Office Hours: Fridays 12.30-2 or by appointment
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My book Political Philosophy: What It Is and Why It Matters (Cambridge University Press, 2014) is drawn directly from the Horizons course. So I’d urge people taking the course to purchase it since the chapters are commentaries on all of the thinkers dealt with in the course. (The course is a seminar course so I don’t give lectures, but if I did give lectures on these twelve thinkers, the chapters of my book would be those lectures.)

Intro. Jan. 6

Reading: Max Weber, "Science as a Vocation

1 HANNAH ARENDT Jan. 13

Reading: The Human Condition, Chap. IV ("Work")
[Videos of interviews with HA are readily available on the Internet. For an audio of an HA lecture, see: http://www.bard.edu/hannaharendtcenter/projects.html]
2  MICHAEL OAKESHOTT  Jan. 20
Reading: "Political Education"
Supplementary reading: the rest of Rationalism in Politics and Other Essays (original Methuen edition, or, even better, the expanded Liberty Press edition); K. Minogue, "Oakeshott and Political Science", Annual Review of Political Science 7 (2004): 227-46.

3  LEO STRAUSS  Jan. 27
Reading: "What is Political Philosophy?"
Supplementary reading: "Persecution and the Art of Writing" (in book of the same title, published by University of Chicago Press); Natural Right and History (University of Chicago Press); correspondence with Hans-Georg Gadamer [available from the instructor]; correspondence with Karl Löwith [available from the instructor]; Allan Bloom, "Leo Strauss", in Bloom, Giants and Dwarfs (Simon & Schuster); Stanley Rosen, Hermeneutics as Politics (OUP), Chap. 3; Stephen Holmes, The Anatomy of Antiliberalism (Harvard U.P.), Chap. 3; Beiner, Philosophy in a Time of Lost Spirit, Chap. 13 & exchange with Pangle in Appendix to Chap. 13. [For an audio of an LS lecture, see: http://leostrausscenter.uchicago.edu/meno_audio.shtml]

4  KARL LÖWITH  Feb. 3
Reading: "Nature, History, and Existentialism"; "The Quest for the Meaning of History"
5  ERIC VOEGELIN  
Feb. 10
Reading: The New Science of Politics, Chap. VI ("The End of Modernity")
Supplementary reading: the rest of The New Science of Politics; Faith and Political Philosophy, ed. Peter Emberley & Barry Cooper (Pennsylvania State U.P.). [A lecture by EV is available on a DVD entitled “Voegelin in Toronto.” Gadamer is also featured on the same DVD.]

6  SIMONE WEIL  
Feb. 10
Reading: The Need for Roots, Part I ("The Needs of the Soul")

7  HANS-GEORG GADAMER  
Feb. 17
Reading: "Hermeneutics as Practical Philosophy"; "Hermeneutics and Social Science"; "A Letter by Professor Hans-Georg Gadamer"
8  JÜRGEN HABERMAS  
March 3

Reading: The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity (MIT Press), Chap. XII: The Normative Content of Modernity.


[Videos of JH lectures & interviews are readily available on the Internet.]

9  MICHEL FOUCAULT  
March 10

Reading: Discipline and Punish, Part Three, section 3 ("Panopticism")


[Videos of MF lectures & interviews are readily available on the Internet.]

10  ALASDAIR MACINTYRE  
March 17


Supplementary reading: After Virtue (U. of Notre Dame Press); "The Privatization of Good", Review of Politics, Vol. 52 (1990), pp. 344-361; Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry, Chap. X ("Reconceiving the University as an Institution and the Lecture as a


11 JOHN RAWLS  
March 24

Reading: "Justice as Fairness: Political not Metaphysical"

12 RICHARD RORTY  
March 31

Reading: "The Priority of Democracy to Philosophy"

[Videos of RR lectures & interviews are readily available on the Internet.]
Seminar topics

1. How does the idea of "worldliness" function as a political category in Arendt's political philosophy, and how does it reorient our notions of politics (with respect to, for instance, the political relevance of art)?

2. In "Rationalism in Politics", Oakeshott writes: "The notion of founding a society, whether of individuals or of States, upon a Declaration of the Rights of Man is a creature of the rationalist brain, so also are 'national' or racial self-determination when elevated into universal principles. The project of the so-called Re-union of the Christian Churches, of open diplomacy, of a single tax, of a civil service whose members 'have no qualifications other than their personal abilities', of a self-consciously planned society, the Beveridge Report, the Education Act of 1944, Federalism, Nationalism, Votes for Women, the Catering Wages Act, the destruction of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the World State (of H.G. Wells or anyone else), and the revival of Gaelic as the official language of Eire, are alike the progeny of Rationalism. The odd generation of rationalism in politics is by sovereign power out of romanticism." Why is Oakeshott opposed to these various political projects, and how is his notion of "the pursuit of intimations" intended to help avert them?

3. "His politics were the politics of philosophy and not the politics of a particular regime" (Allan Bloom). Explain what this means, and discuss why one should be concerned with "the politics of philosophy".

4. Is Habermas's phrase, "Stoic retreat from historical consciousness", a fair characterization of Löwith's philosophical outlook?

5. What does Voegelin mean when he claims that "Hobbes countered the Gnostic immanentization of the eschaton which endangered existence by a radical immanence of existence which denied the eschaton" (p. 179)? What does Voegelin see as being at stake, politically, in this Hobbesian legacy (as well as the Puritan movement to which Hobbes was responding)?

6. How do you respond to Weil's suggestion that the notion of obligations is philosophically prior to the notion of rights?
7. In his letter to Richard Bernstein (Appendix to Bernstein's book, Beyond Objectivism and Relativism), Gadamer writes (in criticism of Habermas), "I cannot really make sense of a phronesis that is supposed to be scientifically disciplined, although I can imagine a scientific approach that is disciplined by phronesis". Explain what he means by this.

8. The three basic components of Habermas's theory are: the notion of communicative action; the idea of a "differentiation of value-spheres"; and a certain conception of the relationship between "system" and "lifeworld". How do these three components of the theory fit together so as to generate a distinctive account of "the normative content of modernity"?

9. If Foucault is right about modern society as such being "disciplinary" and bound up with techniques of ubiquitous surveillance, what becomes of the notions of autonomy and citizenship that we otherwise more or less take for granted?

10. What does MacIntyre mean by a "politics of local community"? What kinds of social and political transformation would be required in order to realize this politics?

11. Why does John Rawls believe that the best definition of liberalism is one that eschews "metaphysical" (broader moral-philosophical) commitments?

12. Is the idea of universal truth as dispensable as Rorty suggests? ("Priority of Democracy to Philosophy", p. 177: "For pragmatist social theory, ...truth is simply irrelevant").

Grading:
Seminar presentation: 30%
Class participation: 30%
Final essay, 15 pages, comparing two of the thinkers covered in this course (due April 10, 2017): 40% [By my math, that works out to at least 66 possible combinations of thinkers. That doesn’t count three-way comparisons, or comparisons with thinkers beyond these 12 – which I’m also open to as possibilities.]