

PSC 4383  
CONTEMPORARY POLITICAL THEORY

## Political Philosophy against Ideology: Voegelin, Oakeshott, Strauss and Arendt

Fall 2012  
M/W 4:00-5:15  
Draper 349

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### REQUIRED BOOKS

Eric Voegelin, *Autobiographical Reflections*  
Michael Oakeshott, *Rationalism in Politics and Other Essays*  
Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History*  
Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*  
Other required readings will be made available electronically.  
Routine reading of a few major news periodicals including...

### RECOMMENDED

Wiser, *Political Philosophy: A History of the Search for Order*  
Strauss and Cropsey, *History of Political Philosophy*  
Strunk and White, *The Elements of Style*  
McMahon, "Real World Writing"

### COURSE OVERVIEW

This course focuses on four 20<sup>th</sup> century political philosophers whose writings were forged in the crucible of world war and mass ideology. All four offer a profound critique of political ideology as well as an alternative vision of healthy political life. In their efforts to illuminate the perils and possibilities of politics, they touch on several common questions which will become, for us, topics of reflection and comparison. These include (1) what is the best, or at least a good, kind of life for man? (2) What has gone wrong with modern politics? (4) What is ideology, and what would a non-ideological politics look like? And (5), what is the proper relationship between politics, religion and philosophy?

### GOALS

The goals of the course are for students to encounter and appreciate four great contemporary political philosophers and to consider what they might contribute to our own (personal) understanding of contemporary politics. Beyond these primary goals, we also want to perfect the knack of reading and writing and conversing philosophically.

### ATTENDANCE

As the fruits of this course come largely by way of classroom conversation, attendance is required. Any student who does not attend at least 75% of all scheduled class meetings will automatically receive an "F" in the course. Any University-related activity necessitating an absence from class will count as an absence when determining whether a student has attended the required 75% of class meetings. Beyond this, any student who misses more than three scheduled classes will see his or her final grade substantially affected. I do not distinguish between "excused" and "unexcused" absences, so there is no need to tell me why you were absent or to worry about a doctor's note.

### **COURSE STRUCTURE**

The course is structured by thinker, beginning with Voegelin and Oakeshott, and ending with Strauss and Arendt. The purpose of our class sessions is not to repeat what is in the readings, but to understand the readings more deeply. We do this through lectures and conversations, and these will be only as fruitful as you are prepared to offer insights and appreciate the insights of others. All this presupposes *careful reading and reflection* at home before every class. In fact, the backbone of the course (and the major determinant of your grade) is the time you spend engaged in careful, reflective reading outside of class. There is no substitute for this. If you read consistently and well, you will have no difficulty with (and should even enjoy) the five ways in which your grade will be determined:

*Classroom Participation:* 10%, based on the contributions you make to classroom conversations. "Contributions" refers not only to the frequency with which you speak, but also the quality of your reflections. It will moreover be based on attendance, insofar as repeated absences will subtract substantially from this grade.

*Blog Participation:* 10%, based on your contributions to the class blog on contemporary ideological manifestations.

*Quizzes and study questions:* 20%, based on your cumulative score minus your three lowest quiz grades. Quizzes are designed to assist you in reading consistently and well.

*Essays:* 40%, based on the cumulative values of the two equally weighted essays. Essays will be 5-7 pages in length and are designed to prepare you for your final paper.

*Final Paper:* 20%

*Optional Final Exam:* 20%, will cover strictly factual aspects of the readings. It will thus consist of multiple-choice and other rather mechanical instruments of assessment. The exam can replace one of the essay grades (but not the final paper). The exam will be held on Thursday, December 6, 2-4 p.m..

Your grade will be calculated according to the following scale: (100 - 90%) = A, (89 - 87%) = B+, (86 - 80%) = B, (79 - 77%) = C+, (76 - 70%) = C, (69 - 60%) = D, (59 - 0%) = F

COURSE CALENDAR

READING ASSIGNMENT

TOPICS

COURSE CALENDAR	READING ASSIGNMENT	TOPICS
M 8/20	Class handout on ideology	<b>Introduction: Defining Ideology</b>
W 8/22.....	<i>Autobiographical Reflections (=AR)</i> ch.1- 12.	<b>I. Eric Voegelin</b>
M 8/27.....	“Remembrance of Things Past”; <i>AR</i> ch. 13-20.	A. Voegelin’s Awakening to Ideology
W 8/29.....	“On Debate and Existence”; <i>AR</i> ch. 21-7.	B. Developing an Analytical Tool: Philosophy of Consciousness
M 9/3.....	“Reason: The Classic Experience”; Youtube video: Eric Voegelin: Philosopher of Consciousness, parts 1-4.	C. Diagnosis & Therapy
W 9/5.....	“Immortality: Experience and Symbol.”	D. Voegelin and Christianity
M 9/10.....	<i>New Science of Politics</i> , pp. 107-132, 170-3.	
W 9/12.....	“Gospel and Culture”.	
M 9/17.....	“Work and Play”; “Religion and the World.”	<b>II. Michael Oakeshott</b>
W 9/19.....	“The Voice of Poetry.”	A. Dissatisfied with Worldliness
M 9/24.....	“The Study of ‘Politics’ in a University.”	B. Discovering the Modes
W 9/26.....	“Rationalism in Politics.”	C. Critique of Ideology
M 10/1.....	“On Being Conservative.”	
W 10/3.....	“Tower of Babel.”	
M 10/8.....	No reading: Paper 1 due at class time	Review / Introduction to Leo Strauss
W 10/10.....	“What is Liberal Education”; Watch YouTube video of Prof. Nathan Tarcov, “Leo Strauss on Liberal Education.”	<b>III. Leo Strauss</b>
M 10/15.....	<i>Natural Right &amp; History</i> , intro and ch. 1.	A. Escaping the Limits of Our Time & Place
W 10/17.....	<i>Natural Right &amp; History</i> , pp. 35-58.	B. Questioning Historicism
M 10/22.....	<i>Natural Right &amp; History</i> , pp. 59-80.	C. Relativism & Nihilism (Max Weber)
W 10/24.....	“Progress or Return,” pp. 227-41.	D. Progressivism
M 10/29.....	“Progress or Return,” pp. 241-60.	E. Reason & Revelation
W 10/31.....	“Progress or Return,” pp. 260-70.	
M 11/5.....	YouTube video “The Dangers of Obedience” “Thinking and Moral Considerations.”	<b>IV. Hannah Arendt</b>
W 11/7.....	<i>The Human Condition (=HC)</i> , Prologue and pp. 7-21.	A. Political Problem of Thoughtlessness
M 11/12.....	<i>HC</i> ch. 2, pp. 22-78.	B. The <i>Vita Activa</i>
W 11/14.....	<i>HC</i> ch. 3, pp. 79-135	C. Loss of the Genuinely Public Realm
M 11/19.....	<i>HC</i> ch. 4, pp. 136-174.	D. Fetishizing Labor: Consumerism
W 11/21.....	<i>Start Thanksgiving Break</i>	E. Work: Instrumentalization and Meaninglessness
M 11/26.....	<i>HC</i> ch. 5, pp. 175-247	F. Possibilities & Perils of Politics
W 11/28.....	<i>HC</i> ch. 6, pp. excerpts from pp. 248-325.	G. Modern Age
M 12/3 .....	No reading. Paper 2 due at class time	<b>Review and Conclusion</b>
<b>Th 12/6, 2-4 pm.</b>	<b>Final Exam</b>	