

University of Toronto
Department of Political Science

Topics in Political Theory: Realist Political Theory

Political Science 381H1F Lecture 0201

Fall 2022

Syllabus date: 10 September 2022

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

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.**)

Office location: Sidney Smith, Room 3030.

Office hours (a.k.a. student meeting hours, whether or not you have a particular problem):

Wednesdays, 6:15-7:15 p.m.; Thursdays, 4:30-5:30 p.m.

Please sign up via Calendly: calendly.com/andrew-sabl/office-hour-meeting

In person: Sidney Smith, Room 3030.

Meetings at other times are also possible, including Zoom meetings for good reasons: please email. However, please schedule a meeting for office hours if at all possible.

COURSE SESSIONS: Wednesdays, 4-6 p.m.

Location: Claude. T. Bissel building (BL), room 313.

The class will meet in person. A hybrid option will not be offered.

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.

Ideal theorists' 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 passions or mere preferences.

- *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.
- Finally, 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 17 October and 5 December | Total Weight: 45% |
| 2. | Course exam

The exam will last three hours and will be offered in person.
It will cover all the material in the course and will be closed-book, closed-notes.
It will consist of two essay questions, with choice. | Weight: 45% |
| 3. | Participation | Total Weight: 10% |

Includes:

(a) attendance at Wednesday class meetings (attendance will be recorded).

(b) quality of class participation during those meetings, with the caveat that participation opportunities may be limited if enrollment is high.

The papers should be turned in via Quercus: no hard copies will be accepted. The Paper assignments will be under assignments.

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:

Normally, students will be required to submit their course assignments to the University’s plagiarism detection tool website for a review of textual similarity and detection of possible plagiarism. In doing so, students will allow their material to be included as source documents in the University’s plagiarism detection tool 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 University’s plagiarism detection tool service are described on the company web site.

[The above statement is required by the University and may not be modified by the instructor. However, because it is baffling to mention the “company web site” without specifying the company, I am happy to add that U of T will, as far as I know, be using a tool called Ouriginal—AS.]

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 the university’s plagiarism tool. 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. **It is the instructor’s intention to be understanding and lenient when students face difficult circumstances, but please contact me as far in advance as possible and provide as much detail as is consistent with university rules, medical privacy, etc.**

CLASS ATTENDANCE/PARTICIPATION:

Students are expected to complete the readings listed for each lecture/discussion session before that session takes place. You are also expected to download and print out the handout that will be provided as a reference point for each lecture: it will contain an outline of the lecture as well as 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

As of this writing, covid-19 is not as disruptive as it was in previous academic years, and it is expected that learning will take place in person. However, this may change without notice, and course delivery may end up becoming virtual. Even if that is not the case, any student (or the instructor!) may have to miss specific classes, or provide them virtually, if those individuals come down with covid-19 infections.

I am determined to be sensitive to all such circumstances and to accommodate them whenever possible (e.g. by adapting assignments). 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 as of this writing, 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' mid-seventeenth-century 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

I. Introduction (Week 1): 14 September

Course introduction, mechanics, and format; the realist attitude towards politics.

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).

Recommended Viewing: "Game Of Thrones Season 8 Finale, Tyrion And Jon Scene", <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=En4QJ2G0dL0>, posted 19 May 2019. The relevant part begins around 2:30.

(Discussion will probably be a little light, and the session will probably not last two hours.)

II. The nature of realist theory (Week 2): 21 September

Realist vs. idealist political theory; Moralism vs. the values of politics.

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.

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

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

Week 3: 28 September

Agency and institutions; realism vs. moral constraints

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). Pay special attention to Chapter 8-9.

Week 4: 5 October

"Effectual truth" vs. imagination; technology (political and scientific)

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, 45-47, 209-212, 214-15): selections available under "Files" on Quercus.

IV. Political reflections on human nature: *The Federalist* (Weeks 5-6)

Week 6 (12 October): "Instruction week"—focus on techniques of close reading and interpretation, and possibly current events (very little reading!).

Reading: close reading of two *Federalist* papers chosen by the instructor, and possibly one determined by student interest.

MONDAY, 17 OCTOBER: FIRST PAPER DUE (via Quercus), 10 p.m. (on material covered through week 4)

Week 6: 19 October (*The Federalist*, continued).

A. Institutional design: political science and technologies of representation; security and commerce; justifying vs. checking power.

B. Political Problems and their (partial) solutions: Causes and remedies of faction; fame, interest, and political office; divisions of political labour.

Reading: The Federalist, Nos. 1-4, 6, 9, 10, 11, 48-9, 51, 63, 70-72.

V. Realist nature and utopian commonwealths: Hobbes (Weeks 7-8)

Week 7: 26 October

Power and interest; political honour and dishonour

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

Week 8: 2 November

“Thomas Hobbes, Idealist?": The artificial commonwealth and its authority; will as a realist category (or not); the (attempted?) displacement of religion.

Reading:

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

NOVEMBER 9: U of T READING WEEK—NO CLASS. (No regular office hours; individual meetings may be scheduled via Zoom).

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

Week 9 (November 16): 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.

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

Week 10 (November 23): Ethics and Action

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

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

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.

VII. Realism and Liberal Democracy: The Liberalism of Fear

Week 11: November 30.

- A. Avoiding the worst—metaphysical eclecticism, suffering, and pessimism.
- B. The priority of injustice and realist moral psychology.

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).
 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).

MONDAY, DECEMBER 5: SECOND PAPER DUE (via Quercus), 10 p.m.

(Requests for turning in papers late will typically be granted; the due date is Monday to avoid conflicting with term tests.)

VIII: Review and Conclusion

Week 12: December 7.

- A. Concluding lecture. Some reference will be made to the following readings, which should be considered helpful but optional:
 - Andrew Sabl, “Realist Liberalism: An Agenda,” *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy* 20, No. 3 (2017): 349-364.
 - Andrew Sabl, “Realist Disobedience”, forthcoming in *Cambridge Companion to Civil Disobedience*, ed. William E. Scheuerman (Cambridge, England: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2021). (Both of these are posted on Quercus under Files/Week 12).
- B. Review session: students to come prepared with questions.

COURSE EXAM: DAY AND TIME TO BE ANNOUNCED. THREE HOURS, IN-PERSON, CLOSED-BOOK, CLOSED-NOTES.