CONTEMPORARY POLITICAL THEORY AND ITS HISTORIES

Political Science 48500
Autumn Quarter 2014

Tuesdays, 1:30–4:20 pm, Pick Hall 506

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

What is the relationship of history to the practice of contemporary political theory? What role does attention to history—or its neglect—play in the reproduction and contestation of theoretical authority? What is the relationship between the history of political thought (whatever that is!) and other modes of historical research and writing? What relevance might methodological disputes among historians (of political thought and of other things) have for theoretical engagement with the present? What light do the histories of academic institutions, of the disciplines, and of canon-formation shed on contemporary theoretical practice?

This seminar will consider these and related issues through an idiosyncratic and selective survey of important recent work in the field, chosen and supplemented with an eye toward the disclosure of its own historical contexts, and toward the critical evaluation of its investments in, stances toward, and, sometimes, disavowals of history. In 2014, the course will include units on the theory and history of human rights; the revival of republicanism in contemporary political theory; new approaches to the work and legacy of Jean-Jacques Rousseau; and recent debates over “realism” and political theory.

This is a two-quarter seminar, which will continue in the Winter of 2015. The Winter syllabus will be developed collaboratively, and will allow participants in the course to design, carry out, and share more extensive research projects than would be possible in a ten-week course. Students who wish to take only the first quarter of the course may complete a seminar paper of regular length instead; but only students who have taken the course in the Autumn will be permitted to enroll in the Winter.

ADMISSION:

This course is designed for Ph.D. students in political theory. Students from the Political Science department may enroll without prior consent. Students from other programs with appropriate interests and background are welcome, space permitting, but must obtain my consent before registering. I do not make decisions about admission to courses prior to the first session, so please do not contact me to request consent before the beginning of the term; instead, simply come to the first class, where I will provide information about how to request consent if you are still interested in taking the course after you’ve heard me describe it in more detail.
TEXTS FOR PURCHASE:

The following required texts are available for purchase at the Seminary Coop. All other readings will be placed on electronic reserve via the course’s Chalk site. Links to electronic versions of journal articles will also be embedded within the syllabus when possible, but note that these may require access via the network of a subscribing institution, or via a proxy server.

Seyla Benhabib, *Dignity in Adversity*
Jane Anna Gordon, *Creolizing Political Theory*
Jimmy Casas Klausen, *Fugitive Rousseau: Slavery, Primitivism, and Political Freedom*
Samuel Moyn, *The Last Utopia*
Philip Pettit, *On the People’s Terms*

ELECTRONIC DEVICES:

I prefer that you use printed books and copies of articles in the seminar itself. If you do use a laptop or tablet to access course materials or to take notes during the seminar, I may ask you to stop if your use of the device is distracting to other members of the seminar. You may not use devices for any other purpose in the seminar, and I ask that you disable wireless connections and silence—fully silence, not put on “vibrate”—cell phones while in class. Also, you may not congregate or form a line near the forward lavatory.

WRITING ASSIGNMENTS:

(a) If you intend to take the course in the Winter as well as the Autumn, you must submit a 5–7 page research proposal by **Monday, December 1**, which should include: a statement of the problem or question to be addressed, and a brief explanation of its stakes; a summary of the research required to address the question; a bibliography; and one or more suggestions for the organization of the Winter term of the seminar. This proposal will not be graded, but students who do not submit proposals will not be admitted to the Winter term of the course.

(b) If you continue the course in the Winter quarter, you must complete a 25–30 page research paper. The grade for this paper will retroactively become your grade for the Fall as well as the Winter.

(c) If you take the course in the Fall quarter only, you must complete a 15–20 page seminar paper on a topic of your choice, which need not involve substantial research beyond the material on the syllabus, by **Monday, December 8**, unless you have arranged in advance for a later due date. Your grade for the paper will determine your grade for the Fall quarter of the seminar.

(d) Auditors are welcome in the Autumn quarter, space permitting. Auditors are expected to do the reading and participate in the discussion along with everyone else. Since the Winter quarter will be more closely focused on students’ own research, I doubt there will be much interest in auditing that term, but I’m open to it, under the right circumstances. Anyone wishing to audit the Winter quarter will still have to submit a research proposal, per (a) above.
SCHEDULE OF MEETINGS AND READING ASSIGNMENTS

Week 1 (September 30): Introduction

   No reading assignment.

Week 2 (October 7): Human rights, I

5. Seyla Benhabib, chaps. 3–5 in Dignity in Adversity, 41–93.

Week 3 (October 14): Human rights, II

   Samuel Moyn, The Last Utopia (all).

Week 4 (October 21): Human Rights, III


Week 5 (October 28): Republicanism, I

   Philip Pettit, On the People’s Terms (all).

Week 6 (November 4): Republicanism, II


**Week 7 (November 11): Republicanism, III**

6. Andrew N. Rubin, “Transnational Literary Spaces at War,” in *Archives of Authority: Empire, Culture, and the Cold War*, 47–73.

**Week 8 (November 18): Rereading Rousseau, I**

Jimmy Casas Klausen, *Fugitive Rousseau* (all).

**Week 9 (November 25): Rereading Rousseau, II**

Jane Anna Gordon, *Creolizing Political Theory* (all).

**Week 10 (December 2): Realism, Politics, and History**