The University of Texas at Austin
Government 382M
Unique # 38920
The Political Thought of Leo Strauss
Fall 2011

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Office Hours: Friday 8:30 – 11:30

Course Description

Leo Strauss has come to be recognized by many as one of the most significant – and now one of the most controversial – thinkers of the past century. In this course, we will explore his thought through a close study of his most famous and comprehensive work, *Natural Right and History*, which we will read together with a number of supplementary essays. We will focus on the great themes of Strauss's work: his critique of historicism and relativism; his confrontation with the theologico-political problem; his recovery of classical political philosophy; and his resurrection of the quarrel between the ancients and the moderns. Although Strauss's work has become the focus of intense debate, this course has been designed in accord with Strauss's own maxim that it is best try to understand the thinker as he understood himself.

Main Text

Available at the Co-op.

Natural Right and History, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965 [1953].

Additional Texts

Note: All of these texts are on course reserve at the PCL library. Since we will be reading only selections from them, you may prefer to copy the relevant sections rather than purchasing the books. Then again, you may prefer to have the books themselves.

Philosophy and Law: Contributions to the Understanding of Maimonides and His Predecessors, translated by Eve Adler, Albany: SUNY Press, 1995.

The Rebirth of Classical Political Rationalism: An Introduction to the Thought of Leo

Strauss, selected and introduced by Thomas L. Pangle, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989.

What Is Political Philosophy? And Other Studies, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988 [1959].

Studies in Platonic Political Philosophy, with an Introduction by Thomas L. Pangle, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983.

Political Philosophy: Six Essays, edited with an Introduction by Hilail Gildin, Indianapolis: Pegasus, 1975. (Or *An Introduction to Political Philosophy: Ten Essays by Leo Strauss*, edited with an Introduction by Hilail Gildin, Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1989.)

Spinoza's Critique of Religion, translated by Elsa M. Sinclair, New York: Schocken Books, 1965. (Or the later edition published by the University of Chicago Press).

Heinrich Meier, *Leo Strauss and the Theologico-Political Problem*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006.

Requirements and Grading

Seminar Paper: 60%

This 12-15 page analytical essay will be due on Monday, December 5. You should come up with your own topic, but I will be happy to discuss possible topics with you. Late papers will be marked down 10 points for initial lateness, and 5 points for each day of lateness beyond the first. Incompletes will not be granted.

Three papers of 2-3 pages: 20%

For these brief papers, I will offer topics at least seven times during the semester. You are required to write three of them. They will be due at the beginning of class one week after they are assigned. Late papers will not be accepted. I will write brief comments on these papers, but I will not grade them. I will, however, consider the quality of these papers over the course of the semester in determining your final grade.

Class participation: 20%

NOTE: Plus/minus grades will be used in final grading.

Students with disabilities may request appropriate academic accommodations from the Division of Diversity and Community Engagement, Services for Students with Disabilities, 471-6259.

Course Plan

This rough schedule is subject to revision as dictated by the pace of our discussions.

Note: The first reading listed for each meeting, with two exceptions (September 22 and 29), is from *Natural Right and History* and will be the focus of our in-class discussions.

August 25	Introduction of *Natural Right and History*
	"The Living Issues of German Postwar Philosophy" (*Leo Strauss and the Theologico-Political Problem*)
September 1	Chapter 1, "Natural Right and the Historical Approach"
	"An Introduction to Heideggerian Existentialism" (*The Rebirth of Classical Political Rationalism*)
	"Political Philosophy and History" (*What is Political Philosophy?*)
September 8	Chapter 2, "Natural Right and the Distinction between Facts and Values"
	"'Relativism'" (*The Rebirth of Classical Political Rationalism*)
September 15	Chapter 2, "Natural Right and the Distinction between Facts and Values"
	"Philosophy as Rigorous Science and Political Philosophy" (*Studies in Platonic Political Philosophy*)
September 22	Digression on the Theologico-Political Problem
	"The Mutual Influence of Theology and Philosophy" (*The Independent Journal of Philosophy* 3)
	Preface to *Spinoza's Critique of Religion*
September 29	Digression on the Theologico-Political Problem

	"Reason and Revelation" (*Leo Strauss and the Theologico-Political Problem*)
	"Jerusalem and Athens" (*Studies in Platonic Political Philosophy*)
October 6	Chapter 3, "The Origin of the Idea of Natural Right"
	"Progress or Return?" (*The Rebirth of Classical Political Rationalism*)
October 13	Chapter 4, "Classic Natural Right"
	"On Classical Political Philosophy" (*The Rebirth of Classical Political Rationalism*)
October 20	Chapter 4, "Classic Natural Right"
	"What Is Political Philosophy?" (*What Is Political Philosophy*?)
	"On a New Interpretation of Plato's Political Philosophy" (*Social Research* 13:3)
October 27	Chapter 5, "Modern Natural Right: Hobbes"
November 3	Chapter 5, "Modern Natural Right: Hobbes"
	Introduction of *Philosophy and Law*
	"On the Basis of Hobbes's Political Philosophy" (*What Is Political Philosophy*?)
November 10	Chapter 5, "Modern Natural Right: Locke"
	"Locke's Doctrine of Natural Law" (*What is Political Philosophy?*)
November 17	Chapter 6, "The Crisis of Modern Natural Right: Rousseau"
	"On the Intention of Rousseau" (*Social Research* 14)

	"The Three Waves of Modernity" (*Political Philosophy*)
December 1	Chapter 6, "The Crisis of Modern Natural Right: Burke"