PROSPECTIVE STUDENTS: This is last year’s version of the syllabus, but next year’s will be very similar

Non-Western Political Theory
Political Science 399
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Course Description

Courses in political theory often focus primarily on theorists from the “Western” tradition – in other words, those who contributed to or were influenced by Greek, Roman, and Christian thought. The goal of this course is to consider political theory in other locations, especially China and India. The course will be centrally interested in the concept of an intellectual “tradition”. To what degree should contemporary political thought in China, India, and other parts of the world be seen as inherited from earlier times? To what degree might styles of thought travel across geographical and social spaces, to replace the traditions that previously existed there? The latter half of the class pays special attention to these questions in reading theorists who opposed European colonialism, some of whom drew on Marxism and others of whom rejected it.

Since the scope of the course is broad, it will frequently focus on specific aspects of these theories to make comparison easier. It will focus for example on the nature of social order: what renders societies stable, or alternatively tears them apart? It will also focus on the relationship between political order and religious truth: to what extent must laws reflect the will of divine powers, and what methods should be used to ensure this correspondence? Finally, the course will focus on the nature of the good human being: what kind of character should a person have, and how might it be brought about? Obviously, these questions often have interlinked answers, and in many cases we will be especially concerned to spot the differences and similarities of connection across the traditions examined. The intellectual world of ancient societies in the first half of the course will be less familiar than that considered in the course’s latter half, when we turn to colonialism and the reactions to it.

In taking this course, you will be contributing to the development of an intellectual field. “Comparative political theory” has only begun to be studied carefully in the last decade. In some cases, you may be reading works that have never been formally compared to one another before. You are therefore expected to think carefully about them, and are invited to offer your own interpretations throughout.

Required Books

Frantz Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth (New York: Grove Press, 2005).
There is also a course pack containing most readings for the second half of the course, which is available at the University book store.

**Learning Objectives and Course Expectations**

By the conclusion of this course, you should have a deeper knowledge of the range of political thought across the ancient world, the character of reactions of European colonialism, and the intellectual processes of conceptualizing a post-colonial world. Since this is a course in political theory, you will also have a deeper knowledge of normative concepts such as justice, law, virtue, courage, individual rights, equality, and democracy. You should be able to write effectively about complex intellectual topics, and to undertake comparisons of apparently divergent but sometimes deeply analogous ideas.

Although this course is mid-sized, it will involve discussion whenever practical. You will need to read carefully and with an open mind for our class meetings to function effectively. These are complicated texts, and we are moving through them quickly. You should thus not expect to master each of their details fully. Rather, you should learn to recognize the most important elements in each, and the ways in which themes continue or diverge between theorists and traditions. Since we are engaging in the development of the field of comparative political theory in this course, you should not be afraid of making errors; you should, however, keep careful track of what counts as evidence for or against your position about the theorists. Plausibility and textual attention are what matter, rather than any specific position about these theorists or about the notion of tradition itself.

To provide additional motivation for your reading, and to help to orient your study of the texts, you will need to turn in a one-paragraph reaction to the assigned reading for 8 of our 20 course meetings. This should be about 1/3 to 1/2 page, typed. Reading questions are listed for each day, but you are always free to come up with your own question to answer if you prefer. These reaction papers are intended to help you think about the texts. They are not individually graded: anyone who completes the assigned number of reaction papers will receive full credit for this portion of the course. (They should, however, represent your own reactions; copying materials from web sources such as Wikipedia counts as plagiarism here as elsewhere.)

There are three graded writing assignments for the course. The first is a one-page paper comparing two theorists of your choice on the relationship of politics to divine powers. This paper can be turned in at any point before April 28th, though you are encouraged to turn it in sooner. On May 7th, you will turn in a four-page paper on a topic to be announced. A more extensive comparative paper will be due during the finals period. This in-depth paper, of about eight pages, will ask you to compare three or more theorists on a specific topic, with details to be announced later in the quarter.

The grading breakdown for the class is as follows:

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<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tr>
<td>Classroom Participation</td>
<td>14%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reaction Papers</td>
<td>12%</td>
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<td>One Page Paper</td>
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<td>May 7th Paper</td>
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<td>Final Paper</td>
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In addition to the above, non-attendance can lower your grade. Each student is permitted two unexcused absences without penalty, after which penalties begin to accrue. More than six unexcused absences will give you a grade of F for the participation segment of the course.

**Plagiarism, Technology, and Accommodation**

It is essential for your education that you do your own intellectual work. This course and others of its type are intended to foster skills of critical reading along with critical thinking about complex questions of history and political philosophy. The process of working through the texts and the ideas they contain is thus more important than the specific conclusions that you reach about them (though your ability to explain and defend those conclusions matters a great deal). Allowing others to do your thinking for you thus undermines the purpose of the course. Accordingly, incidents of plagiarism will be dealt with using the most severe means available within University policy. If you are not sure what constitutes plagiarism, please ask.

Because cell phones, laptops, iPads, and other forms of electronic technology are distracting to yourself and others, they are prohibited during our class meetings. The first incident of using these technologies in class will result in a warning. For the second incident, your maximum classroom participation grade will drop to C-. For a third incident, it will drop to F. Please expect to put your devices away before course meetings begin. If special circumstances require that you use them (e.g. a family illness about which you expect to receive texts, vision problems that make electronic devices essential for reading), please let me know before class begins.

Federal law requires that universities reasonably accommodate those with documented learning or other disabilities. Please inform the professor within the first three weeks of class if these policies of accommodation apply to you. If the university fails to meet its own requirements for this course (e.g. in providing appropriate desks to wheelchair users), please inform me as soon as possible.

**Reading Schedule**

These are complex texts, so set aside sufficient time to read them before class without being rushed. As you read, think ahead to papers that you might want to write; flag interesting arguments or metaphors so that you will be able to find them again easily, and mark similarities among theorists where you spot them.

Each reading assignment is followed by potential questions on which you might write a short response. We will often consider issues not included within these questions, but they will be useful to orient your reading even if you do not write a response for that day’s class meeting. You are, of course, always permitted to create your own response question if you so choose.

**March 31:** No reading – introductory discussion of “tradition” and “Western political thought.”

**April 2:** Reading Assignment: Plato, *The Apology of Socrates* in *The Trials of Socrates.*
Reading Questions:

1. What seems to be the relationship between religion and politics in Plato's *Apology*? Which seems to have precedence, and why?

2. Writing a text is a social act that always takes place in a specific context. What kind of background social context is implied by the *Apology*? In other words, what kind of social world is Plato writing in?

3. Socrates says that the unexamined life is not worth living. What kinds of things are taken for granted in the text? In other words, what things does he seem to endorse or presume rather than questioning?

April 7: Reading Assignment: Plato, *Crito*, *Phaedo* (Death Scene), and *Euthyphro* in *The Trials of Socrates*.

Reading Questions:

1. Socrates offers several arguments to Crito about why he (Socrates) is obligated to obey the laws of Athens. Which do you judge to be most persuasive, and why?

2. If you were Socrates, would you stay to drink the hemlock, or would you allow Crito and your other friends to bribe the guards, or otherwise escape execution? Why?

3. What seems to be the relationship between religion and reason in Plato’s *Euthyphro*? Which seems to have precedence, and why?

April 9: Reading Assignment: Aristophanes, *Clouds* in *The Trials of Socrates*.

Reading Questions:

1. To what degree does “Socrates” as Aristophanes presents him correspond to or differ with Socrates as Plato presents him?

2. Who, if anyone, would you regard as the hero in this play? What leads you to believe that?

3. When Superior Argument and Inferior Argument debate, what exactly is it that leads to Inferior Argument’s victory?

3. This play was written, scheduled, and performed at public expense, for a religious festival in which most of the city's citizens were present. What do you believe would have been the public purpose of plays of this sort?

April 14: Reading Assignment: Confucius, Chapters 1-8 of *Analects* in *Readings in Classical Chinese Philosophy*.
Reading Questions:

1. What seems to be the vision of a good political life described by Confucius? What kinds of actions does he praise and blame, and why?
2. What is necessary to secure stable and effective political order, according to Confucius? Does his view seem to you compelling or mistaken, and why?
3. What is the best method for reading Confucius’ sayings? That is, what rules should one use in understanding his meaning, and why are these rules appropriate?
4. This text is broken up into multiple short sections, which often have an ambiguous relationship to one another. What effect do you believe this has on the reader, and is it conducive to clear thinking or damaging to it?

April 16: Reading Assignment: Confucius, remainder of *Analects* in *Readings in Classical Chinese Philosophy*.

Reading Questions:

1. What is the nature of Confucius’ argument for social differentiation? That is, what differences in social status are acceptable, and what seems to underlie these views?
2. What exactly should a good person do when confronting a bad political order, according to Confucius? What methods seem permissible to pursue change, and which impermissible? Why?
3. Who do you judge to be the greater thinker, from what you’ve read – Confucius or Socrates? What are the standards for evaluating one way or the other?
4. How might Confucius's ideas have changed if he were citizen of a democratic society, rather than of a system of competing monarchies and noble houses? What makes you believe this?

April 21: Reading Assignment: Zhuangzi, chapters 1-7 in *Readings in Classical Chinese Philosophy*.

Reading Questions:

1. What seems to be the ultimate purpose of this text? What is it intended to achieve, and to what degree does it achieve it?
2. Who claims to have less certain knowledge, Socrates or Zhuangzi? Between the two, which of them has the more convincing position and why?
3. At points, Zhuangzi uses Confucius (Kongzi) as a character. Is this use similar to Aristophanes' use of Socrates, or different? What are the primary similarities or
4. What kinds of political implications might Zhuangzi's text have? If you were a political leader, would you want to have subjects influenced by Zhuangzi or not?

**April 23: Reading Assignment:** Han Feizi (read all) in *Readings in Classical Chinese Philosophy.*

**Reading Questions:**

1. What seems to be the core of Han Fei’s advice about politics, and do you believe that it is correct? What evidence would be necessary to decide one way or the other?

2. Han Fei argues that rulers should wait "empty and still, allowing names to define themselves." What does he seem to have in mind, and does it seem plausible?

3. Han Fei argues that Confucians and others like them are socially dangerous. What do you think of his reasons? Does he seem correct or mistaken?

4. Having read Confucius, Zhuangzi, and Han Fei, how would you characterize the classical Chinese intellectual tradition as a whole? What are its uniting features? What are its axes of disagreement?

**April 28: Reading Assignment:** Apastamba, selections from *Dharmasutras: The Law Codes of Ancient India* (course pack).

**Reading Questions:**

1. How would you characterize the rules relating to social class (varna or caste) in this text? How do the duties of the various classes differ, and how do they relate to one another?

2. What seems to be the central motivating vision of this legal text? That is, what vision of society and human life does it seem to achieve, and how? Are there central ideas that give the text logical unity, or are there competing priorities to be found?

3. What similarities and differences are there between the vision of law described here and that found in Han Feizi? Are there areas in which the text might have overlaps with the ideas of Confucius?

4. What legal rules are applied specifically to women in this text? Generally, would it be better to be a woman living in the world described here, or in that described by Zhuangzi, Confucius, or Aristophanes?

**April 30: Reading Assignment:** *Bhagavad Gita*, Sections 1-6, 16-18 (course pack).

**Reading Questions:**
1. What seems to be the purpose of this text? That is, what is its central argument, and why might this argument seem important to make?

2. If you were Arjuna, would you continue on into battle after this conversation, or would you turn back? What leads you to decide one way or another?

3. Arjuna is a member of the Kshatriya (warrior and king) class, not a Brahmin. From reading this text, what would you judge the relationship to have been like between these two classes? Where are their intellectual overlaps? Where are there tensions?

4. If you were a dissatisfied member of a lower caste in this time, or alternatively a woman of upper caste concerned with unfair treatment, what kinds of intellectual and other resources would be available for pursuing social change?

May 5: Reading Assignment: Kautilya, selections from The Arthashastra (course pack).

Reading Questions:

1. How would you characterize the central message of the Arthashastra? To what degree does its advice seem effectively constructed to achieve its goals?

2. What are the similarities between the Arthashastra and the advice of Han Feizi? What are the differences? Does this comparison tell us anything about the character of politics in the ancient world, or does it fail to do so?

3. What do you see as the relationship between a text like the Arthashastra and works like that of Apastamba? Are they overlapping in their concerns, conflicting, or what? What might this tell us about political writing in India at this time?

4. Presuming that "the West" was able to colonize other countries in the 17th-20th Centuries because of something specific about its intellectual heritage, what stands out as the most likely cause? How compelling do you think arguments about the intellectual heritage of the West are when all things are considered?

May 7: Reading Assignment: V. I. Lenin, selections from Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism (course pack).

Reading Questions:

1. What is distinctive about contemporary imperialism, according to Lenin? What makes the competition for colonies so acute, and why will it continue?

2. Lenin argues that many workers within countries like England, France, and Germany have given in to "opportunism". What is the structure of his argument, and do you find it convincing?
3. What are the similarities and differences between the "bourgeois" theorists of colonialism such as Hobson and Lenin’s own views? What are the main overlaps, if any, and the main differences, if any?

4. If you are not persuaded by Lenin’s explanation, what explanation would you offer instead for the colonial expansion of European powers?

May 12: Reading Assignment: Sun Yat-Sen, selected speeches (course pack).

Reading Questions:

1. What are the main problems that China faces, according to Sun Yat-Sen? What must be done to counter those problems over the short term and the long term?

2. If you were in Sun Yat-Sen's shoes, would you have made the same arguments that he did, or different arguments instead? Where would you differ and agree, and why?

3. What would Lenin have said about the social plans outlined in Sun Yat-Sen's work? What would Sun Yat-Sen have said about Lenin's work? Where do they most agree and disagree?

4. What do you think about Sun Yat-Sen's references to Confucius? How might Confucius have reacted to Sun Yat-Sen's arguments, if he were able to hear them?

May 14: Reading Assignment: Kang Youwei, selections from The Great Harmony (electronic source).

Reading Questions:

1. What is Kang’s primary point in this text? What outcome does he most want to ensure, and what elements of his writing lead you to believe this?

2. Kang has much to say about racial difference and amalgamation, much of it disturbing. What are the basic goals of his argument, and to what degree could you imagine having endorsed some similar positions in his circumstances?

3. How do the economic proposals of Kang Youwei differ and overlap with those of (A) Sun Yat-Sen or (B) Lenin? What do these similarities and differences tell you about the basic intellectual climate of the times, if anything?

4. Which of the following do you see as most similar intellectually to Kang Youwei: Confucius, Zhuangzi, Han Fei, or someone else?

May 19: Reading Assignment: Mao Tse-Tung, selections from Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse-Tung (course pack).
**Reading Questions:**

1. What seem to be Mao’s central concerns in this text? What problems is he most worried about, and what are his methods for resolving them?

2. What is the role of intellectual modernization in Mao’s text? To what degree should political thinking look back to Chinese tradition for its ideas rather than to ideas coming originally from Europe or somewhere else?

3. What arguments of Mao’s text do you find most troubling? Is them essential to his political project as a whole, or are they relatively isolated?

4. Mao’s text is presented in a way that has some visually similarities to the texts of Confucius. To what degree are there similarities and differences in methods of presentation, and to what degree do they seem important?

**May 21: Reading Assignment:** Frantz Fanon, “Concerning Violence” from *Wretched of the Earth.*

**Reading Questions:**

1. According to your interpretation of Fanon, what is the root cause of colonialism? How close or distant is his view from that of Lenin?

2. According to Fanon, what are the psychological characteristics of both colonizer and colonized, and what leads them to exist in this way?

3. What is Fanon’s position on the colonial bourgeoisie and professionals who have been educated within the systems of the colonizer? To what degree do you agree or disagree with what he has to say, and why?

4. Toward the end of the reading, Fanon includes a selection from a work by Aime Cesaire which involves a vivid act of killing. If you were the member of a colonized society, would you use violence to change your circumstances? Would you be willing to engage in this kind of violence in particular? Why or why not?

**May 26: Reading Assignment:** Frantz Fanon, “Violence in the International Context” and “Spontaneity: Its Strength and Weakness” from *Wretched of the Earth.*

**Reading Questions:**

1. In "Violence in the International Context", Fanon argues that colonizing states should pay compensation to former colonies for harm done. Do you agree with this argument?
2. Why does Fanon believe that the peasants and those who live on the edges of colonial towns are deeply important for anticolonialism? What kind of traits do they have that make them strongly revolutionary, and why?

3. What seems necessary to establish a stable and functional society at the conclusion of the anti-colonial movement? That is, what will the new society be like if all goes well, and what difficulties are the most challenging to overcome?

4. To what degree do the difficulties with the post-war success of anti-colonial movements that Fanon describes seem universal to all anti-colonial movements, and why? What (if anything) might this tell us about the difficulties of creating new political systems?

May 28: Reading Assignment: B. R. Ambedkar, selections from *The Annihilation of Caste* and *Reply to the Mahatma* (course pack).

**Reading Questions:**

1. What is the basic structure of Ambedkar's argument against caste? What positive view of politics does he support instead, and what are its primary intellectual sources?

2. Ambedkar has many things to say about Gandhi's character in the second reading. What are his basic concerns? Before reading Gandhi himself, do those concerns seem likely to be justified or not?

3. What are the similarities and differences between the political goals that Ambedkar describes and those that Fanon has in mind? Where they differ, which is more plausible?

4. Could one make similar arguments about economic class in countries like the United States and the UK to those Ambedkar makes against caste? What are the strongest overlaps and biggest differences?

June 2: Reading Assignment: M. K. Gandhi, pgs. 15-40 of *Hind Swaraj* (course pack).

**Reading Questions:**

1. What is the basic reason India has been colonized, according to Gandhi? To what degree is his view consistent with that of Fanon? Where they differ, which one is more persuasive?

2. Gandhi has some strong objections to British politics and civilization. What are they, and to what degree do you find his arguments plausible?
3. Gandhi reread the *Bhagavad Gita* frequently throughout this life. To what degree do you see overlaps between that text and the view of Indian life articulated here? Are there parallels with Apastamba, who Gandhi did not read, and if so what are they?

4. After reading the first half of Gandhi's text, to what degree do you believe that Ambedkar's portrayal of Gandhi from the last reading was correct? What elements of the text that would allow you to answer this question most effectively?

**June 4: Reading Assignment:** M. K. Gandhi, pgs. 41-69 of *Hind Swaraj* (course pack).

**Reading Questions:**

1. Gandhi would likely believe that you lack sufficient courage. Why does he think this is so? What do you yourself need to be more politically courageous about, and what could you do about it?

2. Gandhi endorses non-violent political resistance. What is the causal path that Gandhi believes will make this successful? (Looking carefully at his example of the thief may be helpful.) Do you find Gandhi's argument compelling? Why or why not?

3. It's sometimes been argued that people in the classical world were concerned with the requirements of a happy life, whereas moderns are concerned with material productivity. Would you endorse this as a general statement of the differences between the classical and modern worlds? Why, and based on which theorists?

4. Given your reading from the course as a whole, what seem to be the most important intellectual benefits of colonialism, if any exist, and what seem to be its most severe intellectual harms?