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**PLATO, AUGUSTINE, SPINOZA: WHAT IS THE POLITICAL?**

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GOV 382K ▪ Unique 39055  
Spring 2013  
Meets Thursdays 7-10 pm  
Place: Mezes 1.104

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Office M/W 7:30-9 am

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This seminar provides a pointed introduction to the broad and heterogeneous field of Political Theory, focusing on three major periods of Western thought by focusing on one of the most important authors in each. The seminar is alive to differences among very distinct approaches to political theory and to strategies in writing philosophical texts. Our approach is not in terms of the history of philosophy, and we do not proceed chronologically; we seek to read our authors in conversation with each other.

Plato, Augustine, and Spinoza each display a keen sense of the melancholy of this-worldly finitude, particularly with regard to the crookedness of human timber and the frailty of political community. For Plato, humankind is encumbered by the appetitive part of the soul; Augustine points to original sin and the earthly citizen within each of us; Spinoza speaks of our inescapable bondage to the passions. In contemplating the question, “What is the political?”, all three appeal to an otherworldly standard by which to identify and illuminate the crookedness and frailty of the finite world. That is, they brilliantly limn the profound limitations of what political community might be capable of — in the large sense that links politics with the whole of human experience — by invoking a sense of transcendence in the sense of orienting this-worldly political community on otherworldly perfections not given to man. They picture things wholly beyond, even foreign to humankind: the otherworldly as that which men imagine, as the divinely transcendental, ideal, and sublimely beautiful truth that transfigures the reader. We moderns tend to view matters differently, as in contemporary this-worldly approaches that see man in a thoroughly naturalistic way. In its own way, a naturalistic approach also limns the melancholy of human and natural finitude and the limits of what is possible through design of political community. This seminar evaluates the respective efforts of Plato, Augustine, and Spinoza to guide political community by positing normative standards not limited in the ways that common human understanding, behavior, and experience are. It thematizes the presuppositions of our time even as it explores politics as understood in classical Greek thought, in early Christianity, and in the early modern era.

**REQUIRED TEXTS**

Spinoza: *Theological-Political Treatise* (Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy)  
Ed. J. Israel, trans. M. Silverthorne and J. Israel, 2012. ISBN 0-531-53097-0

Plato: *Gorgias, Menexenus, Protagoras* (Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought) Ed. M. Schofield, trans. T. Griffith, 2012. ISBN 0521546001

Augustine: *The City of God against the Pagans*, ed. and trans. R.W. Dyson (Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought), 1998. ISBN 0521468434

## EVALUATION

Course grade based on regular attendance and well-prepared participation as well as one 2-page paper written for each session, to be submitted to our Blackboard website every Wednesday by 6 pm. Each week these papers will generate points of departure for in-class analysis. *Seriatim* each student will be responsible for writing a short summary of a class discussion, to be presented at the beginning of the following session. This is a seminar in close, textual reading and thoughtful, careful discussion. Grading: A = 4.00, A- = 3.67, B+ = 3.33, B = 3.00, B- = 2.67, C+ = 2.33, C = 2.00, C- = 1.67, D+ = 1.33, D = 1.00, D- = 0.67, F = 0.00. Final grades will include pluses or minuses, as warranted.\*

## SCHEDULE OF READINGS AND TOPICS FOR EACH SESSION

**January 17:** Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise* (1670), Preface and chs. 1, 2, 3: outlining of the problem: fear, superstition, and the encroachments of organized religion; prophet and Prophecies: on the natural and human origins of Scripture; the “chosen people” as a political people; the secret: of the success of the Jewish people: obedience

**January 24:** chs. 4, 5, 6: the divine law as intellectual love of God (and ultimately charity); gaining compliance to the divine law; communicating the divine law to people of limited intellects; connecting religious rites with political ends; the limits of myopic self-interest; the limits of coercion; how to make people eager to fulfill their civic duties; the function of historical narrative in Scripture; the psychological origin or “miracles”

**January 31:** chs. 7, 8, 9: problems stemming from bad Scriptural interpretation; scriptural interpretation as a Baconian science; that Moses did not really write the Pentateuch

**February 7:** chs. 10, 11, 12, 13: were the Apostles prophets or teachers? modifying themes for audiences; the need for commands. the real meaning of divine law: obedience and charity

**February 14:** chs. 14, 15, 16: on the need for a civil religion and its tenets; on the separation of faith and philosophy; Spinoza’s state of nature, social contract, and principles of the state; natural right, absolute sovereignty, democracy

**February 21, with guest Prof. David Williams (DePaul University):** chs. 17, 18, 19, 20: how to inspire obedience to the laws; controlling minds; the challenges of constitutional design; lessons from the Jewish theocracy: what can and should be adapted

beyond their state and what cannot and should not; that church and state *should not* be separated; freedom of conscience and freedom of speech

**February 28:** Plato, *Gorgias* (around 380 B.C.E), Stephanus pagination 447a-461b, on rhetoric: Why dialogue rather than long speeches? What is the object, and what is the value, of rhetoric? How is an orator political? What is the difference between a persuader and a teacher? Are abuses of rhetoric inevitable?

**March 7:** pagination 461b-481b, on rhetoric, power, injustice, and punishment: What is the significance of Polus's relative youth compared to Gorgias? How is rhetoric like baking pastry? How does rhetoric rely on deception? How is doing what one wants different from doing what one sees fit? Is it right to pity the wicked? Is it better to do wrong or to suffer wrong? Is the unjust individual, or tyrant, happy or miserable? What is the purpose of punishment?

**March 21, with guest Prof. Devin Stauffer (UT):** pagination 481b-491d: on rhetoric and philosophy: What is the difference between the "beloveds" of Callicles and Socrates? What is Callicles' criticism of conventional justice and of philosophy? Does Callicles have a conception of virtue? What is the source of the laws: justice or the rationalization of weakness in constraining the powerful? Does Callicles advocate anything not already present in Athenian imperial politics? Are philosophers childish?

**March 28:** pagination 491d-509b: on hedonism, desire, pleasure, pain, courage, and wisdom: Why does the conversation turn to the contest between hedonism and moderation? What are the arguments on each side of that contest? How does noble rhetoric differ from ignoble rhetoric? What is an "orderly soul" and how is it relevant to politics? What is the good life?

**April 4:** pagination 509b-527e: on power, politics, rhetoric, and myth: Is the virtuous man simply prey to others? Does anyone actually will to do wrong? Who are Callicles's heroes and why? Why does Socrates condemn Pericles and is he right to do so? Why does Socrates end with a discussion of the afterlife? What does this have to do with politics and with rhetoric?

**April 11:** Augustin, *The City of God* (426) Book II, Chapters 2, 21: why the book was written; the Two Cities (City of God and City of Man) and their relationship; Scipio's definition of the commonwealth

**April 18:** Book V, Chapters 12-21: the different loves -- for freedom, glory, power -- by which Rome was guided in different phases of its development (coupled with Augustine's critique of Scipio's definition of the commonwealth, this provides the basis for a political sociology); how a vice (in particular, love of glory) can for a time seem to imitate a virtue by keeping even worse vices in check; why this strategy is bad for the soul; why, paradoxically, using one vice to check another vice depends on some remaining virtue; why, in the long run, the strategy stops working even in the political sense

**April 25:** Book XII, Chapters 1-8: the privation, or deficiency, theory of evil; no such thing as an evil nature or substance; not only ignorance but evil will can cause evil choice; good loves and bad loves (relate to selections in Book V)

**May 2:** Book XIV, Chapters 1-9 and 28: human nature viewed not as simply bad, not as simply good but rather as created good but fallen

**Date TBA, with guest J. Budziszewski (UT):** Book XIX, Chapters 1-7, 12-17, 21, and 24-28: various pagan philosophies and their deficiencies; the dilemma of judicial magistrates; just war and unjust war; peace as an end; difference between the peace of the City of Man and the peace of the City of God; Scipio again; the Two Cities again but now in the context of a philosophy of history; history as a story with a real plot, driven by a real conflict, and with beginning, rising tension, turning point, climax, and resolution; what view of history this replaces (and what happens to it in the modern era)

## RECOMMENDED SECONDARY LITERATURE

### SPINOZA

- [01] Etienne Balibar, *Spinoza and Politics* (Verso, 2008)
- [02] Julie Cooper, "Freedom of Speech and Philosophical Citizenship in Spinoza's *Theological-Political Treatise*," *Law, Culture, and the Humanities*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (2006): 91-114
- [03] Edwin Curley, "Kissenger, Spinoza, and Genghis Khan," in *The Cambridge Companion to Spinoza*, ed. Don Garrett, pp. 315-42 (Cambridge, 1996)
- [04] Walter Eckstein, "Rousseau and Spinoza: Their Political Theories and Their Conception of Ethical Freedom," in *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 5, No. 3 (June 1944): 259-91
- [05] Aaron Garrett, "Was Spinoza a Natural Lawyer?" *Cardozo Law Review* 25:2 (2003): 627-41
- [06] Stuart Hampshire, *Spinoza and Spinozism* (Oxford, 2005)
- [07] Jonathan Israel, *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity, 1650-1750* (Oxford, 2001)
- [08] Michael LeBuffe, *From Bondage to Freedom: Spinoza on Human Excellence* (Oxford, 2010)
- [09] Filippo del Lucchese, "Democracy, *Multitudo*, and the Third Kind of Knowledge in the Works of Spinoza," *European Journal of Political Theory*, Vol. 8, No. 3 (July 2009): 339-63
- [10] Robert McShea, *The Political Philosophy of Spinoza* (Columbia, 1968)
- [11] Steven Nadler, *Spinoza: A Life* (Cambridge, 2001)
- [12] Steven Nadler, *Spinoza's Heresy: Immortality and the Jewish Mind* (Oxford, 2001)
- [13] Steven Nadler, *Spinoza's "Ethics": An Introduction* (Cambridge, 2006)
- [14] Steven Nadler, "Baruch Spinoza," in *A Companion to Early Modern Philosophy* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2007)
- [15] Steven Nadler, *-A Book Forged in Hell: Spinoza's Scandalous Treatise and the Birth of the Secular Age* (Princeton, 2011)

- [16] Raia Prokhovnik, *Spinoza and Dutch Republicanism* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2004)
- [17] Steven Smith, *Spinoza, Liberalism, and the Question of Jewish Identity* (Yale, 1998)
- [18] Steven Smith, *Spinoza's Book of Life: Freedom and Redemption in the Ethics* (Yale, 2003)
- [19] Steven Smith, "What Kind of Democrat was Spinoza?" in *Political Theory*, Vol. 33, No. 1 (2005): 6-27
- [20] Leo Strauss, "How to Study Spinoza's *Theological-Political Treatise*," in *Persecution and the Art of Writing* (New York: Free Press, 1952): 142-201
- [21] Leo Strauss, *Spinoza's Critique of Religion* (Chicago, 1997)
- [22] David Lay Williams, "Spinoza and the General Will," *Journal of Politics*, Vol. 72, No. 2 (April 2010): 341-56

## PLATO

- [01] Seth Bernadette, *The Rhetoric of Morality and Philosophy: Plato's Gorgias and Phaedrus* (Chicago, 2009)
- [02] James Doyle, "On the First Eight Lines of Plato's *Gorgias*," *The Classical Quarterly*, Vol. 56, No. 2 (Dec., 2006): 599-602
- [03] Alessandra Fussi, "The Myth of the Last Judgment in the *Gorgias*," in the *Review of Metaphysics*, Vol. 54 (2001): 529-52
- [04] Terrence Irwin, *Plato: Gorgias* (Oxford, 1979)
- [05] George Klosko, "The Insufficiency of Reason in Plato's *Gorgias*," *The Western Political Quarterly*, Vol. 36, No. 4 (Dec. 1983): 579-95
- [06] George Klosko, "The Refutation of Calicles in Plato's *Gorgias*," *Greece and Rome*, Vol. 31, No. 2 (Oct. 1984): 126-39
- [07] Ann Michelini, "Pollh Agpoikia: Rudeness and Irony in Plato's *Gorgias*," *Classical Philology*, Vol. 93, No. 1 (Jan., 1998): 50-59
- [08] James Nichols, Jr., "The Rhetoric of Justice in Plato's *Gorgias*," in *Plato: Gorgias and Phaedrus* (Cornell, 1998)
- [09] Arlene Saxonhouse, "An Unspoken Theme in Plato's *Gorgias*: War," in *Interpretation*, Vol. 11 (1983): 139-69
- [10] Paul Shorey, *What Plato Said*, abridged edition (Chicago, [1933] 1965), pp. 85-106
- [11] Devin Stauffer, *The Unity of Plato's Gorgias: Rhetoric, Justice, and the Philosophic Life* (Cambridge, 2006)
- [12] Christina Tarnopolsky, *Prudes, Perverts, and Tyrants: Plato's 'Gorgias' and the Politics of Shame* (Princeton, 2010)
- [13] Catherine Zuckert, *Plato's Philosophers: The Coherence of the Dialogues* (Chicago, 2009), pp. 531-60

## AUGUSTINE

- [01] Christopher Brooke, *Philosophical Pride: Stoicism and Political Thought from Lipsius to Rousseau* (Princeton, 2012), pp. 1-11
- [02] Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo* (California, 2000).
- [03] Henry Chadwick, *Augustine* (Oxford, 1986)
- [04] Paul Cornish, "Augustine's Contribution to the Republican Tradition," *European*

- Journal of Political Theory*, Vol. 9, No. 2 (April 2010): 133-48
- [05] Herbert Deane, *The Political and Social Ideas of St. Augustine* (Columbia, 1966)
- [06] Ernest Fortin, "St. Augustine," in *History of Political Philosophy*, Third Edition, ed. Leo Strauss and Joseph Cropsey (Chicago, 1987), pp. 176-206
- [07] R. A. Markus, *Saeculum: History and Society in the Theology of St. Augustine* (Cambridge, 1988)
- [08] Reinhold Niebuhr, "Augustine's Political Realism," in Niebuhr, *Christian Realism and Political Problems* (Michigan, 1953), pp. 119-46
- [09] John Parrish, "Two Cities and Two Loves: Imitation in Augustine's Moral Psychology and Political Theory," *History of Political Thought*, Vol. 26 (2005): 209-35
- [10] Elenore Stump and Norman Kretzman, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine* (Cambridge, 2001)

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\* NOTE: Students with disabilities may request appropriate academic accommodations from the Division of Diversity and Community Engagement, Services for Students with Disabilities, 512-471-6259, <http://www.utexas.edu/diversity/ddce/ssd/>