political theory analyzes and interprets the foundations of political life and evaluates its principles, concepts and institutions. It is fundamentally concerned with the normative political relationships among human beings that revolve around the organization and basis of government. This course provides an introduction to Western political theory through key texts and thinkers that are reference points in the social science literature.

The focus will be on the Enlightenment tradition and the approach will be geared toward understanding how the seminal texts and thinkers of this period have shaped—and continue to shape—our understanding of political ideas and norms. This course will also have a pragmatic component, where the books and ideas under consideration will be applied to contemporary international debates and issues.

Please note that this course is geared toward students without a strong background in political theory. No previous knowledge is required or assumed. All that is needed is an open mind and willingness to work hard. Professor Nader Hashemi will be the course coordinator and guest lectures will be delivered by several Korbel faculty members. For more information about the study of political theory at the Josef Korbel School, go to: www.du.edu/korbel/politicaltheory/

Students are expected to come to class having done the course readings in advance.
Assessment and Evaluation

- class participation/attendance (20%)
- Paper #1 (30%)
- Paper #2 (30%)
- personal interview (TBA) (20%)

Expectations

Given that 20% of your final grade will be based on participation and attendance, you are required to attend each seminar meeting, actively participate in class discussions, and carefully read and reflect upon the assigned reading materials before each class. As a seminar, the success of this course depends on your active and informed participation.

Each student will write two papers appropriately 1500-2000 words in length (6-7 pages doubled spaced). The focus must be on one of the political theorists or themes discussed in class and the due date is two weeks after the seminar meeting in which the specific thinker in question/theme was first introduced. For example, if you want to write on Plato, your paper is due on January 28. Please note that if you choose to write on Foucault you will only have one week to submit your paper due to official ending of the Winter quarter.

The objective of these papers is to dig deeper into the ideas, concepts and arguments of the various thinkers we are examining in this course. Comparative and applied papers are most welcome. It is strongly advised that before you begin writing your paper you consult with the course coordinator. See the study questions at the end of this syllabus to help guide you through the weekly readings and classroom discussion.
Grading Scale

100% - 94%: A
93% - 90%: A-
89% - 87%: B+
86% - 83%: B
82% - 80%: B-
79% - 77%: C+
76% - 73%: C
72% - 70%: C-
69% - 67%: D+
66% - 63%: D
62% - 60%: D-
Course Schedule

Week 1 (January 7)  Introduction to Political Theory [Nader Hashemi]


Leo Strauss, “What is Political Philosophy?” *Journal of Politics* 19 (August 1957), 343-68.

Week 2 (January 14)  Plato [Alan Gilbert]


Martin Luther King Jr., “Letter from Birmingham Jail” (1963) [on canvass]

Week 3 (January 21)  Modern Politics & Realism/Machiavelli [Nader Hashemi]


Selected readings on canvass

Week 5 (February 4)  Liberalism/John Stuart Mill [Nader Hashemi]


Week 6 (February 11)  
Kant, Democratic Peace and R2P [Jack Donnelly]  
Selected readings on canvass

Week 7 (February 18)  
Conservatism/Burke [Jack Donnelly]  
Selected readings on canvass

Week 8 (February 25)  
The Dialectic of History: From Idealism to Materialism (Hegel and Marx) [Micheline Ishay]  
Selected readings on canvass

Week 9 (March 3)  
Marx and Marxism [George DeMartino]  
Selected readings on canvass

Week 10 (March 10)  
Foucault & Power [Thomas Nail]  
Selected readings on canvass

Student Academic Discipline

A note on avoidance of academic offenses: all students registered in the courses of the University of Denver are expected to know what constitutes an academic offense, to avoid committing academic offenses, and to take responsibility for their academic actions. If you need help in learning how to avoid offenses such as plagiarism, cheating, and double submission, or if you need clarification of aspects of the discipline policy, ask your course instructor for guidance. Other resources regarding the discipline policy are your academic advisor and the graduate Associate Dean.
Study Questions

Week 2 (January 14)

*Plato*

1. In the *Apology*, what law has Socrates disobeyed? Is it a just law?

2. What penalty will Socrates accept? Is he willing to stop asking questions? What effect will it have on Athens to impose death on its wise man?

3. Socrates is often taken, in the *Crito*, to oppose “the many”? But isn’t asking questions – dissent – vital to a healthy democracy, one which might sustain a common good? Why isn’t Socrates, and not the bare majority bullies, seen as defending democracy?

4. In the *Crito*, is the speech of the laws rhetorically effective? Is it philosophically—as argument—convincing?

5. The arguments of the laws are offered by Socrates to convince Crito, a wealthy friend, to let him go to his death. Crito now has things to say to those who will criticize him in Athens. But do these arguments convince Socrates? Which part of them and why?

6. Socrates claims to be convinced by the laws’ argument in the *Crito* (what silences Crito). But his allegiance to the democratic laws by going to his death in fact brings the laws of Athens into lasting disrepute (see the end of the *Apology*, where Plato, in retrospect, has Socrates name this fact). Despite convincing Crito, is Socrates, in fact, being ironic about his fealty to the laws? If not - and it seems not when he speaks of the voice of the laws as a droning murmur of the flutes overpowering, as with the followers of the Mystery religions, all other considerations?
Week 3 (January 21)

Modern Politics and Realism—Machiavelli

1. What does Machiavelli seem to see as the end or objective of political rule?

2. What does Machiavelli mean by *virtú* and *fortuna*? How are the two concepts related politically?

3. In Chapter 18 Machiavelli discusses the need for a prince to have two natures: a fox and a lion. Why does he say a prince needs both?

4. Machiavelli argues that a leader should be both loved and feared, but that if you have to pick one, pick fear. Why does he hold this position?

5. Does Machiavelli believe that the “ends justify the means”?

6. How much of *The Prince* is relevant to contemporary society in an age when monarchies/principalities are no longer the primary form of government?

Week 4 (January 28)


We have read a number of different accounts of the social contract and the state of nature. We can begin to sort them out by considering how each theorist answers the following questions:

1. What is the “historical” character of the state of nature?

2. What is the relationship between the state of nature and a state of war?

3. What form does the social contract take?

4. What can citizens legitimately do when the ruler violates the contract?
Week 5 (February 4)

John Stuart Mill and Liberalism

1. From Mill’s perspective, what burdens and limits can society justly impose upon the individual? What, for Mill, are the minimum requirements for free individuality? When can the state act paternally?

2. How does Mill deal with the objection that there are “private” acts which nonetheless injure others, such as when drinking leads to indebtedness, accidents, or crime? How does Mill help us think about the boundaries between the individual and collective realms, between the private and public spheres?

3. In On Liberty, Mill makes reference to “barbaric” people. In his other writings (in Considerations on Representative Government, for example), he defends imperialism and despotic rule over “inferior” peoples. How could Mill justify this stance, given his commitment to individual liberty? Does this juxtaposition point to a contradiction in the very fabric of Mill’s thought? Did he simply fail to live up to his own ideals—or are those ideals themselves tainted by such views?

4. How would you answer Michael Doyle’s provocative question “Would John Stuart Mill Intervene in Syria?” More broadly, what are the implications of Mill’s arguments about intervention and non-intervention (as Doyle summarizes them) for debates about the Responsibility to Protect vs. state sovereignty? Is there a moral responsibility to stop mass atrocities committed by sovereign states?

Week 6 (February 11)

Kant, Democratic Peace and R2P

1. What fundamental differences do you see between Kant’s individual moral theory and his political theory? Between his political theory and his international theory?

2. What is the relationship between the preliminary and definitive articles of Perpetual Peace? And how does the “guarantee” fit into the structure of his argument?

3. Why does Kant advocate a federation of republics rather than a world state?

4. Why does Kant restrict the third definitive article to a right to hospitality? Did that restriction make sense in the 18th and 19th centuries? Does it make sense
today?

5. What similarities and differences do you see between the contemporary idea of a responsibility to protect and each of Kant’s three definitive articles?

Week 7 (February 18)

Conservatism—Burke

1. Burke is often presented as both a “liberal” and as a “conservative.” In what senses of those terms are each of those descriptions plausible? In what senses are they problematic or indefensible?

2. How does Burke understand “human nature”? Compare that with the theorists we have considered earlier in the quarter.

3. How does Burke understand “society” and “government”? Compare that with the theorists we have considered earlier in the quarter.

4. How does Burke understand and evaluate “hierarchy” and “equality”? Compare that with the theorists we have considered earlier in the quarter.

5. Burke was a supporter of the American Revolution, a strong critic of the French Revolution, and an equally strong critic of British misrule in India. How do these evaluations flow from his broad political theory? (Your answers to the preceding three questions should take you a long way to an answer to this question.)

Week 8 (February 25)

The Dialectic of History: From Idealism to Materialism

Questions regarding Hegel:

1. “History in general is therefore the development of Spirit in Time, as Nature is the development of the Idea in Space.” Explain what Hegel meant.

2. Why is History (or Hegel’s notion of the Idea) “in war with itself?” What does Hegel mean by “dialectic”?
3. Toward what end is history ultimately progressing? And why?

4. How does history manifest itself in the state? Which state does Hegel have in mind?

Questions regarding Marx:

1. What is the difference between an idealistic and materialist approach to society and history? (Consider the points presented by Feuerbach as well.)

2. What are the driving forces of a materialist approach to history? How does Marx differ from Hegel?

3. What are the main forms of ownership in different historical phases?

4. What are the social and economic contradictions that lead to revolutions?

Week 9 (March 3)

Marx and Marxism

1. Neoclassical economic theory treats “labor” strictly as a disutility for which an agent must be compensated so as to forego leisure. In this framework, leisure is a good, one that will be given up by the rational actor only in exchange for income/money that will allow the agent to purchase other goods. Moreover, the agent is in no way affected by the nature of the labor s/he performs.

   Marx presents a very different conception of labor. What are the chief attributes of Marx’s conception of labor in the abstract, and human labor? And how does this conception relate to the concepts of freedom, alienation, and human and social progress?

2. A central, contested analytical concept in Marx (and the Marxian tradition) is the dialectic. It appears in his treatment of history, but also in his accounts of ontology, human nature, identity, and epistemology. What is the dialectic, what role does it play in Marxian theory, and what’s at stake in this conception?

3. Another contested concept in the Marxian tradition is Marx’s notion of human nature. What view, if any, does Marx embrace? And how does this relate to his
notion of human species being, and alienation?

4. What is Marx’s notion of “freedom,” and how does this bear on his conception of capitalism?

5. And while we’re at it, what is “capitalism,” and what are its chief attributes? How can Marx conclude that it is both progressive and exploitative? Much to discuss here, including Marx’s notion of surplus (and its many forms), modes of production, exploitation, the forces and relations of production, etc.

Week 10 (March 10)

Foucault & Political Power

1. What is the nature of political power? Is it simply repressive or does it also require and produce positive effects as well?

2. What is the normative status of political theory? i.e. does it have a normative, descriptive, or tactical role in political action?