

COURSE OUTLINE

Course Code / Title : HA2005 Contemporary Political Theory

Pre-requisites : HA1002

No. of AUs. : 3

Contact Hours : 39

Course Aims

This course is designed to provide students with an introduction to certain of the most important contributions to political theory made in the 20th century. Although the texts studied will be presented more or less chronologically, we will consider them from a general thematic standpoint that interrogates the philosophical acumen of what has come to be established as the dominant political framework of our time: liberalism. We thus begin with John Dewey's radical reformulation of the liberal political tradition, in which he attempts to respond to what earlier critics of liberalism identified as its fundamentally ahistorical presuppositions, particularly its methodological individualism. After familiarizing ourselves with Dewey's reconstruction of the liberal political tradition we will study a variety of thinkers who continue to question the legitimacy of the liberal understanding of the nature of the individual and political society. Figures studied will include: the conservative German jurist and eventual Nazi apologist, Carl Schmitt; the pioneering psychoanalyst, Sigmund Freud; the neo-Marxist Frankfurt School members, Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer; the arguably unclassifiable thinker of the specificity of the political, Hannah Arendt; the revolutionary post-colonial thinker, Frantz Fanon; and the French post-structuralist historian and philosopher, Michel Foucault. Finally, we will conclude the course by returning to the liberal tradition and examining two important essays by John Rawls – the most important liberal philosopher since John Stuart Mill, and arguably the most influential political theorist of the 20th century – paying particular attention to Rawls' attempt to theorize a political liberalism sensitive to the fact of human difference. Throughout the course of the semester students will be encouraged to put each of the thinkers into dialogue with one another, interrogating the ways in which the construction of specific theoretical constellations is able to reveal to us potential textual gaps and inconsistencies, but also new perspectives on how we think about political reality that might otherwise remain obscured. Students will also be required to continually put the texts studied to work, that is, utilize them in order to attempt to shed critical light on their own political worlds and how they think about the nature of human existence and interaction.

Intended Learning Outcomes (ILO)

By the end of the course, you should be able to:

- 1) Explain the main features the key theoretical frameworks, concepts, and methodologies found in the major texts of 20th century political theory studied in the course.
- 2) Situate these texts within the development of distinct historical traditions of political thought.
- 3) Reflectively and critically self-examine your own political ideals and beliefs.
- 4) Use your analytic skills to review and critically interpret complex textual material.
- 5) Present your opinions in a coherent and logical way, both orally and in writing.

Course Content

1. Introduction
2. Dewey's Reconstruction of the Liberal Tradition
3. Schmitt on the Autonomy of the Political
4. Freud on Psyche and Society
5. Adorno and Horkheimer on the Dialectic of Enlightenment
6. Adorno and Horkheimer's Critique of the Culture Industry
7. Arendt's Distinction between Public and Private
8. Arendt on the Specificity of Action
9. Fanon on Violence and Spontaneity
10. Fanon and the Dialectic of National Consciousness
11. Foucault and the History of Punishment
12. Foucault on the Emergence of the Disciplines
13. Rawls' Political Liberalism

Course Assessment

Class Participation	: 10%
Reading Responses	: 10%
Critical Essay 1	: 40%
Critical Essay 2	: 40%
Total	-----
	100%