

University of California, Berkeley
Political Science 191
Fall 2016
Tu 2-5, 791 Barrows Hall

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JUNIOR SEMINAR: FOUNDATIONS OF POLITICAL THOUGHT AND ACTION

This course is a junior seminar in comparative politics. It is intended for outstanding students who intend to pursue graduate school in political science or another of the social sciences. The course is designed, and will be conducted, like a graduate seminar.

The course aims to provide students with a rigorous introduction to core topics in social theory. The course centers on four major themes: power, equality, freedom, and community. The syllabus is divided into sections that focus on each of these themes, respectively.

Our class sessions will focus on discussions of course readings. Students are required to do all of the readings for the week in advance of class meetings and to participate actively in discussions. Students who anticipate that they will not be able carefully to do all the reading in advance of each seminar, who have other commitments that may prevent them from dedicating themselves fully to the course, or who will not be able to attend all seminar meetings should not enroll in this course.

Use in class of any electronic or internet devices, including laptops and cellphones, is strictly forbidden.

Grades will be determined as follows: one-half for the quality and quantity of contributions to seminar discussions; and one-half for a research paper that will be due at the time of our final class meeting. The paper will take the form of a comparative inquiry into several of the major theorists or themes we are covering in the course.

Students will begin developing plans for their research papers during the first several weeks of the course, and will present their work to the seminar at times that we will set aside for discussion of research-in-progress. Students will provide feedback to one another and receive advice from the course instructor on their papers.

Course readings are in the assigned books and the course reader. The reader is available at University Copy Service, 2425 Channing Way. Our books for the course are:

Franz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Constance Farrington. Grove Press, 1994.

Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Sabbath*. Farrar Straus Giroux, 2005.

The Koran, trans. N. J. Dawood. Penguin, 2004.

T. H. Marshall and Tom Bottomore, *Citizenship and Social Class*. Pluto, 1992.

Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. Walter Kaufmann. Vintage, 1989.

Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. Simon and Schuster, 2001.

Bertrand Russell, *Power: A New Social Analysis*, 2nd ed. Routledge, 2004.

Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. Dover, 1996.

Syllabus

Week 1 (Aug 30): Introduction to the Course

(no reading)

PART I: POWER

Week 2 (Sept 6): Thinking about Power

Bertrand Russell, *Power* [1938] (entire)

Week 3 (Sept 13): Power as Domination

Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil* [1886] (entire)

PART II: EQUALITY

Week 4 (Sept 20): Foundational Justifications for Equality

The Bible: Isaiah, chs. 56-58; Amos (entire); Matthew, chs. 5-7; I Corinthians chs. 7-11; James (entire).

Søren Kierkegaard, “Neighbor Love,” in Søren Kierkegaard, *Provocations: Spiritual Writings of Kierkegaard* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2007), pp. 97-101.

The Koran: suras 4 (“Women”), 16 (“The Bee”), 24 (“Light”), 30 (“The Greeks”), 31 (“Luqmān”), 39 (“The Throngs”), 40 (“The Believer”), 49 (“The Chambers”), 53 (“The Star”), 54 (“The Moon”), 57 (“Iron”), 58 (“She Who Pleaded”), 63 (“The Hypocrites”), 81 (“The Cessation”), 82 (“The Cataclysm”), 89 (“The Dawn”), 90 (“The City”), 98 (“The Proof”), and 102 (“Worldly Gain”).

“Buddha-Nature”; and “Practical Guide to True Way of Living: The Life of Women,” in *The Teaching of Buddha* (Tokyo: Kosaido, 2000), pp. 65-80, 222-29.

Week 5 (Sept 27): Class

Karl Marx, excerpts from *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* [1844]; Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, “Manifesto of the Communist Party” [1848]; and Karl Marx, “On Imperialism in India” [1853], in Robert C. Tucker, ed., *The Marx-Engels Reader* (New York: Norton, 1978), pp. 70-81, 469-500, 659-64.

Marshall and Bottomore, *Citizenship and Social Class* (Marshall only)

Week 6 (Oct 4): Gender

Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* [1792] (entire)

Week 7 (Oct 11): Race and Nation

Franz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* [1952] (entire)

PART III: FREEDOM

Week 8 (Oct 18): Freedom as Individual Autonomy

Ralph Waldo Emerson, “The American Scholar” [1837]; “Self-Reliance” [1841]; and “The Oversoul” [1841], in *Ralph Waldo Emerson: Essays and Lectures* (New York: The Library of America, 1983), pp. 53-71, 259-82, 385-400.

Week 9 (Oct 25): Freedom as Absence of State-Imposed Constraint

Herbert Spencer, *Man versus the State* [1884], in Herbert Spencer, *Political Writings*, ed. John Offer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 63-105, 140-69.

Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Politics” [1844], in *Ralph Waldo Emerson: Essays and Lectures* (New York: The Library of America, 1983), pp. 559-71.

Week 10 (Nov 1): Freedom as Rights

Benjamin Constant, excerpts from “Principles of Politics Applicable to All Representative Governments” [1815], in Benjamin Constant, *Political Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 171-213, 227-305.

Isaiah Berlin, “Two Concepts of Liberty” [1958], in Isaiah Berlin, *Four Essays on Liberty* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 118-72.

Week 11 (Nov 8): Freedom as Inner Integrity

The Bible: the book of Galatians (entire)

The Koran: suras 11 (“Hūd”), 12 (“Joseph”), 25 (“Al-Furqān”), 42 (“Counsel”), and 70 (“The Ladders”).

“Causation”; “The Theory of Mind-Only and the Real State of Things”; and “The Practical Way of Attainment: Sacred Sayings,” in *The Teaching of Buddha* (Tokyo: Kosaido, 2000), pp. 38-64, 184-92.

“The Yoga of Renunciation”; “Divine Traits and Demonic Traits”; and “Freedom through Renunciation,” in *Bhagavad Gita*, Stephen Mitchell, trans. (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2000), pp. 81-87, 169-74, 182-98.

Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason* [1788] (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Macmillan, 1993), pp. 28-30, 75-92, 120-38, 149-68.

PART IV: COMMUNITY

Week 12 (Nov 15): The Community and the Individual

Emile Durkheim, *Suicide* [1897], pp. 35-39, 152-70, 208-16, 241-58, 297-325, 361-92.

Week 13 (Nov 22): The Crisis of Community in Contemporary Society

Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, chs. 1, 2, 3, 9, 10, 15, 16, 17, 20, 21, 23, 24

Week 14 (Nov 29): Community as Lived Experience

Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Sabbath* [1951] (entire)

For discussion week 2

How does Russell define and conceptualize power?

How would you characterize Russell's microfoundations (that is, his assumptions about human nature)? How do his assumptions differ from those of other theorists of power with whom you might be familiar, such as Hobbes, Machiavelli, Nietzsche, Carl Schmitt, or Foucault?

What do you think motivated Russell to write his treatise on power?

Consider Russell's classificatory scheme of types of power (priestly, kingly, naked, and so on). How can they help us think about the nature and exercise of power?

How would you characterize Russell's view of how Christianity shaped thinking on and the exercise of power?

Russell asserts: "Military and economic power have become scarcely distinguishable." Was that statement true at the time Russell penned it in the late 1930s? Is it true today?

Russell perceives a particular genius in the U.S. Constitution, but what he sees differs from what most other writers have extolled. What is it?

How does Russell theorize the Soviet regime?

Would you characterize Russell as an optimist or a pessimist on the prospects for democracy?

What does Russell mean by "power philosophies"? Why do you think he uses this particular nomenclature?

For discussion week 3

What assumptions about human nature underlie Nietzsche's philosophy?

How does Nietzsche conceive of power, and how does his conception differ from Russell's? Why and how is he enamored with power?

How does Nietzsche view the progression of history? How does he conceive of historical progress/regression?

What is Nietzsche's position on the freedom of the human will?

For Nietzsche, what is noble? What is heroic?

Nietzsche was a philosopher and, arguably, a psychologist, not a political scientist. But his thinking obviously has a hard political edge, and it has clear implications for the practice of politics. What kind of politics and regimes does Nietzsche advocate and why? What poses the greatest threat to the emergence and/or maintenance of the kind of political order that Nietzsche advocates? Do you see Nietzschean thinking in contemporary, real-world politics?

Many authors besides Nietzsche also placed power at the center of their theories and have been drawn to the study of it. Niccolò Machiavelli, Joseph de Maistre, and Carl Schmitt, among many others, also regarded power as the central subject of social life and as an object worthy of glorification as well as study. Consider how theorists and enthusiasts of power whose work you know have theorized power and pursued their passion for it, and compare these thinkers with Nietzsche.

For discussion week 4

What do you see as the fundamental justification(s) for equality conveyed by the texts? As you do the readings, try to assemble a list of the ways in which the texts justify (or insist upon or imply) equality among human beings.

What types of inequality, if any, do the scriptures we're examining condemn? How will/should these inequalities be redressed, and by whom?

Do you see justifications for *inequality* embedded in the letter or the spirit of the texts? If so, for what types of inequality, and how are such inequalities (explicitly or implicitly) defended?

Do you detect essential differences among Christian, Islamic, and Buddhist approaches to equality?

Is justification for the claim of full equality possible without a concept of natural law, which normally presupposes a transcendent Lawgiver and Judge? In other words, is acceptance of God's existence necessary for a normative justification of equality? If so, why? If not, on what nontheological foundations may justification for equality be constructed?

For discussion week 5

What are Marx's microfoundations (that is, his assumptions about human nature)?

To what does Marx attribute the march of world history? What are the stages it passes through, and how does Marx characterize each of these stages?

Marx sees the degradation of the proletariat in broader terms than its mere poverty. In addition to material deprivation, what does Marx see the worker as robbed of by capitalism?

What does Marx regard as the appropriate remedy for what he regards as the great injustice of his time (and all times)?

Does Marx see any trade-offs between equality and other valued ends, such as efficiency or freedom?

What places, if any, do ideologies, ideas, and principles have in Marx's theory?

We are focusing this week on equality, but notions of freedom and community also figure prominently in Marx's works. How does Marx conceive of freedom? of community?

To what would you attribute the enormous appeal and influence of Marx's ideas in the 20th and 21st centuries?

How does Marshall revise/update/depart from Marx?

For discussion week 6

What is Wollstonecraft's main aim, and how does she propose to realize it?

With which variants of contemporary feminism does Wollstonecraft's theory most closely resonate? Do any of her main ideas stand at odds with some of the guiding notions of modern feminism? If so, which ones, and how do they differ?

How dependent is Wollstonecraft's plea for gender equality on natural rights conferred by God? How does she use theological assertions to advance her argument?

Wollstonecraft's analysis of inequality is not limited to gender inequality. She also addresses—and attacks—socioeconomic inequality as well. How is her critique of inequity between the sexes linked to her critique of class relations?

What is Wollstonecraft's notion of modesty? Why does she place great emphasis on this virtue, and how does it fit into her overarching theory of female subordination and liberation?

What is Wollstonecraft's view on the relationship between the advancement of females and the advancement of humanity in general? Does she see the advancement of the sexes mainly in terms of interdependence of the sexes or of female independence?

What does Wollstonecraft see as the greatest obstacle(s) to the liberation of women and girls?

For discussion week 7

What forces does Fanon identify as the greatest enemies of and obstacles to human equality?

Does Fanon see the struggle for equality mainly in racial terms? Does he regard blackness/whiteness as essential human categories and the sources of specific values? Or is he a universalist who rejects race as an essential category?

Fanon's status as a spokesman for the colonized and oppressed, as well as his harsh critique of capitalism, in some senses placed his work in a Marxist tradition. On the other hand, one may identify aspects of his worldview that do not necessarily fit well within classical Marxism. What similarities and differences can you identify in Marx's and Fanon's writings?

Fanon's book is hardly a standard work of social science. Fanon self-consciously abandons all methodological pretensions ("I leave methods to the botanists and the mathematicians" [p. 12]). Fanon is a psychiatrist who relies on poetry, psychoanalysis, philosophy, and autobiography, and yet his book is normally classified as a work of political science (and indeed we are reading it in a political science course). Setting aside some of the obviously dated (and perhaps discredited) Freudian tenets that Fanon adduces at several junctures, how effectively does Fanon's unorthodox and eclectic approach work for conveying his argument? Do you find his approach useful and his arguments compelling? How would you compare his method with that of a typical work in contemporary political science?

In Fanon's vision, what does a better world look like? How does humanity get there? How much progress has the world made in terms of racial equality in the five-and-a-half decades since Fanon's book appeared?

For discussion week 8

What are Emerson's central assumptions about human nature?

What is Emerson's conception of freedom? In Emerson's view, what does the truly free man look like?

According to Emerson, what is man's highest purpose?

What unites Emerson and Nietzsche? Where do they diverge?

Does Emerson posit a "power philosophy" in the sense that Russell uses the term? If not, why would you say he does not? If so, how would you characterize it in relation to other power philosophies (including some mentioned by Russell)?

How does Emerson conceive of God? Is God central to Emerson's philosophy?

For discussion week 9

How does Spencer conceive of human nature? How does his view differ from that of some other writers we have read in the course, as well as from that of some of the authors Spencer criticizes, such as Hobbes?

Both Spencer and Emerson are critics of an intrusive state. Both regard state involvement in the lives of individuals as rife with the potential for abuse, and both reject the notion of state paternalism. How would you characterize their critiques? Do you see differences in the bases of their critiques and in the thrust of their overall justifications for a minimal state?

Spencer and Nietzsche both despise policies and political systems that are oriented toward relieving the suffering of the poor. Yet one could argue that the two authors' justifications and reasons for their stances on this issue vary considerably. How would you characterize the differences (as well as similarities, if you detect any) in the motivations that underlie Spencer's and Nietzsche's condemnation of the cult of social amelioration?

How are the normative commitments that Spencer and Emerson defend expressed in contemporary political science, political theory, and politics? Do you think that either or both of these theorists' ideas can enrich contemporary libertarian theories?

For discussion week 10

How would you characterize Constant's and Berlin's views of human nature? How, if at all, do these two authors differ in their views?

How does Constant conceive of liberty? What, according to Constant, are liberty's most important aspects?

According to Constant, what is the essential difference between ancient and modern concepts of liberty? Why do moderns hold a different concept of—and treasure a different type of—liberty than the ancients did? Does the disparity in the type of liberty that the ancients and moderns treasure stem from a difference in values, circumstances, opportunities, and/or some other factor(s)? Why did liberty in the ancient world require the individual to sacrifice personal privacy and autonomy?

Constant believed that certain institutional and situational factors help promote liberty. How well have his ideas on this matter held up over the two centuries that have passed since Constant penned his treatise?

Consider Berlin's discussion of negative and positive liberty. Do you regard his distinction as useful in theoretical and practical terms? Why does Berlin favor negative over positive liberty? Do you find his argument in favor of negative as opposed to positive liberty compelling? Why or why not?

For discussion week 11

[NOTE: When reading Kant, don't get hung up on things like theoretical reason, apodictic certainty, or other such matters that might seem quite opaque. Read carefully, think hard, and dig out the big ideas without getting bogged down in what can be daunting language. Also, bear in mind that Kant often makes normative injunctions sound like statements of necessity. Thus, when he says "it can/cannot" he really means "it should/should not." Finally, remember that when Kant refers to "the moral law," he is not taking about any written law *per se*; for him, the "moral law" is something located in our conscience; it is not a "law" that is codified in a formal-legal system.]

How do the sacred texts intersect and differ in their concept of freedom? What is freedom to Paul (the author of Galatians), to the God of the Qur'an, to the Buddha, and to the author of the *Bhagavad Gita*?

Consider what the passages of the four sacred texts convey about the notions of freedom and free will. Consider also how notions of duty and freedom are related in the Bible, the Qur'an, the teaching of Buddha, and the *Bhagavad Gita*.

For Kant, how does morality/moral law lead to the concept of freedom?

Does Kant regard the moral law as something that is naturally present in our conscience or something that is generated outside us and subsequently internalized?

What is the basis for Kant's argument that human beings are free agents, endowed with free will?

Kant characterizes freedom as unhindered commitment in practice to the moral law. What is the logic of his argument? What role does the human conscience play in Kant's reasoning?

Why does Kant extol duty above all other motivations and argue that only action motivated by a sense of duty is morally sound and praiseworthy?

What is the difference, according to Kant, between intellectual contentment and sensuous contentment? Why is the difference important?

What is the role of religious faith in securing the moral law and facilitating individuals' freedom? In Kant's thought, is God a dispensable or indispensable element in the formation and operation of the moral law?

For discussion week 12

What is the basis of Durkheim's criticism of analyses that focus on the individual and treat groups as mere aggregations of individuals?

What, according to Durkheim, is the relationship among social cohesion, educational attainment, and suicide?

How, specifically, according to Durkheim, does the intimacy of community affect the rate of suicide?

How does Durkheim conceive of the link between personal well-being and personal wants? How does Durkheim's take on this issue differ from/resemble that of other authors we have read who have touched upon this matter?

What does Durkheim propose as a practical remedy for ameliorating the pathologies he unearths? Do you find his prescriptions convincing?

For discussion week 13

What does Putnam mean by social capital? How does he measure it?

To what does Putnam attribute what he sees as the decline in social capital in the United States? Do you find his causal argument plausible and convincing? If so, why? If not, why not, and what alternative arguments would you offer?

What's so great about social capital? What, according to Putnam, are its benefits? Do you concur?

According to Putnam, the deterioration of community in the United States is not irreversible. Indeed, Putnam holds that there are historical precedents for both decline and revival of social solidarity in America. Do you share Putnam's optimism about the possibilities for a new Progressive Era in the United States? Why or why not?

How do you assess Putnam's "agenda for social capitalists"? Do you regard his agenda as complete, or would you add some items to it? What could you contribute, both now and after graduation, to rebuilding community in the United States?

For discussion week 14

Heschel draws a sharp distinction between space and time, and exalts the latter while stating that we tend erroneously to favor the former. What does Heschel mean? What are the implications of his ideas on this matter for our lives?

According to Heschel, the Sabbath rightly observed involves, indeed requires, community. How and why?

How does Heschel conceive of freedom?

Heschel offers us a look at how a particular community (Jews) experiences a particular sacred thing (the Sabbath); so too does Heschel tell us of the independence of that community from any particular place. Heschel further sketches a picture of communion between God and man. What can we take away from Heschel's book about the nature of community? How does Heschel's notion of community embrace—and, alternatively, reject—the values of the ordinary world?