

PSC 4383
CONTEMPORARY POLITICAL THEORY
‡

Four Critics of Modernity: Strauss, Voegelin, Oakeshott and MacIntyre

Spring 2005
Tuesdays and Thursdays 9:30-10:50
Draper 338

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REQUIRED BOOKS

1. Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (Notre Dame, 1984): ISBN: 0268006113
2. Michael Oakeshott, *Rationalism in Politics* (Liberty Fund, 1994): ISBN: 0865970955
3. Leo Strauss, *What is Political Philosophy?* (Chicago, 1988): ISBN: 0226777138
4. Emberly and Cooper, *Faith and Political Philosophy: The Correspondence between Leo Strauss and Eric Voegelin* (Missouri, 2004): ISBN: 0826215513

RECOMMENDED

The two quotations that appear at the end of this syllabus.

COURSE OVERVIEW

This course focuses on four seminal 20th century political theorists, who share a common preoccupation with the classics and who, in one way or another, employ the classics in an effort to gain critical perspective on modernity. None of these theorists is unequivocally opposed to modernity, but they are all critical of various aspects or propensities of modern political life. In their efforts to illuminate the problems of modern life, they touch on common themes that will become, for us, topics for reflection and comparison. The themes include (1) an effort to understand liberal education and political education (2) the question of what political philosophy *is*, (3) an attempt to describe aspects of modernity in terms of intellectual mistakes or vices (*e.g.*, “rationalism,” “gnosticism,” “historicism,” and “emotivism”) and (4) an interest in religion and its relationship to philosophy and politics.

GOALS

The goals of the course are for students (1) to see how ancient and medieval texts can be employed to gain perspective on contemporary life; (2) to encounter and appreciate four great contemporary political philosophers and their ideas; (3) to make further

progress in becoming attentive, reflective readers; (4) to acquire the knack of writing about philosophic masterpieces; and (5) to master the art of conversing about serious issues in a calm and sometimes playful way.

ATTENDANCE:

As the fruits of this course come largely by way of classroom conversation, attendance is required. In accordance with Baylor's policy on attendance, any student who misses more than seven scheduled class meetings will automatically fail the course, regardless of performance. Students who accumulate more than three absences should expect to see their grade for the course 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 purpose of our class sessions is not to repeat what is in the readings, but to understand the readings more deeply. We shall do this through conversation, and our conversations will only be fruitful if you are prepared to offer insights and appreciate the insights of others. All this presupposes *careful reading* 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 might even enjoy) the five ways in which your grade will be determined:

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

Quizzes and study questions designed to assist you in reading consistently and well will constitute 20% of the grade.

There will be *three papers* of 5 pages each, which are designed to prepare you for your final paper and will total 30% of the grade. A *final paper* of 8-10 pages will be worth 20% of the grade.

Lastly, a *final exam* will constitute 20% of the grade.

Participation-----	10%
Quizzes/Study Questions-----	20%
Three Short Papers-----	30%
Final Paper-----	20%
Final Exam-----	20%

GRADE SCALE:

100 - 90% = A	79 - 77% = C+	59 - 0% = F
89 - 87% = B+	76 - 70% = C	
86 - 80% = B	69 - 60% = D	

REQUIREMENTS OF GRADUATE STUDENTS

If you are taking this course for graduate credit, you will be expected to write a 5-7 page paper every other week on some aspect of the readings for the week. You will also be asked to participate in four extra class sessions over the course of the semester in which we shall discuss each of our four thinkers in greater depth. Dates for the extra sessions will be announced after the first day of class.

COURSE SCHEDULE

I. Michael Oakeshott

T, 1/11	Lee Auspitz, " Michael Joseph Oakeshott (1901-1990) "; Oakeshott, " Work and Play "
TH, 1/13	(No Class) "Political Education" in <i>RP</i>
T, 1/18	"The Study of Politics in a University" in <i>RP</i>
TH, 1/20	"Political Philosophy" (on blackboard)
T, 1/25	"A Philosophy of Politics" (on blackboard)
TH, 1/27	"On Being Conservative" in <i>RP</i>
T, 2/1	"Rationalism in Politics" in <i>RP</i>
TH, 2/3	"Religion in the World" (on blackboard)
T, 2/8	"The Tower of Babel" in <i>RP</i>
TH, 2/10	**First Paper Due: Oakeshott

II. Leo Strauss

T, 2/15	Thomas Pangle, "Introduction," in <i>The Rebirth of Classical Political Rationalism: An Introduction to the Thought of Leo Strauss</i> Gregory Bruce Smith, "Who Was Leo Strauss?" (on blackboard) Leo Strauss, "What is Liberal Education?" (on blackboard)
TH, 2/17	"Exoteric Teaching" (on blackboard) "On a Forgotten Kind of Writing" in <i>WPPh</i>
T, 2/22	"What is Political Philosophy?" in <i>WPPh</i>
TH, 2/24	"The Three Waves of Modernity" (on blackboard)
T, 3/1	"Progress or Return" (on blackboard)
TH, 3/3	"On Classical Political Philosophy" in <i>WPPh</i>
T, 3/8	"Jerusalem and Athens: Some Preliminary Reflections" in <i>S-VCor</i>
TH, 3/10	"Mutual Influence of Theology and Philosophy" in <i>S-VCor</i>
FR, 3/11	**Second Paper Due: Strauss

Recommended: David Schaefer, Jr., "[The Legacy of Leo Strauss: A Bibliographic Introduction](#)" *Intercollegiate Review* (Summer, 1974)

T, 3/15	SPRING BREAK
TH, 3/17	SPRING BREAK

III. Eric Voegelin

T, 3/22	John Hallowell, " <u>Eric Voegelin (1901-1985)</u> " <i>Intercollegiate Review</i> (Spring/Summer 1985)
	Sandoz, <i>Voegelinian Revolution</i> (excerpts on blackboard)
TH, 3/24	Voegelin, "Remembrance of Things Past" (on blackboard)
	"In Search of the Ground" (on blackboard)
T, 3/29	"Reason: The Classic Experience" (on blackboard)
	"On Classical Studies" (on blackboard)
TH, 3/31	<i>Science, Politics and Gnosticism</i> (excerpts)
T, 4/5	"The Gospel and Culture" in <i>S-VCor</i>
TH, 4/7	<i>Third Paper Due: Voegelin</i>
	Select correspondence between Strauss and Voegelin
	Select secondary essays in <i>S-VCor</i>

IV. Alasdair MacIntyre

T, 4/12 *After Virtue*
Ch. 1: "A Disquieting Suggestion" (1-5)
Ch. 2 "The Nature of Moral Disagreement Today & the Claims of Emotivism" (6-22)

TH, 4/14 DIADELOSO

T, 4/19 *After Virtue*
Ch. 4: "The Predecessor Culture and the Enlightenment Project of Justifying Morality" (pp. 36-50)
Ch. 5: "Why the Enlightenment Project of Justifying Morality had to Fail (pp. 51-61)

TH, 4/21 *After Virtue*
Ch. 9: "Nietzsche or Aristotle?" (pp. 109-120)
Ch. 14: "The Nature of the Virtues" (pp. 181-203)

T, 4/26 *After Virtue*
Ch. 15: "The Virtues, the Unity of a Human Life and the Concept of a Tradition" (pp. 204-225)

Ch. 18: "After Virtue: Nietzsche *or* Aristotle, Trotsky *and* St. Benedict" (pp. 256-63)

TH, 4/28 Review and Closing Reflections

Final Papers Due at the final exam period.

Two Recommended Quotations:

(1) On reading and reflecting: R. G. Collingwood, "Philosophy as a Branch of Literature"

The reader, on his side, must approach his philosophical author precisely as if he were a poet, in the sense that he must seek in his work the expression of an individual experience, something which the writer has actually lived through, and something which the reader must live through in his turn by entering into the writer's mind with his own. To the basic and ultimate task of following or understanding his author, coming to see what he means by sharing his experience, the task of criticizing his doctrine, or determining how far it is true and how far false, is altogether secondary. A good reader, like a good listener, must be quiet in order to be attentive; able to refrain from obtruding his own thoughts, the better to apprehend those of the writer; not passive, but using his activity to follow where he is led, not to find a path of his own. A writer who does not deserve this silent, uninterrupted attention does not deserve to be read at all.

In reading poetry this is all we have to do; but in reading philosophy there is something else. Since the philosopher's experience consisted in, or at least arose out of, the search for truth, we must ourselves be engaged in that search if we are to share the experience. . . . What we can get by reading any book is conditioned by what we bring to it; and in philosophy no one can get much good by reading the works of a writer whose problems have not already arisen spontaneously in the reader's mind. Admitted to the intimacy of such a man's thought, he cannot follow it in its movement, and soon loses sight of it altogether and may fall to condemning it as illogical or unintelligible, when the fault lies neither in the writer's thought nor in his expression, nor even in the reader's capacities, but only in the reader's preparation. If he lays down the book, and comes back to it ripened by several years of philosophical labour, he may find it both intelligible and convincing.

(2) On Conversation: Michael Oakeshott, "The Voice of Conversation in the Education of Mankind"

Conversation . . . springs from the movement of present minds disposed to intellectual adventure. Its enemies are the tedious, pertinacious talkers, resisting the flow without being able to give it a fresh direction; those who, like a worn gramophone record, distract the company by the endless repetition of what may have begun by being an observation but, on the third time round, becomes the indecent revelation of an empty mind; the noisy, the quarrelsome, the disputatious, the thrusters, the monopolists and the informers who carry books in their pockets and half-remembered quotations in their heads. Conversation cannot easily survive those who talk to win, who won't be silent until they are refuted, those who won't forget or who cannot remember, those who are too lazy to catch what comes their way or who (like men of putty) are too unresponsive to do anything but let it stick.