

“It is one of the assumptions of intellectual life in our country that there should be amongst us men whom we think of as political philosophers. Philosophers themselves and sensitive to philosophic change, they are to concern themselves with political and social relationships at the widest possible level of generality. They are to apply the methods and the conclusions of contemporary thought to the evidence of the contemporary social and political situation. For three hundred years of our history there have been such men writing in English, from the early seventeenth to the twentieth centuries, from Hobbes to Bosanquet. To-day, it would seem, we have them no longer. The tradition has been broken and our assumption is misplaced, unless it is looked on as a belief in the possibility that the tradition is about to be resumed. For the moment, anyway, political philosophy is dead.”

—Peter Laslett,

(1956)

Political Science 7995
Contemporary Political Theory
Fall 2016

In the 1940s and 1950s, the Walgreen Foundation sponsored a series of lectures at the University of Chicago that transformed the study of politics in the United States. In this seminar, we will read published books that resulted from the lectures by four pre-eminent scholars, all of them refugees from the Nazis in Europe. While we will place these works in the post-war context, a context defined both by the rise of totalitarianism and by the defeat of national socialism and fascism, we will also ask what they teach about the tradition of political philosophy more generally and what there is in their analyses of politics that speaks to our world today.

Instructor: James Stoner, poston@lsu.edu, Stubbs 214
(225) 578-2538 [office] or (504) 232-4399 [cell]

Office Hours: Tuesdays, 3:00-4:30
Thursdays, 10:00-11:30, and by appointment

Books available for purchase:

- F.A. Hayek, (Chicago, 2007; orig. 1944) [ISBN 9780226320557]
- Jacques Maritain, (CUA Press, 2012; orig. Chicago, 1951) [ISBN 9780813209050]
- Leo Strauss, (Chicago, 1953) [ISBN 9780226776941]
- Eric Voegelin, (Chicago, 1952) [ISBN 9780226861142]
- Hannah Arendt, , 2d ed. (Chicago, 1998; orig. 1958) [ISBN 9780226025988]
- Leo Strauss, (Chicago, 1995; orig. Free Press, 1958) [ISBN 9780226777023]

Course requirements:

- Attendance at all class sessions and participation in discussions [absence penalized]
- Five 500-word papers on the assigned reading, due before class (& read aloud), one on each of the principal books (a paper on Hayek can substitute for one on Strauss) [40%]
- Presentation of research (11/15, 11/22, or 11/29) [10%]
- Research paper, 25 pages, on an approved topic (topic due 10/28; paper due 12/8) [50%]

Grading scale: A+ (98%-100%), A (93%-97%), A- (90%-92%)
 B+ (88%-90%), B (83%-87%), B- (80%-82%), etc.

SYLLABUS:

I. The Mid-Century Context

Tues., 8/23 Introduction

Tues., 8/30 Hayek, , introduction, ch. 1-9, 14-16

II. Maritain

Tues., 9/6 Maritain, , ch. 1-4

Tues., 9/13 , ch. 5-7

III. Strauss I

Tues., 9/20 Strauss, , introduction, ch. 1-4

Tues., 9/27 , ch. 5-6

IV. Voegelin

Tues., 10/4 Voegelin, , introduction, ch. 1-3

Tues., 10/11 , ch. 4-6

V. Arendt

Tues., 10/18 Arendt, , prologue, ch. 1-4

Tues., 10/25 , ch. 5-6

Fri., 10/28