

POLITICAL THEORY

In memory of Daria Platonova,
political philosopher

Course Structure

1ST MODULE:

1. Political Theories
2. People and Populism
3. Nation and Nationalism
4. State and Society,
5. Justice and Equality,
6. Freedom and Slavery
7. Culture and Multiculturalism

MIDTERM TEST

2ND MODULE:

1. Cooperation and Community
2. Conflict and Violence
3. Ideology and Discourse
4. Identity and Subject
5. Sovereignty and Legitimacy
6. Gender and Nature
7. Political Power

ESSAY

FINAL TEST

Assessment

Formula:

Seminar Discussion (0,2) + Midterm Test (0,2) + Essay (0,2)
+ Final Test (0,2) + Exam (0,2)

Seminar Discussion (0,2) - could **not** be retaken (reading + discussion of questions)

Midterm Test (0,2) - **could** be retaken (end of 1st module, in-class, 80 minutes, lecture and seminar notes)

Final Test (0,2) - **could** be retaken (end of 2nd module, in-class, 80 minutes, lecture and seminar notes)

Essay (0,2) - **could** be retaken (2000 words, end of 2nd module)

Exam (0,2) - **could** be retaken (oral, 2 questions, questions TBA in syllabus)

Reading & Discussion

Required:

- Contemporary Political Philosophy (3rd ed-n, ed. by R. Goodin, P. Pettit)

Optional:

- other materials, sent via LMS or other communication media

! Reading notes in class \neq Discussion

read → analyze → formulate thesis & arguments → present them in class discussing it with others.

- don't expect to be graded every week
- be prepared to engage in discussion and present your opinion every week
- make notes (for test and exam)

Multiple Political Theories

(1) **What is theory?** There are not one, but several answers that we need to give. There are no definitive answers (definitive answers are metaphysical, i.e. bad)

- (a) Theory is a **set of assumptions** about things, about the nature of things. These are “basic” or “**foundational**” beliefs. We need to agree on them in order to build our argumentation on some **grounds**. Assumptions can be **axiomatic** (*parallel lines do not cross, human is free by nature*)

ILLUSTRATION: Liberal political theory rests on the assumptions that natural law exists & property is natural.

- (b) Theory is a **middle ground** between Philosophy (=knowledge of universal) and scattered positive epistemic facts. We need set of rules to systematize knowledge about facts (Philosophy → Theory → [scientific] Method → Facts). We need Theory to understand **HOW** to gather data and **WHAT** conclusions and predictions can we draw from the data on our hands.

ILLUSTRATION: to explain empirical facts of *political violence* that we encounter we rely on already existing assumptions and theories of violence, that exist in different political theories.

- (c) Theory is **Paradigma** [see Thomas Kuhn *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 1962] = Set of theories (smaller ones) that create an interweb of resources/capital, that imposes itself on us and dies only with the physical or institutional deaths of its carriers

ILLUSTRATION: Orthodox Marxist political theory is either dead in Russian political science (after 1991) or has deeply transformed into a Liberal-Marxist-Constructivist mix.

Political theory ...

=/= [is not] **political philosophy, philosophy of politics**. Though for Plato politics and politics would be the same. Political philosophy is less focussed on connecting with scientific methods.

=/= **political theology & political anthropology**, though it may borrow concepts of sacred, body, sacrifice, myth, civil religion, decision, etc.

=/= **comparative politics**, which focus on positive facts and operate only within positivist epistemology and liberal political theory.

=/= **social theory, *Sotsialnaia filosofii*** which focuses only on the place of politics in society (interrelations with gender, classes, ethnicities, property, institutions, practices, etc.)

=/= **theory of the state, Legal theory, & *Teoriia Gosudarstva i Prava***: they are theories about the nature of law and government.

=/= **Meta-politics**, i.e. the language with which we discuss politics, the relations between power and the Subject [see Badiou Alain. *Metapolitics*. Verso, 2005] Metapolitical level of analysis.

=/= **theory of International relations**, though they may share some assumptions about the nature of Man or the state system. There is a discipline of International Political Theory which is a mixture of two.

=/= **ideology**, which could be described as utilitarian technological application of political theories

Why do we need Political theory

- (a) To connect what we already know/understand through philosophy and its branches (ontology, epistemology, logic, ethics) and social facts
- (b) To systematize and hone your own political and theoretic arguments, to understand, whether the argument belongs to the theory or not.
- (c) To get rid of existential anxiety of living in uncertain conditions, that we do not control. Knowing political theory grants us the illusion of control over the political, it soothes us and comforts us.

Major political theories are:

- (1) Classical Liberal political theory (Locke, Bentham, Hayek, Nozick, ...)
 - (a) Republican political theory ([Cicero], Jefferson, Leo Strauss, Arendt,)
 - (b) Communitarism (Alasdair MacIntyre, Charles Taylor)
- (2) Marxist Political theory →
 - (a) Critical Political Theory (Adorno, Marcuse, Habermas)
 - (b) Post-Marxist Political Theory (Laclau & Mouffe, Zizek)
 - (c) Neo-Marxist International Political theory (Hobsbawm, Wallerstein)
- (3) Feminist political theory (Judith Butler, Cynthia Enloe, Donna Haraway, J.A. Tickner)
- (4) Traditionalism/Perennialism (Rene Guenon, Julius Evola, Mircea Eliade, Alain de Benoist, Alexander Dugin)

Political Theories are different on ground of:

Ontology: what is the nature of politics:

- objective (natural, material): Liberalism, Marxism,
- subjective (ideal, relational): Feminism, Traditionalism

Epistemology: what is possible to know politics:

- foundationalist: Liberalism, Marxism, Traditionalism
- anti-foundationalist: Feminism (de Beauvoir)
- post-foundationalist: Post-Marxism, Feminism (Butler)

Methodology: how do we study politics:

- methodological individualism (Liberalism): they study individuals
- methodological holism (Marxism, Feminism, Traditionalism): they study systems, structures, collectives, groups