

University of Toronto
Department of Political Science

Topics in Political Theory: Realist Political Theory

Political Science 381H1F

Fall 2020

Tentative syllabus: 25 August 2020

Note: this course is a semester-length version of a previous year-long course by the same name (Political Science 381Y1Y). Students who have completed Pol381Y1Y may not take this course for credit.

See below for a section on “Covid-19 and Special Circumstances”

INSTRUCTOR

Andrew Sabl (rhymes with “bauble”)

Professor of Political Science

Email: andrew.sabl@utoronto.ca

(Emails will be answered within 24 hours; feel free to re-send if one is not.)

Virtual office hours: Fridays, 3-5 p.m. (every week of the term except reading week).

Sign up for meetings via Calendly: <https://calendly.com/andrew-sabl/office-hour-meeting>

COURSE SESSIONS (“mixed synchronous/asynchronous with fully asynchronous option”)

(A) Recorded video lectures (2, sometimes 3) each week

—to be distributed on Quercus (under Files/Folder labeled with each week) on Monday evening and Wednesday morning (sometimes Tuesday evening for the second). Each video will typically last 20-25 minutes. The video lectures will therefore total 45-50 minutes per week.

[**Students must view the video lectures by Thursday each week in order to complete the participation assignment:** see “course requirements” below.]

(B) One synchronous session (mostly discussion) per week: Fridays 10:45 (sharp)-11:45 a.m., Toronto time (i.e. US/Canada Eastern time, GMT-5:00).

Note that this session will *not* take the full two hours allocated in the course catalogue but only a portion of that time.

The session will take place on Zoom. The meeting ID is 832 3437 9254. The password will be distributed to students via email before the class meeting.

The Friday sessions will be recorded, allowing for fully asynchronous instruction for those unable to make the Friday session. Students who choose not to attend synchronously will be expected to complete alternative participation requirements.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

In everyday talk, we have a decent idea what it means to call oneself a “realist” about politics. Realists pride themselves on having learned from hard experience to distrust both fancy talk and utopian moral aspirations. A little bit cynical or “hard-boiled” (though not necessarily malicious or evil), realists think that behind—or at least alongside—professed aspirations to morality or community lie the real currency of all politics: power on the one hand, self- or group interest on the other. They have a chastened, somewhat bleak view of human nature in which most people find it hard to care deeply about those very different (or distant) from themselves and prefer a quiet, comfortable life to risky endeavours in pursuit of social change.

What would a similar disposition look like in, or as, political theory? The main mode of political

theory has been called “ideal” (a term used by John Rawls, but other ideal theorists include (Plato, Rousseau, and Aquinas, and in our age, besides Rawls, Nozick, Dworkin, and most so-called “deliberative democrats). Ideal theorists seek to construct systematic, more or less universally valid theories of a just—or equal, or legitimate, or free—society, so as to be able to criticize existing institutions and practices for falling short of the ideal. Their methods and assumptions include: —*utopianism* (imagining perfect orders so as to attack existing ones); —*moralism* (a belief that justice and other moral principles should always trump nonmoral considerations, e.g. self- or group interest, self-preservation, and custom); — *rationalism* (a belief that people’s reason can and should govern their “base” passions); —*universalism* (a search for principles independent of time, place, and circumstance); —*harmonism* (a neologism: the conviction that much, perhaps all, political conflict is regrettable, a sign of bias or partiality, and that we should aspire to have much less of it).

The recent school of thought known as realist—or “political realist”—adopts the opposite assumptions. It begins from political and social experience, current and historical. While respecting the force of moral appeals, it does not treat them as sovereign as a matter of either fact or right: in politics, morality is typically one consideration among many. It doubts that most people most of the time are ruled by reason, much less the philosophically soundest reasons. It accepts the possibility that many political standards may differ according to time, place, circumstances (the level of wealth, the distribution of power, etc.), and regime type. It assumes that conflict is permanent and must be managed through non-rational means, including institutional design, rhetorical persuasion, the channeling of passions and interests towards more rather than less benign ends, and the deployment of one set of power to avoid another. It focuses not on idealized systems but on the perspective of agents and the requirements of real-world political action. And it insists that good political theory must always be based on a knowledge of, and respect for, real politics.

This course will explore the insights and virtues of the realist tradition. It will do this by exploring an alternative canon of political thinkers and, more briefly, contemporary contributions to the “realist revival” of political theory.

A central goal of the course is to show that when political theory avoids a one-sided emphasis on the justice and/or legitimacy of imagined institutions, it can consider—and has considered—a great many concerns of crucial and continuing importance to political life. These include: the way political decisions and institutions are driven by power and interest (and how to define those things); the real but partial role of moral claims as motivating some but not all political actions and judgments; the way in which human nature and moral psychology may limit political possibilities; the urgency of political order and the requirements of durable order; the role of initiative and invention in political life; the varieties of political character and leadership; the role of both institutions and countervailing political power (e.g. social movements) in preventing abuses of power; and the ways in which custom, habit, and history structure and limit, for better or worse, the political choices considered by human agents.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

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| 1. | 2 short papers (4-5 pages, 1100-1500 words)
Due October 12 and December 7 | Total Weight: 35%
(15% and 20%) |
| 2. | “Sentence outline” (instructions to follow: it’s a substantial effort) of each short paper
— due one week before each paper is due [i.e. October 5 and November 30) (Outlines will be graded leniently, mostly A-range—but lower grades will be given if the outline is missing or perfunctory.) | Total Weight: 10%
(5%/each outline) |

2. **Capstone assignment** **Weight: 35%**
Consisting of either (student choice)

(a) Exam (two hours)

—two different exams will be given, synchronously at two different stated times during assessment period—at two very different times of day (e.g. one exam e.g. 7-9 pm and the other 9-11 a.m.) to allow as many students as possible to take one of the exams regardless of personal circumstances and time differences.

—each exam will consist of two essays, with choice (e.g. “write on one of the following two prompts” in each of two sections).

—exams will be *open-book, open-notes but not therefore easy: substantial analysis and argument will be expected.*

or

(b) Capstone writing assignment involving an argument incorporating material from several different portions of the course: ca. 2900-3600 words (10-12 double-spaced pages). While taking the exam is probably easier, the capstone paper is provided as an alternative.

3. **Participation** **Total Weight: 20%**

Includes:

(a) attendance at Friday class meetings *or* completion of a short (150-word) response paper for every class meeting missed (graded sat/unsat)

(b) peer review of two fellow students’ sentence outlines (reviews graded sat/unsat based on whether you complete them)

—due five days before each paper is due (i.e. October 7 and December 2) a detailed grading rubric will be provided.

(c) submission by Thursday at 5 p.m. of questions for Friday’s class: one on the reading, one on the video lectures (graded sat-unsat). The Friday discussion will reflect student interest as revealed in these questions; discussion topics will be announced on Thursday evening or Friday morning before class.

All assignments should be turned in via Quercus: no hard copies will be accepted. The Assignments will all be under “Assignments” except for the exam which will be taken under “Quizzes”.

QUERCUS AND EMAIL

Course assignments and guidelines will be posted on Quercus. You **MUST** have a valid UTOR email and are expected to consult Quercus regularly as well as enabling prompt (same-day) Quercus announcements to allow communication of urgent matters.

The professor will respond to emails within 24 hours whenever possible. In the rare case that a substantive question is not answered within that time, you should feel free to send it again, and will never be marked down for (politely!) repeating your inquiry. *Please consult the syllabus or Quercus before asking questions that are answered there.*

WRITING ESSAYS

This course assumes that you are prepared to work on improving your prose style and argumentative skill. Moreover, it regards clear, well-structured, and forceful writing as the hallmark of strong analytic and synthetic thought. Passive, indirect constructions let a writer get away with not stating and defending—in other words, possibly not having—a definite position. The Writing at U of T website (<http://writing.utoronto.ca/>) contains a variety of online resources, links to writing centers, and other forms of support. Writing assistance is also available through every college. *You are strongly encouraged to take extensive advantage of all these resources.* Not only the worst but also the best writers are constantly trying to improve.

Other resources for improving your writing will be posted on Quercus.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Plagiarism is a serious academic offense and will be dealt with accordingly. Students must read “Tips for Avoiding Academic Misconduct” <http://www.artsci.utoronto.ca/osai/students/avoid-misconduct/tips-for-avoiding-academic-misconduct> and the University’s “How not to Plagiarize” document, <http://advice.writing.utoronto.ca/using-sources/how-not-to-plagiarize/> and are encouraged to discuss with the instructors if they are unsure of what constitutes plagiarism or academic dishonesty. Plagiarism applies not only to essays, but also to more informal forms of writing.

SUBMITTING PAPERS AND OTHER ASSIGNMENTS: TURNITIN.COM

Normally, students will be required to submit their course assignments and essays to Turnitin.com for a review of textual similarity and detection of possible plagiarism. In doing so, students will allow their work to be included as source documents in the Turnitin.com reference database, where they will be used solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism. The terms that apply to the University’s use of the Turnitin.com service are described on the Turnitin.com web site.

You should ensure that you have an electronic copy and a backup copy (hard copy, or an electronic copy stored somewhere other than the device on which the original is) of all work submitted, and you are strongly advised to retain the rough work, notes, and draft material that went into the essay or assignment.

Students have the right to refuse to use Turnitin.com. In this case, students will be expected to submit an electronic copy of their essay to the professor by email, accompanied by their outline, thesis statement and annotated bibliography, as well all their notes and rough drafts, **by the time each paper would normally be due on TurnItIn.**

LATE WORK POLICY

Late papers and other assignments will be penalized three points on the 100-point U of T grading scale per day late or part thereof. Exceptions may be granted to students who have faced serious medical or other emergencies, and who have substantial and convincing documentation fully accounting for the length of delay. If you are facing such a situation, inform the instructor as soon as possible—and, whenever possible, *before* the assignment is due.

CLASS ATTENDANCE/PARTICIPATION:

Students are expected to complete the readings listed for each video lecture *before* watching the lecture. You are also expected to download and print out the handout that will be provided as a reference point for each video lecture: it will contain an outline of the lecture and relevant quotations. The lectures will not summarize the reading. On the contrary, they will assume that you have covered the reading material and will therefore analyze or explain the reading, or place it in a larger context. The papers as well as the fall and end-of-year exams will be based on material covered in both the readings and the class lectures and discussion.

COVID-19 AND SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES

The coronavirus has, to put it mildly, disrupted everyone's plans. That you are taking (and the instructor is preparing) the course online is of course not standard in the first place. Many of you also have personal circumstances that make online instruction more difficult: from technical limitations (poor internet connections) to living situations in which private learning is difficult. Some of you may even be taking the course from another time zone or another country.

I am determined to be sensitive to all such circumstances and to accommodate them whenever possible (e.g. by adapting assignments). Some course features are already designed to do so. The video lectures will adopt a reasonable frame rate so as not to require huge amounts of data; the fully asynchronous option regarding class discussion is meant to accommodate both those who want live interaction and those for whom such interaction is not easy or not possible; the capstone essays as an alternative to the fall exam is meant for similar purposes. All readings are available in electronic form, and alternatives are available such that all of them can be accessed without cost. Please contact me, however, with any special circumstances that have not been covered here. I will try to do what I can to accommodate those circumstances—with the proviso that we will have to settle on some way that I can monitor whether you have learned the course material.

TEXTS

Five books (though by no means the whole of each book) will be assigned in this course. Two are available online through the U of T library. The other two unfortunately are not, and the library cannot obtain electronic versions of them from the publishers. Because placing books on reserve is not possible due to covid-19, students will also be permitted to read, and cite, editions of those two books that *are* available online: see the details below.

Though some of these books are long, reading will typically consist of less than 80 pages a week—often much less if the material is dense and/or difficult. Only portions of the big books will be assigned. Although you are encouraged to refer to used copies, please use the editions assigned, so that we are all literally on the same page and using the same translation. That said, the instructor will refer to universal indicators (e.g. section and paragraph number) whenever possible and available, to allow for cross-referencing.

All other required course readings will be available online, either as copyright-compliant postings on the course Quercus site or as links to the University of Toronto Libraries electronic collection (see below).

You are responsible for completing all readings by the dates indicated on the syllabus (i.e. *before* the lecture in which they will be discussed).

All the readings marked on the syllabus are required, unless otherwise stated. Readings may be modified at the Instructor's discretion – you must consult Quercus regularly for new, revised or updated assignments.

Assigned books (in alphabetical order; the numbers at the end are ISBN-13 numbers for easier used book shopping.

Raymond Geuss, *Philosophy and Real Politics* (Princeton Univ. Press, 2008). ISBN-13: 9780691137889. Available online through U of T library: <https://search.library.utoronto.ca/details?8844788>

Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and John Jay, *The Federalist* (originally published in serial form, 1787-88). The instructor will be using the Gideon edition, ed. George W. Carey and James McClellan (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2001 [1818]). This edition is available online [here](#) through the Online Library of Liberty. You may also use other online or print editions, as are widely available, or ebooks (free).

Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. Edwin Curley (Hackett Publishing Co., 1994). ISBN-13: 9780872201774. This edition is available through the U of T library here: <https://search.library.utoronto.ca/details?12629431>
Other editions are widely available, in print and online, but the Curley edition is convenient because it modernizes Hobbes' archaic spelling and punctuation.

Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, trans. Harvey C. Mansfield (2d. ed., Univ. of Chicago Press, 1998). ISBN-13: 9780226500447.

Max Weber, *The Vocation Lectures*, trans. Rodney Livingstone, ed. David Owen and Tracy B. Strong (Hackett Publishing Co., 2004). ISBN-13: 9780872206656.

The listed translations of Machiavelli and Weber are highly recommended (since many translations, especially older ones that are free, are very misleading). Both are available as e-books but, regrettably, not through U of T library. I recommend buying both books since they are quite cheap as paperbacks. But if you genuinely cannot afford them you may use
— the Oxford University Press translation (2005) of *The Prince*, by Peter Bondarella, which is quite good and available through the library: <https://search.library.utoronto.ca/details?8960384>
—The Palgrave Macmillan translation of Weber's "Politics as a Vocation", available as a chapter of the larger collection *Weber's Rationalism and Modern Society: New Translations on Politics, Bureaucracy, and Social Stratification*, ed. and trans. Tony Waters and Dagmar Waters (U of T link: <https://search.library.utoronto.ca/details?12031741&uuid=9e919fbb-f4f6-48d0-a8ef-c22963d0bdf3>).

That translation is fine but a bit clunky and pedantic. So I recommend buying the paperback (or an e-book)

CLASS SCHEDULE

Note that the first two lectures each week, on Monday evening and Wednesday morning, will be videos uploaded on Quercus under "Files"

Note also that the reading listed under each lecture should be completed *before* the lecture. All readings that are not part of the five books assigned will be available in Quercus under "Files" or as a U of T library link listed below.

I. Introduction (Week 1)

Sept. 7: Course introduction, mechanics, and format.
No reading.

Sept. 9: The realist attitude towards politics.

Recommended reading:

Zoltán Gábor Szücs, "Realism and Utopianism Reconsidered: A Political Theoretical Reading of *A Song of Ice and Fire*." In *Utopian Horizons*, ed. Zsolt Czigányik: 219-237. Budapest: Central European University Press, 2017 (posted on Quercus).

September 11: Light discussion. Do submit a question on the reading and one on the lectures (see "participation" above). Please do watch the lectures, which will contain crucial information, but we will probably end discussion before the usual 11:45 time.

II. The nature of realist theory (Week 2)

A. Realist vs. idealist political theory

September 16

Reading:

Raymond Geuss, *Philosophy and Real Politics*, Introduction, pp. 1-18.

William Galston, "Realism in Political Theory", *European Journal of Political Theory* 9, No. 4 (2010): 385-411.

B. Moralism vs. the values of politics

September 18

Reading:

Bernard Williams, "Realism and Moralism in Political Theory", in *In the Beginning Was the Deed* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005): 1-17.

September 20: Discussion; topics to be chosen by student interest (see "participation" above).

III. Political immoralism and the autonomy of politics: Machiavelli (Weeks 3-4)

A. Agency and Institutions; realism vs. moral constraints

September 21

Reading:

—Machiavelli's letter to Francesco Vettori (10 Dec. 1513), pp. 107-111 of the Mansfield translation of *The Prince* (will be posted on Quercus for students using other editions).

—*The Prince*, Dedicatory Letter and Chapters 1-14 (pp. 3-60).

September 23

Reading:

—Re-read carefully chapters 8 and 9 of the above.

September 25

Discussion.

B. Machiavelli's method
 "Effectual truth" vs. imagination; technology (political and scientific)

Sept. 28-30

Reading:

Machiavelli, *The Prince*, Chapters 15-26.

Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy*, trans. Harvey C. Mansfield and Nathan Tarcov (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996): Book I, chapters 9-10, 14, and sections 4-5 of chapter 16; Book III, chapters 1 and 3 (that's pp. 28-33, 41-2, 35-47, 209-121, 214-15): selections available under "Files" on Quercus.

October 2: Discussion

SENTENCE OUTLINE FOR FIRST PAPER (on Machiavelli or Introductory articles) DUE MONDAY, OCTOBER 5, at 10 p.m. (via Quercus)

PEER REVIEW OF OTHER STUDENTS' SENTENCE OUTLINES DUE WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 7, at 6 p.m. (via Quercus)

IV. Realist nature and utopian commonwealths: Hobbes (Weeks 5-6)

A. Power and interest; political honour and dishonour

October 5 and 7

Reading:

Hobbes, *Leviathan*

Skim chapters 1, 2, 3, 8; Read Introduction and chapters 4-7, 9, 10, 11, 13, 17, the last paragraph of 18, and 26.¹

October 9: Discussion.

MONDAY, OCTOBER 12: FIRST PAPER DUE (via Quercus), 10 p.m.

B. Thomas Hobbes, Idealist?

The artificial commonwealth and its authority; will as a realist category (or not); the (attempted?) displacement of religion.

October 12 and 14

Reading:

Hobbes, *Leviathan*: Chapters 12, 14-20, 22, 43, 46, 47, Review and Conclusion.

October 16: Discussion

¹ Curley includes in his edition his own translation of some chapters of the Latin edition of *Leviathan* whose sense differs from the English version published in Hobbes's time. *Feel free to ignore these translations from the Latin* (marked "OL" by Curley): the English version, and only that, is assigned.

V. Political reflections on human nature: *The Federalist* (Weeks 7-8)

A. Institutional design

Political science and technologies of representation; security and commerce; justifying vs. checking power.

October 19

Reading: *The Federalist*, Nos. 1-4, 6, 9, 11, 48-9, 63.

B. Political problems and their (partial) solutions

Causes and remedies of faction; fame, interest, and political office; divisions of political labour.

October 21

Reading: *The Federalist*, Nos. 10, 51, 70-72.

October 23: Discussion.

C. "Instruction week": focus on techniques of close reading and interpretation, and possibly current events (very little reading!).

October 26

Close reading of one *Federalist* paper: to be announced

October 28

Close reading of one *Federalist* paper: to be announced

October 30

Discussion: close reading of one *Federalist* paper, chosen by student interest (need not be one that was assigned).

VI. Political ethics and political action: Weber (Weeks 9-10)

A. Institutions and Actors

Political crisis as context; administration as temptation to anti-politics; violence as the limit case of power; mass politics and the alienation of elites.

November 2-4

Reading: *Politics as a Vocation*: pages to be announced. The November 4 video lecture may focus partly on the U.S. election (which will take place November 3), and if so may be posted Wednesday afternoon or evening instead of Wednesday morning as usual.

November 6: Discussion. May focus partly on the US election.

November 9-13: READING WEEK. NO CLASS.

B. Ethics and Action

Agency, leadership, and "spiritual proletarianization"; political ethics (conviction and responsibility); ethical pluralism and the limits of reason.

November 16-18

Reading: *Politics as a Vocation*: pages to be announced.

November 20: Discussion.

VII. Realism and Liberal Democracy: The Liberalism of Fear (Week 11)

November 23: Avoiding the worst—metaphysical eclecticism, suffering, and pessimism.

Reading:

Judith N. Shklar, "The Liberalism of Fear", in *Liberalism and the Moral Life*, ed. Nancy L. Rosenblum (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989): 21-38 (posted on Quercus).

November 25: The priority of injustice and realist moral psychology

Reading:

Shklar, "The Sense of Injustice", in *The Faces of Injustice* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1990), 83-126: focus on 83-91, 101-111 (posted on Quercus).

November 27: Discussion.

VIII: Review and Conclusion (Week 12)

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 30: SENTENCE OUTLINE FOR SECOND PAPER DUE (via Quercus), 10 P.M.

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 2: PEER REVIEWS OF OTHERS' SENTENCE OUTLINES DUE (via Quercus), 6 P.M.

November 30

Readings to be announced from Raymond Geuss and/or Bernard Williams

December 2

Concluding lecture

December 4: Review session—students to come prepared with questions (as well as submitting some ahead of class, as part of the usual Thursday participation).

MONDAY, DECEMBER 7: SECOND PAPER DUE (via Quercus), 10 p.m.

During exam ("assessment") period: students to take a two-hour open-book exam during one of two two-hour periods, by student choice. (See "requirements") or write a capstone paper due as late in the term as U of T allows.