

Introduction to Politics

202

Liebowitz

LIE-01, MW 9:00-10:25 am

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Office hours: T, 12:00-2:00 pm, W, 12-1 pm; by appt.

This course explores the concept, domain, and discipline of politics. We engage with various attempts to define and determine the nature, form, content and extent of “the political.” In doing so, we may access the tense and conflicting sources of our own current understandings of politics, its subjects, and its objects. It is important to remember that the course does not take any of the assigned readings as the final word on an issue or topic. Rather, we visit all texts as agnostics, sceptics, and critics, assessing their approaches, definitions and arguments, earnestly working with and through them over the course of the semester to (1) become fluent in basic concepts and terms at work, and (2) to come up with our own speculations about what constitutes the political; when, where and how politics happens; what it means to think, ask, and act politically; and what being a student of politics may entail. It is my hope that this “introductory” course errs more on the side of questions rather than answers, even if only to show that studying and thinking politics requires an ability to submit to the fullness of a situation, to ask good questions, and to be patient and humble in the absence of clear-cut answers. In this way, we may equip ourselves with some of the conceptual, experiential, and analytical tools to be put to use in our subsequent engagements with the study, activity, and experience of politics.

Texts***Books to Purchase***

Heywood, Andrew. *Key Concepts in Politics*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2000

This text will serve as a handbook for the course. It will be used along with every reading, and will be our source for all definitions and conceptual clarifications. Let’s say it will be your dictionary for the semester.

Weber, Max. *The Vocation Lectures*. Hackett, 2004

Schmitt, Carl. *The Concept of the Political*. University of Chicago Press, 2007

Arendt, Hannah. *The Promise of Politics*. Schocken, 2007

Dussel, Enrique. *Twenty Theses on Politics*. Duke U. Press, 2008

Norton, Anne. *95 Theses on Politics, Culture and Method*. Yale U. Press, 2004

Required and suggested readings **beyond** the above-mentioned books have been placed on the course Moodle page, and are indicated with an asterisk in the reading schedule that follows.

Expectations & Requirements

Attendance and Preparation

Much of what we will read and write on is *probably* a bit different from stuff you have dealt with before. That should not make this course ominous or any more intimidating than it needs to be—it should free you up in so many ways to have fun, experiment, and develop new relationships and ways of relating. I do realise, however, that some guidelines will be helpful, and I will post them on the course website a day in advance of the scheduled reading, and/or email them to you.

You are required to attend class having done the assigned reading for the day. Please bring the text to class. I do not enjoy having screens obstructing our access to each other, so unless in a dire situation, please refrain from using the computer, and bring a print-out of the readings that are online.

Active class participation is not only required, it is expected. The point is not to have understood everything before coming to class—your treasure is the questions, difficulties and issues that arise from what is read, because they eventually determine what course the class will take. So, try to have as many of those as possible when you come to class.

I will strictly follow the college attendance policy, which should keep you from being tardy and skipping class just for the fun of it. Two unexcused absences will earn you an official warning. Three unexcused absences shall result in suspension. Presence and participation are worth much in the total grade, so even absences within the 3-absence limit may cost you unless you make every effort to keep abreast of the goings on in your absence through classmates and myself, and make up for participation opportunities lost.

Written Work

There are **four** components of your written work for this course.

First, you will keep a **journal** throughout the semester to be handed in to me on the dates specified in the syllabus. You will follow this format:

(1) It will be a 4-column response journal (remember the 2 and 3 column RJs of the W&T workshop?). The first column will have a quote OR you will describe a move you sense the author has made in the text. The second column will contain a description, exegesis and interpretation of the first column. The third column will contain a broader question you think this quote raises that is relevant to the domain of political or other humanistic inquiry (this could be stated in the form of an explicit connection to some other course you are taking, or to another thinker within this course). The fourth column must connect this question to a contemporary political issue.

(2) You will also submit a glossary of newly-encountered terms with every journal (Heywood will be your reference here). You must choose wisely and smartly—your choice will also be graded!

Each of the 8 submissions and their requirements are clearly marked on the reading schedule. You will submit your journal entries in your own named google document in my google folder for our class. I will STRICTLY NOT GRADE LATE WORK. (The google document will timestamp everything; in order for your

work to count toward your grade, you have time until midnight on the date the work is due to submit it, REGARDLESS of when I actually assign it a grade).

Your journals will also be a way of communicating to me what is working or not for you, so we can work out the rough edges of the course, and do more of what seems to work better! The google document will promise a continuing conversation.

Second, you will write a **review** of Anne Norton's book. I will provide instructions.

Third, there will be a short midterm take-home exam to be completed over Spring break.

Fourth, a final exam or assignment of some sort at the end of the semester (format and length to be determined collectively).

I repeat, I will not grade any late work. Please get things done as they come due; they don't have to be perfect!

Presentations

There will be two required graded presentations (one roundtable, and the other on Norton in the last week of classes).

For course policies on Academic Honesty and Religious Holidays, please refer to the SRC Catalogue, pp. 31-33. For issues of learning skills, and subsequent accommodations, please get in touch with me, and also contact Sue Lyon (slyon@simons-rock.edu) or Jeannie Altshuler (jaltshuler@simons-rock.edu).

A sketch of your grade composition

Class Participation/Presentation	10%
Journal (8 parts)	40%
Book Review, Midterm, & Final	50%

LEARNING OUTCOMES

- To discern where the use of the terms politics, political science, the political, government, governance, state, liberalism, and democracy, might be relevant and appropriate, and how these differ from each other.
- To determine ways in which the definition and solution of specific "political problems" assumes a meaning of and relation to politics itself.
- To begin to approach politics as something produced by all of us, rather than something which is distributed to or consumed by us.
- To lay the groundwork for further studies in a number of disciplines with a honed political analysis and sensibility.
- To begin to clarify how the politics programme at Simon's Rock builds on and departs from and frames our engagement with American political and social sciences

- To treat contemporary issues at multiple levels, in a way that goes deeper than the approach provided in the media and politics understood only as government.
- To appraise how, in the history of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, certain ideas and approaches to political action and political knowledge became dominant, and which of those presuppositions each of us has inherited and normalized.
- To develop a sensitivity to the constructions of politics embedded in individual and group claims and actions.
- To consciously correlate the nature of one's claims over politics and the political with one's position in the system of power.
- To evaluate in different circumstances the shifting relations between political action and political knowledge and thought.
- To engage with politics not as a given object of interaction outside of or over us, but to see how the interactions change the very meaning and reality of politics.
- To analyse the origin of the separate domain of politics and its morphology over the last century or so, in understanding and parsing contemporary injustices and inequalities.
- The multi-pronged analysis of political life (rather than merely government) must gear us to see the fundamentally interdisciplinary and counter-disciplinary nature of the study of politics, instead of ghettoising politics in the disciplines of political science or government studies.
- To read, speak, and write about assigned texts, and contemporary problems, in a way that takes responsibility for the political nature of reading, speaking, and writing—so that the student feels at least somewhat of an active participant in making sense of the world rather than a consumer of facts and ideas. To be able to separate this charge from assertion of opinion and subjective understanding beyond negotiation.
- To unpack texts applying some of the techniques of W&T workshop, and then extending them into connections across texts and events.
- To read closely and contextually, understanding thinkers as products of their time also involved in shaping the world in some way, a world we affirm and disaffirm in our understandings and actions.
- To practise engaging with texts and peers in a connected and non-condescending way, with empathy and with understanding, that doesn't require agreement, but also does not diminish or caricature what is being said as a mode of exerting power over others. To appreciate the relation between engaging with texts and with peers, and its lessons for politics.
- To participate in political discussions with a view to thinking and speaking with your interlocutors.
- To intervene in political discourse with clarity and to challenge glib, inaccurate, and lazy, concepts being deployed by others.
- To make thoughtful politics cool.
- To critically analyse this proposed history (in the construct of the syllabus) of our present political state. To glean the politics of this course (content, form, arrangement, method).

- To identify one's and others' sensibilities that engage with politics, in their various everyday actions, and to decide for oneself what form of education in politics or political education is to be pursued, and what that entails from this point forward.
- To broaden and enrich what elements are considered in addressing our problems.
- To disrupt the lazy oppositions between thought and feeling, thought and practice, as a product of those in power, and to come up with new propositions. To understand how those labours are divided in an unjust society, and to start thinking of how we can change them if we find them wanting.
- To develop one's own views of the relation between the personal and the political, politics and being, politics and education, politics and experience, politics and justice, and politics and democracy. To start building a sense of one's own attachments, and the choices they present us.
- To value patience and kindness in some way or the other, even if one feels incapable of it, or to have a good sense for why they mustn't be valued.
- To entertain the notion that the luxury of this engagement is sponsored by and necessitated by many on whose behalf this engagement is necessary—so, to get past seeing one's own privilege in the classroom as merely one's loss (something that often becomes an excuse for not doing the necessary work of seeking a different model of relations, judgment, and labour).
- To desecularize politics. To reclaim it from the dead spaces of government and policy making, in order to generously enliven those in return, as if something is at stake for us.

CLASS SCHEDULE

* All readings marked with an asterisk are on Moodle. The rest are available at the online Bookstore.

Monday, 25 January	Breaking Ice *Baldwin, James. "My Dungeon Shook"
Wednesday, 27 January	<i>THE BASICS: Government, Politics, the Political</i> (Lecture and Discussion) * Munroe, Introduction to Politics and Political Science (pp. 31-71) (recommended) *Heywood, Andrew. <i>Political Ideologies: An Introduction</i> (Chapter 1) (required)
Monday, 1 February	*Wolin, Sheldon. "Fugitive Democracy" https://drive.google.com/file/d/oB2MN3ZwnuDWJRXNWR2RJMmxSeko/view?usp=sharing *Oakeshott, Michael. <i>What is Political Theory?</i> <i>Supplementary:</i> *Connolly, William. "Politics and Vision" *Gunnell, John. "Introduction" from <i>The Descent of Political Theory: The Genealogy of an American Vocation</i>

Wednesday, 3 February	Strong, Tracy. "Political Theory and Crisis," pp. 1-38 1st Journal Due (3 entries in total from readings so far)
Monday, 8 February	Weber, Max. "Politics as a Vocation," pp. 32-53
Wednesday, 10 February	Weber. "Politics as a Vocation," pp. 53-94
Monday, 15 February	Weber. "Politics as a Vocation," pp. 53-94 <i>Suggested:</i> "Introduction," pp. ix-xix, xxxiv-lxii 2nd Journal Due: Weber (3 entries total)
Wednesday, 17 February	Schmitt, Carl. <i>The Concept of the Political</i> . pp. 19-22, 25-37, 37-39 <i>Suggested:</i> "Foreword" and "Introduction"
Monday, 22 February	Schmitt, Carl. <i>The Concept of the Political</i> . pp. 45-58, 66-79 *Schmitt. <i>A Theory of the Partisan</i> . pp. 1-23, 47-68
Wednesday, 24 February	*Schmitt. <i>A Theory of the Partisan</i> . pp. 1-23, 47-68 3rd Journal Due: Schmitt (3 entries total)
Monday, 29 February	*Crick, Bernard. <i>In Defence of Politics</i> . "Preface" and Chapter One, "The Nature of Political Rule"
Wednesday, 2 March	*Crick, Bernard. <i>In Defence of Politics</i> . "Preface"; Chapter Seven, "In Praise of Politics" *Andrew Gamble, Introduction to <i>Politics and Fate</i>
Monday, 7 March	*Laver, Michael. <i>Playing Politics</i> . Chapters 1, 13 4th Journal Due: Crick/Laver/Gamble (3 entries total)
Wednesday, 9 March	*William Connolly, "The Fragility of Things" http://contemporarycondition.blogspot.com/2010/08/fragility-of-things.html *Foucault, Michel (Interview on Politics and Polemics) <i>Suggested:</i> pp. 25-39 <i>only</i> from the excerpt from <i>Government of Self and Others</i>)
Monday, 14 March	BREAK

Wednesday, 16 March	BREAK
Monday, 21 March	BREAK
Wednesday, 23 March	BREAK
Monday, 28 March	Midterm Test Due Arendt, Hannah. <i>The Promise of Politics</i> (selection)
Wednesday, 30 March	Arendt, Hannah. <i>The Promise of Politics</i> (selection)
Monday, 4 April	*Ranciere, Jacques. "Ten Theses on Politics." *Panagia, Davide. "Dissenting Words: Interview with Ranciere"
Wednesday, 6 April	Ranciere, contd. <i>Suggested Reading</i> : *Schaap, "Human Rights in Arendt and Ranciere" (on Moodle) 5th Journal Due: Arendt & Ranciere (2 entries each, 4 total)
Monday, 11 April	Dussel, Enrique. <i>Twenty Theses on Politics</i> (selection TBA)
Wednesday, 13 April	*Hanchard, Michael. <i>Party/Politics</i> . Introduction and Chapter 1 *Mills, Charles. <i>The Racial Contract</i> . pp. 1-40 https://sites.sas.upenn.edu/educationglobal/files/ebooksclub-org_the_racial_contract.pdf
Monday, 18 April	*McClure, Kirstie. "The Issue of Foundations: Scientized Politics, Politicized Science, and Feminist Critical Practice" *Pateman, Carol. <i>The Sexual Contract</i> , pp. 1-18 http://www.feministes-radicales.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/Carole-Pateman-The-Sexual-Contract.pdf 6th Journal Due: Dussel, Hanchard, McClure (1 per thinker, 3 entries total)
Wednesday, 20 April	*Ahluwalia, Pal. <i>Politics and Post-colonial Theory: African Inflections</i> . Introduction
Monday, 25 April	*Spivak, Gayatri. "Nationalism and the Imagination" 7th Journal Due: Ahluwalia, Spivak (1 per thinker, 2 entries total)

Wednesday, 27 April	*Spence, Lester K. "Austerity, Neoliberalism, and Black Communities: The Neoliberal Turn in Black Politics"
Monday, 2 May	*Asad, Talal. "Thinking About Tradition, Religion, and Politics in Egypt Today" Supplementary: Gerhard Bowering, "Islamic Political Thought: An Introduction"
Wednesday, 4 May	* Varoufakis, Yanis. "The Euro-Summit Agreement on Greece" Supplementary: Varoufakis, "How I Became an Erratic Marxist" 8th Journal Due: Spence, Asad, Varoufakis (1 per thinker, 3 entries total)
Monday, 9 May	Norton, Anne. <i>95 Theses on Politics, Culture and Method.</i> Book Review Due/Presentations
Wednesday, 11 May	*Strong, Tracy. "The World as We Find It," <i>Politics Without Vision</i>
EXAM WEEK	Final Exam/Assignment/Activity TBD