Course Description

This course offers a chronological survey of some central contributions to contemporary political thought. Its premise is that 20th-century political thinkers have given us different (a) vocabularies to understand modern political world and (b) arguments for why and how we should try to change that world. Beginning with the German sociologist Max Weber and ending with the South African novelist J. M. Coetzee, the course draws from contributions outside political theory proper.

Although this is a course in political theory, it is worthwhile — even necessary — to keep the historical context in mind. The twentieth century saw the rise of mass democracy and mass politics as well as unprecedented political experiments, in both good and bad. Some of the texts we read contributed to those events, others reflect and try to make sense of them. Having some knowledge of the history of the twentieth century will therefore be useful for this course; appreciating the fact that the people we read didn’t write in a historical vacuum is absolutely necessary.

Furthermore, since much of the twentieth-century political thought also consists of developments of and reactions to the nineteenth-century legacies of liberalism and Marxism, you need to be familiar with those theories. If you aren’t, that may affect your ability to do well in this course.

The course satisfies the Upper-level Writing Requirement (assuming your final grade is C– or higher).

Learning Objectives

Political theory is a type of social inquiry which studies arguments made in texts. The purpose of this course is to introduce you to some of the most important arguments made in the twentieth-century, and to teach you to interpret and analyze the texts and evaluate the arguments. Most of the steps require your own expressive skills, particularly your own writing. This means that while the knowledge objectives of the course are limited to the theories we study, mastering the skill objectives will make you prepared more broadly. In general, in keeping with the goals of the LSA upper-level writing requirement, this course should help you understand some of the central concepts, approaches, and materials of political science, particularly political theory.

This course is graded on a score system. It is explained on p. 6 below.
General Course Requirements

Writing
You will write much and often in this course, but you will also get much help. There are two key ideas guiding the writing pedagogy in the course: (1) The idea of writing as a process from an initial half-baked thought to a polished expression of sophisticated ideas, with many steps in between. (2) The modularity of the types of writing: work by political theorists includes argument paraphrases, summaries and comparisons; counterarguments; and new normative arguments. Good work incorporates these into seamless wholes, but to be able to do that, one needs to learn to work with the modules by themselves. Throughout this course, we will practice these various steps and modules, and you will be able to incorporate others’ feedback as you develop your ideas.

It is important to keep in mind that although we both study and produce texts, they are different kinds of texts. You won’t always be writing like the authors we study; you will be writing like political theorists who study those texts now. Some of our authors are useful exemplars for that; others aren’t. In this sense, political theory is no different from any other subfield of political science: you do not replicate the object of your study, but illuminate it for others.

There are two types of writing assignments in the course: short papers, which help you practice the modular aspects of theoretical writing, and a term paper, in which you bring the different modules together. In both cases, you will also practice revising your work.

Short Papers. You will write three very short papers (500 words). The first of these papers is due on September 20. Topics for the other two will be assigned weekly, beginning at the end of September, with specific due dates. You may choose which topic you want to write on; the only requirement is that you complete two additional papers.

The short papers ask you to practice the different components of theory writing: paraphrasing, reviewing and comparing arguments as well as making counterarguments and developing normative arguments of your own.

Each of these papers has a revision requirement. The first paper, which everyone will write, will be scored and commented on and returned to you for revision on September 27. You will have a week to revise the paper. After you turn it in, it will be scored again.
You will revise the two other short papers on the basis of a peer review. You will submit your draft to another, pre-selected student who will have several days to comment on the draft. After making revisions, you will turn in your final version as well as your original version and your peer’s comments.

**How the peer review works.** Students in the course will be randomly assigned to groups of four for the duration of the semester. Each member of a group must comment on two short papers by his or her peers in the group. The quality of your comments will be scored; the maximum points for the comments together is 30 points.

**Term paper.** The purpose of the term paper is to allow you to combine the different types of writing you have practiced in the short papers in a more sustained piece of work. The term paper will be 2,500–3,000 words long. A draft and a revised final version are required.

Each topic will be comparative and require you to focus on at least two different theorists.

**Expectations about writing.** We don’t assume you already have mastered the styles of writing we focus on in this course, although your prior writing experience will help. Still, our purpose is to teach those styles to you now. We will provide many resources to give you a sense of what we hope you will have mastered by the end of the semester. For example, the course website has

- general and specific tips on writing political theory papers,
- links to resources on, for example, grammar, and
- examples of the different kinds of papers we are asking you to write. Some of these are from professional political theorists; others are from undergraduates like you.

We also urge you to take advantage of the professor’s and particularly the GSI’s office hours. The GSI’s job is to help you work on your writing, and ignoring this great resource puts you at a disadvantage and wastes your tuition dollars.

We realize grades are important to you, and we therefore want to make it clear in advance what you will need to do well in this course. The following offers the rough principles on the basis of which your papers will be graded:
10  A rare piece of superb work. The paper exceeds all expectations for writers at this level. It offers an original thesis and a complex valid and sound argument in its defense. It displays the writer’s familiarity with and understanding of relevant debates and literatures. Prose is mature and sophisticated and shows that the writer has not only mastered Standard Written English, but has also developed his or her own voice. Paper could be a candidate for publication in a quality journal.

9  Excellent work. Paper offers a clearly stated, interesting and very strong thesis which is supported with valid and sound arguments. The paper shows that the writer has thought about the assignment and developed his or her own ideas about it. Interpretations of theories are sophisticated and supported with textual evidence. Writing is excellent: the organization of the paper is clear; prose is good and grammar flawless.

7–8  Good work. Paper offers a clearly stated thesis which is supported with arguments which are by and large valid and sound. The paper stays on topic and considers all the relevant aspects of the assignment. Interpretations of theories are plausible — or at least intelligent — and supported with textual evidence; more than one source is considered. Writing, including outline, grammar and style, is solid. There are at most two or three typographical or grammatical errors.

6  Satisfactory work. Paper offers a thesis and supports it with arguments. The thesis is simplistic, the arguments are weak or unconnected to the thesis. Interpretations are possible, but they can have some weaknesses. Paper uses textual evidence, but there are problems between the evidence and arguments. Paper only uses one textual source. Writing and organization have problems that may affect readability; typographical, grammatical and stylistic errors are noticeable.

5  Acceptable work. Paper offers a relatively minimal thesis. Arguments in support of the thesis are insufficient, invalid, or unsound. Organization of the paper is confusing. Writing has significant stylistic, grammatical and typographical problems. There is little textual evidence, or it is used poorly.

4  Weak work. Paper offers a minimal thesis and minimal or no arguments in its support. Interpretations are thoroughly misguided and/or unsupported with any evidence. Writing — both at the level or paper organization and grammar — is seriously problematic.

3  Poor work. Minimal, incoherent, or thoroughly misguided thesis. There are either no arguments and no textual evidence, or arguments and evidence are so poorly used that they do not support the thesis at all. Organization is incoherent, writing is so awkward that it begins to be unintelligible.

1–2  Extremely poor work. No thesis, no arguments, no evidence. Writer has little or no conception of most rudimentary aspects of writing (paragraphs, outline).

0  Unacceptable. The paper displays a fundamental lack of understanding of the principles that guide scholarly endeavors. Examples include but aren’t limited to gross mistakes in citing source materials as well as significant errors in framing the paper (e.g., writing a short story instead of an essay).

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**A word on grammar.** Students often ask whether they will be “graded for grammar.” The answer is no and yes. “No,” in the sense that grammar alone isn’t a grading criterion. But “yes” in the sense that bad grammar — and awkward style — detract from the argument: they make it difficult to follow the writer’s logic, and they make it tiresome for the reader to go through the text. Your goal is not to entertain, but you also shouldn’t make the reading harder work than it needs to be. You are responsible for understanding the rules governing Standard Written English, and usage and grammar rules are important.
Readings

All writing is about something, and in this course it is about the texts we read. You will therefore need to keep up with the readings and, in particular, show up in class having read the material.

The following books are available at Ulrichs, Michigan Book & Supply, and the Union Bookstore:

- J.M. Coetzee, *Disgrace* (Penguin USA)
- Franz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (Grove Press)
- Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* (Vintage)
- Susan Moller Okin, *Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women?* (Princeton UP)
- George Orwell, *A Collection of Essays* (Harvest/Harcourt)
- Carl Schmitt, *Concept of the Political* (U Chicago P)
- Max Weber, *The Vocation Lectures* (Hackett)

Additional required readings are available through the course website.

Quizzes

In order to motivate you to keep up with the readings, there will be ten random quizzes in the course throughout the term. The maximum number of points you can get on the quizzes altogether is 60, so on average, each quiz is worth six points. However, the point totals per quiz may vary slightly.

Participation

Participation and attendance count for two reasons: (1) Learning is collective. You might not care about discussions, but by avoiding them, you deprive your peers of an educational opportunity they have a right to. (2) The ability to engage in an intelligent conversation is a skill which is different from being able to understand lectures and readings and from being able to write. You need to practice it, and it counts.

You must attend class regularly and you must participate in class and group discussions.
Summary of grading

This course is graded on a 300-point scale. Here is how your final score translates into a course grade:

- 280–300: A+
- 250–279: A
- 230–249: A–
- 210–229: B+
- 190–209: B
- 170–189: B–
- 150–169: C+
- 130–149: C
- 110–129: C–
- 90–109: D+
- 70–89: D
- 50–69: D–
- 0–49: E

EXCEPTION: Regardless of your performance in the course otherwise, if your total score of the three short papers and the term paper falls below 36 points, your MAXIMUM POSSIBLE GRADE will be D+.

Grade grievances

If you believe that you have been unfairly graded, you must follow this procedure:

1. Wait 24 hours after receiving the grade before approaching the GSI or the professor.
2. Provide an explanation in writing for why the grade you received was unfair.

Departmental grade grievance procedures are outlined on the political science website, at [http://www.polisci.lsa.umich.edu/undergrad/grievance.html](http://www.polisci.lsa.umich.edu/undergrad/grievance.html).

General Policies

Religious Observances and Other Scheduling Conflicts

In keeping with the University of Michigan policy of respecting students’ religious commitments, all attempts will be made to accommodate conflicts arising out of religious observances. Please note that, according to the Provost’s policy on

- Rosh Hashanah: Sept. 22-24
- Ramadhan: Sept. 24-Oct. 23
- Sukkot: Oct. 6-8
- Shemini Atzeret: Oct. 13-14
- Diwali: Oct. 21-24
- Id al-Fitr: Oct. 24
relational holidays, you must give notice of a religious conflict by the drop/add deadline. After that, requests cannot be honored.

Furthermore, we are aware of and, in principle, sympathetic to the many other pressures students have in their lives and are willing to accommodate reasonable requests for extensions (except in the case of exams) and other issues that involve scheduling conflicts. It is, however, your responsibility to bring conflicts to the professor’s attention, and to do so in advance. Student athletes will, in most cases, need a letter from the Athletic Department about the scheduling conflicts. As a rule, no late assignments will be accepted without prior permission except in cases of a documented emergency.

**Academic integrity**

Plagiarism and cheating are violations of academic integrity and so violations of the LSA Academic Conduct Code, and they will result automatically in a failure in the course. Furthermore, as the LSA Academic Judiciary Manual of Procedures specifies, a student may be expelled from the university for academic misconduct. For the purposes of this class, plagiarism will mean

submitting a piece of work which in part or in whole is not entirely the student's own work without attributing those same portions to their correct source.

Additional information on what does and does not count as plagiarism is available on the course website. You are responsible for familiarizing yourself with those cases. Note that the paper-grading principles above specify a score of 0 for a paper that does not cite material correctly. You are also responsible for avoiding even the appearance of plagiarism.

Meeting the learning objectives in this course requires that you apply your current knowledge and skills to the questions and exercises and, through them, improve that knowledge and those skills. Shortcuts won’t get you there, however appealing they might seem. Because of this, the use of commercial study guides such as Cliff Notes, Sparknotes.com, and other similar resources outside this course is a violation of academic integrity. You will automatically fail this course if we catch you using such resources.
Seminar Calendar

9/6 Introduction — no reading

9/11 Max Weber, “Politics as a Vocation”
9/13 Weber, “Science as a Vocation”

9/18 Carl Schmitt, The Concept of the Political, pp. 19–45
9/20 Schmitt continued, pp. 45–79

9/27 Gramsci continued, pp. 135–153, 181–188

10/2 George Orwell, A Collection of Essays, 156 –171, 188–210, 252–278
10/4 Orwell continued, pp. 148–156, 171–180

10/9 Franz Fanon, Black Skin, White Masks Introduction & chs. 1–4
10/11 Fanon continued, chs. 5 and 8

10/16 Fall break
10/17 Hannah Arendt, Eichmann in Jerusalem, pp. 3–111

10/23 Arendt continued, pp. 112–219
10/25 Arendt continued, pp. 220–298

10/30 Michael Walzer, “Political Action” Philosophy and Public Affairs 2.2. (1973).**

11/6 Foucault, Discipline and Punish, pp. 3–69
11/8 Foucault continued, pp. 73–130

11/13 Foucault, pp. 135–228
11/15 John Rawls, Justice as Fairness, pp. 39–79

11/20 Rawls continued, pp. 135–178
11/22 Thanksgiving — no class

11/27 Iris Marion Young, Justice and the Politics of Difference (excerpts)*

11/29 Term paper draft due
Nancy Fraser, “From Redistribution to Recognition?”**

12/6 Multiculturalism continued, pp. 95–131

12/11 J.M. Coetzee, Disgrace (read as much as you can)
12/13 Coetzee finished