This seminar provides an overview of some fundamental questions and fundamental texts in political theory, both past and present. It also addresses some of the major debates about how political theory should be studied, including problems of methodology in interpreting political theory. I have structured the course so that it will alternate between three dimensions of political theory: in-depth textual examination of certain key thinkers in political theory; textual commentary; and contemporary work that uses these thinkers as a point of departure but presses the problems they raise in new directions. This three pronged approach will be framed by debates about how political theory should be studied. The course begins with the theory of justice, contrasting classical claims about justice with John Rawls’s contemporary account of distributive justice as fairness. We then will focus on Machiavelli’s *Prince* and some of the most significant textual commentary on this work. We will then discuss two modern appropriations of Machiavelli, Gramsci’s *Modern Prince* and Weber’s “Politics as a Vocation.” We will then read Rousseau’s *Social Contract* focusing on the classic problem in democratic theory of relating egalitarian citizenship to active participation in legislating laws for the common good. Here too we will read two interpretations that differ on whether Rousseau is a utopian critic of the political present, capitulates to the need for representation, or merely describes the conditions for realizing moral autonomy. As with Machiavelli, we will turn to one of the most significant modern versions of the Rousseauist problem that argues for direct participation as the means of enjoying political liberty, Hannah Arendt’s *On Revolution*. Arendt will argue for the necessity of constituting opportunities for a public life shared by equal citizens, but will reject Rousseau’s focus on the general will. We will close the course with a discussion of several competing (and fiercely debated) approaches to studying political theory. Here we will give special attention to four recent claims about how to study political theory: first the claim that the job of political theory is to clarify political “concepts” and provide analytical arguments; second, the claim that political theories must be reconstructed within the historical contexts in which they could have been understood; third, the claim that we should regard political theories as political ideologies; and fourth the claim that we should understand political theory as a part of subject-less discourse.

**Required Books:**

Plato *The Republic* ed. by Grube, revised by Reeve (Hackett)
Machiavelli, *The Prince* (Chicago)
Jean Jacques Rousseau, *The Political Writings* (Hackett)

A number of readings can be found on e-res under the course number. The password will be pos501.
Course Outline


(Jan 31, Book I and II; Jan 7 Books III, IV, V; Feb 14 Books VI, VII, VIII plus possible commentaries).

Commentary


A. (The Principles of Justice) sections 1-3, 5 10-15; (equality)16-17, 48, 67; (The original position) 4, 20-26, 29, 40; (Equality of liberty) 31-33, 39; (Political Justice, Political Constitutions, and Equality of Political Participation and its limits) 36-37,

B. (Justice, Equality and Political Economy) 41-43, (attack on merit as basis for economic distribution) 48; (Summing up—a well-ordered society and its justification) 69, 87.

III. Machiavelli, *The Prince* (entire) (March 6, 20)

Commentary:
A. Political vocabulary and grammar:
B. Text as Discourse
Thomas Green, “The End of Discourse in Machiavelli” *Yale French Studies*
C. History and context (e-res).
Quentin Skinner, chapter on Machiavelli’s *Prince* from *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought* (e-res).

IV. Modern Appropriations of Machiavelli (March 27)

Max Weber, “Politics as a Profession and Calling” in *Political Writings*. (e-res)


Commentary:
A. Rousseau as Utopian:
   Judith Shklar, *Men and Citizens: A Study of Rousseau’s Social Theory* (selection)
B. Rousseau as theorist of restricted popular sovereignty. (e-res)
C. Rousseau as theorist of democracy and autonomy

VI. A Modern Participatory Response to Rousseau—Public Liberty without the General Will (March 24, May 1)

Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* (entire)

VII. How Should We Study Political Theory? (May 1, 8)

A. Political Theory as Analytic Argument: Conceptual analysis.
   Alasdair MacIntyre, “The Philosophical Point of the History of Ethics,” *A Short History of Ethics*. (e-res)

B. Political Theory as History of Ideas: Historical context.

   Recommended:

C. Political Theory as Ideology.

   Recommended:
   Karl Mannheim, “The Prospects of Scientific Politics” in *Ideology and Utopia*

D. Political Theory as Discourse
   Michel Foucault, “Truth and Power” and “What is an Author” in *The Foucault Reader*. (e-res)
Assignments

There will be at least two exercises relating canonical political theorists either to textual commentary or contemporary discussion (roughly 6 pages). The purpose of these papers is to help you clarify differences between competing positions, relate present debates to canonical texts, or elucidate some of the methodological problems of studying political theory. There also will be a third paper (6 pages) on ways of studying political theory. You will also have to write a larger 15-20 page paper either on a problem you would like to explore more deeply in one of the theorists you have read, or an account of the various interpretations of a problem in one of the assigned theorists. Lastly, everyone will be asked to make at least two presentations on the readings in the course. At the time you give your presentation, you must provide a written outline of your talk to be given to each member of the class. 80% of the grade will be based on the papers. 20% will be based on the presentations.

A Note on Presentations:

While I am asking you to provide us with an outline of your presentation, I want you to speak your presentation not read it. You want to think of a presentation as you would a lecture in which you need to engage the audience. The presentations need not recite every bit of the argument you are presenting. Rather they should elicit the most salient parts of the piece under discussion and should point to the central questions the piece is addressing. Lastly, they should point to ambiguities, slippages, or incompletely answered questions in the argument being discussed.

Additional Reading

Some ways of thinking about the meaning of political theory

Leo Strauss, “What is Political Philosophy” in What is Political Philosophy
Sheldon Wolin, “Political Philosophy and Philosophy” from Politics and Vision
Charles Taylor, “Social Theory as Practice” in Collected Papers, Vol. II
D. D. Raphael, “What is Political Philosophy” from Problems in Political Philosophy
Andrew Vincent, “We Have a Firm Foundation” from The Nature of Political Theory
Michael Oakeshott, “Political Education” from Rationalism and Politics (in packet)
Jürgen Habermas, “Knowledge and Human Interests” in Knowledge and Human Interests
J. G. A. Pocock, Politics, Language and Time
James Tully, “Public Philosophy as a Critical Activity,” in Public Philosophy in a New Key
Raymond Geuss, Philosophy and Real Politics
John Gunnell, The Descent of Political Theory