

POLITICAL THEORY

DOBLE GRADO ADMINISTRACIÓN DE EMPRESAS Y RELACIONES INTERNACIONALES / DUAL BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Professor: **TIMOTHY SYME**

E-mail: tsyme@faculty.ie.edu

Academic year: 17-18

Degree course: FIRST

Semester: 1º

Category: BASIC

Number of credits: 6.0

Language: English

PREREQUISITES

There are no prerequisites for this class.

SUBJECT DESCRIPTION

This course is designed to introduce students to the central authors and ideas of western political theory throughout history by means of a close reading of a selection of key texts. The course is structured around ideas which have shaped the political reality of the West from Antiquity to the present day, attending to both their historical context and general evaluative relevance. Within each unit the analysis will be broadly chronological, thereby highlighting the particular circumstances in which these ideas were conceived and their evolution over time.

The course provides students with the necessary theoretical basis for a critical understanding of contemporary political structures and movements as well as an authoritative outlook on the emergence and evolution of political thought.

Students will develop the ability to read, understand, digest and debate the ideas covered in the course. This will ultimately allow them to fully understand the complex origins of current political systems, debates and conflicts.

OBJECTIVES AND SKILLS

Objectives

1. Providing students with basic concepts central to political theory and become acquainted with foundational texts of political thought.
2. Placing ideas and ideologies in their historical context.
3. Articulating and observing how ideas evolve and develop over time.

Skills

1. Use of and sensitivity towards primary texts.
2. The analysis and critical assessment of arguments and theories.
3. Developing an understanding of historical perspective.

4. The ability to formulate and express a persuasive argument or position in written work.
5. The ability to intervene effectively in discussion.

METHODOLOGY

Each Seminar will focus on one particular idea of Political Theory by studying specific authors and examples from history. For each Seminar one or several readings will have to be made in order to follow the contents of the sessions and participate in ensuing discussions. All theoretical readings are provided in advance. It is important that readings are made for each session, since a large part of each class is devoted to the joint analysis and debate of what has been previously read. Continuous evaluation is of an essence and, in order to ensure that, reading quizzes and theoretical papers, together with active participation in in-class discussions and debates, are the most important part of your course evaluation. While this is eminently a theoretical subject, and most of your work is done on your own in reading compulsory texts ahead of each of the seminars, it is in the lively discussions in class with your teacher other peers when you are going to have the opportunity of making the most of your previous work. That is why doing the readings ahead of each seminar is the most important part in order successfully learn and understand all the different ideas.

Teaching methodology	Weighting	Estimated time a student should dedicate to prepare for and participate in
Lectures	33.34 %	50 hours
Discussions	6.67 %	10 hours
Exercises	20.0 %	30 hours
Group work	0.0 %	0 hours
Other individual studying	40.0 %	60 hours
TOTAL	100.0 %	150 hours

PROGRAM

SESSIONS 1 - 2

Intro:

Plato

- Plato, ~400BC, 'Crito'
- Leo Strauss, 1957, 'What is political philosophy?'
- Sandel, 2008, Ch1. 'Doing the right thing'

What is political theory? What are its objectives and is its role in our understanding of social life? This seminar introduces these questions by examining a classic example of political theorising, Plato's 'Crito', in which Socrates explains his loyalty to the laws of Athens and justifies his refusal to escape the death penalty they have unjustly imposed upon him. We also consider Leo Strauss' defence of the necessity of political theory and the limits of narrowly empirical and historical ways of knowing about social life. He contends that abstract argument about what makes societies good or bad is essential to any attempt to understand, evaluate and improve them. Finally, Michael Sandel illustrates the practical implications of disagreement in political philosophy, for example with respect to the Wall Street bailout. He also surveys rival theories of justice and offers another account of the methods and role of political theory and philosophy. Together, these pieces convey the method and varied subject matter of political philosophy and the immense practical significance of ideas such as authority, virtue and freedom.

B.C.: Crito(Printed)

R.A.: What is political philosophy?(Printed)

B.C.: Ch.1 Doing the right thing(Printed)

SESSIONS 3 - 4

Monarchy and Powe

- John of Salisbury, 1159, Policraticus, Books IV, V & VI (excerpts)
- Machiavelli, 1532, The Prince (excerpts)

Virtually all European societies were long dominated by absolute monarchs who claimed a divine right to rule. John of Salisbury offers an important articulation and defence of this, now rare, way of justifying political authority in medieval Christian society. If Salisbury provides the idealised, rhetorical justification for monarchic power, Machiavelli offers a much more realistic account of how power is actually acquired and maintained, not just by monarchs but by virtually anyone, namely by cunning and selective immorality rather than by virtue and the will of a supreme being. His famous discussion of the skills needed by a successful Prince apply just as much in contemporary societies as to 15th-century Italy and mark an important break with Aristotle and with medieval political thought more generally.

B.C.: Policraticus (excerpts)

B.C.: The Prince (excerpts)

SESSIONS 5 - 6

Nature, virtue and the purpose of society:

- Aristotle, 350BC, Politics, I.i, I.ii, III.i, III.v, III.vi, III.vii, III.viii. III.ix,
- Sandel 2009,, ch. 8.

This seminar focuses on Aristotle's political philosophy, which dominated western thought for over a thousand years. Aristotelianism focuses on the idea of society as a natural phenomenon whose inherent, essential purpose is the promotion of virtue and human flourishing. Variations in ability and virtue create a natural hierarchy among people which should, ideally, be reflected in social hierarchies so that only the best people rule. We also read another chapter by Sandel in which he elucidates Aristotle's ideas and their modern relevance. Sandel discusses a number of cases, such as the justification of affirmative action in university admissions, in which students from traditionally marginalised groups are given preferential treatment.

B.C.: The Politics (selected chapters)(Printed)

B.C.: Ch. 8. Who deserves what?

SESSIONS 7 - 8

Rights:

- J. J. Rousseau, Discourse on Inequality (excerpts)
- Mary Wollstonecraft, Vindication of the Rights of Women, Intro + Chs. 1 and 2.

Probably the main characteristic of modernity is the idea of universal, inalienable rights. This marks a definitive break with the medieval vision of the divine rights of kings. Disagreements about the scope and extension of these rights have dominated political debates of the modern era. This seminar considers two influential early-modern discussions of modernity and of rights. Rousseau's Discourse presents a critical analysis of the development of modern human society and discusses the emergence of demands for rights in relation to concerns about social status and inequality. Mary Wollstonecraft resists Rousseau's critique of rationality in order to argue that women are capable of reason and ought to enjoy the same rights as men.

B.C.: Discourse on Inequality (excerpt)(Printed)

B.C.: Vindication of the rights of women (selected chapters)(Printed)

SESSIONS 9 - 10

Social contract (1):

- Thomas Hobbes, Leviathan, Part 1, Chs. 14 and 15, Part II, Chs. 17-19, 21.
- John Locke, Second Treatise of Government, Ch. 7-13.

Hobbes' Leviathan, written after the English Revolution, proposed for the first time a social contract that jettisoned the divine right of monarchs but still defended absolutism. He articulates for the first time the modern theory of the sovereign state. The apparently contradictory combination of absolutism and natural rights is grounded in Hobbes' account of political authority in terms of a common need for security rather than virtue or divinity. Locke also rejects traditional sources of authority but argues instead that people create governments to complement their shared, but fallible, capacity to understand and apply the moral laws embedded in nature. We will analyse the revolutionary contribution of the former as well as the long-lasting impact of the latter.

B.C.: Leviathan (selected chapters)(Printed)

B.C.: Second Treatise of Government(Printed)

SESSIONS 11 - 12

Social contract (2):

- J.J. Rousseau, The Social Contract, Book I, Ch. 1-9; Book II, ch. 4-6; , book 3,
- John Rawls, 'Justice as Fairness', 1958.
- Sandel, ch 6, 'The case for equality'

The social contract was also the foundation for more radical, morally ambitious visions of society. The French Revolution opened the door to forms of government grounded in ideals of collective freedom, as expounded in Rousseau's theory of the social contract. This kind of moral contract also provides the foundation for Rawls' influential theory of liberal egalitarian justice as fairness.

B.C.: The Social Contract (selected chapters)

R.A.: Justice as Fairness

SESSIONS 13 - 14

Democracy:

- Plato, Republic, Bk. VIII 555b - 566d.
- Rousseau, Social Contract, Book 2, Ch. 1-3, book 3 ch 12-18
- Dahl, Robert A., 'What Political Institutions Does Large-Scale Democracy Require?', 2005, Political Science Quarterly 120:2, pp. 187-197.

Although we tend to consider democracy as the most common political system nowadays, this has not always been the case. Born in Athens in the fifth century BCE, it largely disappeared from Western history until the early modern era, when it took a very different institutional form. This week, we will read Plato's foundational critique of democracy, Rousseau's radical account of democracy as direct popular sovereignty and, finally, Robert Dahl's analysis of modern democracy as a fair and transparent struggle for popular consent to exercise governing power.

B.C.: Plato's critique of democracy - Book. 8, paragraphs 555b - 566d(Printed)

B.C.: Social Contract, Book 2, Ch. 1-3, book 3 ch 12-18(Printed)

R.A.: What political institutions are required by large-scale democracy?(Printed)

SESSIONS 15 - 16

MIDTERM

SESSIONS 17 - 18

Revolution

- Sieyès, 1789, 'What is the Third Estate?'
- Leon Trotsky, 1930, History of the Russian Revolution, Preface and ch 3, 'The proletariat and the peasantry'.
- Thomas Jefferson, 1776, et. al., The Declaration of Independence. (short)
- Emma Goldman, 1909 'A new declaration of independence', (short)

Sometimes, social change is neither peaceful nor slow. When social conflicts over the fundamental aims and organisation of society cannot be regulated by current practices and political institutions, violent conflict is likely and sudden, drastic social and political change is possible. Revolutions involve clashes of ideas and of brute power. This seminar explores the two key revolutionary moments and movements of the modern era: liberal and socialist. Sieyès famous pamphlet lays out a powerful challenge to monarchical absolutism and feudalism in the name of the rights, interests and power of the France's 'third estate', the common people. Trotsky's history explains the specific conditions in early 20th century Russia that facilitated the rise of the Bolsheviks and the revolutionary political alliance between the small industrial labour force the much larger Russian peasantry. We also read two very short, very different declarations of independence by American statesman Thomas Jefferson and anarchist Emma Goldman.

B.C.: What is the third estate?(Printed)

B.C.: History of the Russian Revolution (excerpts)(Printed)

Other: Declaration of Independence(Printed)

Other: A new declaration of independence(Printed)

SESSIONS 19 - 20

Conservatism:

- E. Burke, Reflections on the Revolution in France
- Leo Strauss, Natural Right and History

In the immediate aftermath of the French Revolution, critics challenged the attempt to build a political system based on liberty, equality and fraternity. They argued that experience, tradition and history were a much more reliable source of wisdom. Edmund Burke denied that the state should have a role in promoting good, and preferred to rely on the State only to prevent evil. In the 20th century, Strauss defends the need for philosophy and a commitment to universal ethical truths as a defence against the nihilistic relativism he diagnoses in modern ideals of ethical pluralism and individual choice.

B.C.: Reflections on the Revolution in France (excerpts)(Printed)

B.C.: What is the origin of natural right?

SESSIONS 21 - 22

Liberalism:

- Mill, 1859, On Liberty, Introduction
- Hayek, 1944, Road to Serfdom (summary)
- Sandel, 2009 Ch. 4, 'Hired Help: Markets and morals'

From the foundational texts of John Locke (seen in Seminar 3) up to the agendas of modern political parties, liberalism focuses on the importance of individuals: their interests, rights, welfare and freedom. This seminar considers two classic interpretations of this central liberal concern. John Stuart Mill expounds a moderate, utilitarian liberalism, in which protecting individual freedom is claimed to be the best way of maximising well-being overall and to be the key to a rational, progressive life for individuals and societies. Hayek offers a more radical vision of a society with minimal state-interference in individual's private economic decisions. He argues that excessive management of the economy by the state inevitably leads to totalitarianism. The chapter by Sandel explores these liberal arguments for economic freedom in the context of two case studies: volunteer armies and surrogate pregnancy.

B.C.: On Liberty (excerpt)(Printed)

R.A.: The Road to Serfdom(Printed)

T.N.: Hired Help: Markets and Morals(Printed)

SESSIONS 23 - 24

Marxism:

- Marx, 'The German Ideology' (excerpt)
- Karl Marx, Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844, Estranged Labour

The aftermath of the Napoleonic empire and the 1848 revolutions and, most importantly, the irruption of the Industrial Revolution in Europe revolutionised Western conceptions of citizenship and of a person's contribution to society. Productivity, not property, was now considered as a person's defining social feature and the political debate focused the best ways to organise control over the means of production. These changes were embodied most thoroughly in the socialist thought of Karl Marx, which treats the experiences and interests of poor workers as the fundamental social concern. We read two of Marx's key early works: his materialist account of human nature, society and history in the German Ideology and his analysis of the injustice suffered by workers in a capitalist economy.

R.A.: The German Ideology (excerpt)(Printed)

B.C.: Estranged Labour(Printed)

SESSIONS 25 - 26

Nationalism:

- G. Mazzini, 'Nationalism and Nationality'
- Bakunin, 'The Immorality of the State'

We have grown used to the idea that one people corresponds to one nation. But the idea of a nation as the geopolitical representation of a single social group united by race, language, religion or supposedly shared history is comparatively new. Rooted in Romantic ideals of national culture, the legitimisation of the nations as political rather than merely cultural entity was sanctioned in the Treaty of Versailles that put an end to the First World War and dismantled European Empires on European soil. This week we read Mazzini's influential defence of nationalist independence movements and Bakunin's polemical condemnation of the division of humanity into distinct ethical communities and the cruelty this motivates, justifies and masks.

B.C.: Nationalism and Nationality(Printed)

R.A.: The Immorality of the State(Printed)

SESSIONS 27 - 28

Imperialism:

- Lenin, 1917, 'Imperialism: The highest stage of capitalism', chs. 4-6.
- Frantz Fanon, 1952, 'The Fact of Blackness'.

Throughout history, Empires have been the most common form of government. At the dawn of modern era, a new kind of commercial or trade empire emerged, based on mercantilism. By the end of the 19th century, the European powers had subjugated most of the world's territory, forever reshaping the economies, cultures and politics of the peoples and places they ruled. Lenin offers an economic analysis of colonialism, explaining how it facilitated the development of capitalism despite the obstacles posed by workers' movements in its original territories. Frantz Fanon describes the damaging effect of racism and colonialism on the culture and identity of its victims, trapped by prevailing imperialist interpretations of their native culture as 'backward' and their exclusion from white, European culture.

B.C.: Imperialism: The highest stage of capitalism (excerpts)(Printed)

B.C.: The Fact of Blackness(Printed)

SESSIONS 29 - 30

FINAL EXAM