

PSPA's Undergraduate Political Theory Courses and Minor at AUB

PSPA offers a wide variety of historical and contemporary courses in political theory. This document is an attempt to inform prospective students of courses and the minor option in this subfield of political science. Follow-up inquiries may be made in person or by email with Dr. Eric Goodfield (eg09@aub.edu.lb).

Introduction to Political Theory

Many of us have personal political commitments; we may be socialist, liberal, conservative, Islamists, marxists, anarchists, feminists, environmentalists or other. Given these political or ideological backgrounds we may have, the question arises as to why we should involve ourselves in the process of political theory (also known as “political philosophy”), and what can political theory offer us?

Political theory is an unbroken discussion which stretches back at least 2500 years, and is really part and parcel of what it means to be human at anytime and anywhere in human history. Political theory takes place when there is a discussion about ultimate ends or goals. A debate about ultimate ends means that we are involved in some kind of partnership about what the right thing to do or way to live is. Political philosophy in this context is not merely an argument with power, an argument with the state or some other authority. It is also about the way we as individuals want to conceive our own development in a way which is not merely political but also social and personal as well. To sum up, political theory in the modern world means participating in a discussion over the values our community, society or world does or ought to ascribe to in order to create a more free, just or human condition.

A) Course Offerings in Political Theory for Fall 2013/2014

PSPA 210 Introduction to Political Thought 3 cr.

An introduction to the main Western and Islamic traditions in political philosophy and political theory. Students cannot receive credit for both PSPA 210 and PHIL 216.

PSPA 214 Early and Mediaeval Islamic Thought 3 cr.

This course is an introduction to early and medieval Islamic political thought. It focuses on the history and construction of Islamic political notions as it includes discussions of legitimacy, authority (for example Imamate, and Caliphate), ethics, law, community and many others. It also exposes the various intellectual and administrative influences (mainly Greek, Persian, and Indian) that suffused Islamic traditions. This course will critically engage with a small selection of key texts written and transmitted from the Prophet to the consolidation of the Sunni traditions around the end of the Abbasid era, from works attributed to Imam Ali, to Al Mawardi, Ibn Rushd, Nasir el Din al Tusi, and

others.

PSPA 215 Modern Islamic Thought 3 cr.

The course is a survey that focuses on major political and ideological issues in the modern world of Islam and deals analytically with the major doctrines, movements, and trends that have been developed during the 19th and 20th centuries. The course starts with the discussion of the ideological and political doctrines of Islamic reformers, then moves to discuss the rise of Islamic movements and their ideologies. Issues like Islamic government, state, religion, revolution, nationalism, and relations with the West, are to be discussed. *Annually.*

PSPA 216 Western Political Thought from Antiquity to the Renaissance; 3 cr.

This course is an introduction to ancient political thought in the Western tradition. It begins with a consideration of the meaning of political theory –ancient and modern-, and moves on to examine the core writings of the major Greek political philosophers. In the second half, the course considers several major authors of the Medieval period who worked under the influences of classical Greece in Islamic and Christian contexts and closes with a consideration of the renaissance as a break and continuation of this heritage. In this way the course examines the legacies of Platonism and Aristotelianism for political philosophy as they extend over a span of near two millennia.

B) The Minor in Social and Political Thought

For those interested in deepening their knowledge of political thought, an inter-faculty/department minor in Social and Political Thought is available.

Social and Political Thought requires 15 credits: PSPA 210 or PHIL 216, one senior seminar, and three courses from: ENG 222, ENG 235, ENG 240, ENG 243, ENG 247, PHIL 210, PHIL 225, PHIL 251, PHIL 252, PSPA 214, PSPA 215, PSPA 216, PSPA 217, PSPA 218, PSPA 219, PSPA 221, PSPA 290A, PSPA 290B, PSPA 290C, SOAN 213, SOAN 221, SOAN 223, SOAN 290 (after securing the approval of the SPT Committee), ARCH 021, ARCH 022, ARCH 037, ARCH 039 and GRDS 020. No more than 9 credits can be taken from the same department; no more than 3 credits can be counted toward the student's major; no more than 6 credits can be taken from the student's home department

C) Comprehensive Listing of PSPA's Political Theory Courses

NOTE: The following represents a comprehensive listing of PSPA's undergraduate Political Theory course offerings. However, the course descriptions are general and schematic and the contents of these courses will vary from semester to semester. Students may contact Dr. Eric Goodfield (eg09@aub.edu.lb) or approach the PSPA student advisor to be informed of the specific contents of this semester's/year's offerings.

PSPA 210 Introduction to Political Thought 3 cr.

An introduction to the main Western and Islamic traditions in political philosophy and

political theory. Students cannot receive credit for both PSPA 210 and PHIL 216. *Each semester.*

PSPA 214 Early and Mediaeval Islamic Thought 3 cr.

The course is an introduction to early and classical Islamic political thought. It focuses on the history, origins, developments and objectives of Islamic political history, theology, jurisprudence and politics as they relate to the state, society, and relations with non-Muslims. The course analyzes the essential concepts and events that make the political core doctrines of Islam: a political system, a political theology and ideology, and a theory of international relations. Comparisons and contrasts between different Islamic schools are to be made and explored. *Occasionally.*

PSPA 215 Modern Islamic Thought; 3 cr.

Description Above

PSPA 216 Western Political Thought from Antiquity to the Renaissance; 3 cr.

A survey of the main Western traditions, philosophies, and themes in political thought from Greek Antiquity to the Renaissance. The course will combine an in-depth analysis of the main philosophical concepts of the past that are still relevant to contemporary political thought and politics, with a historical analysis of the intellectual, social, and political context in which they emerged and for which they were constructed. Special focus will be given to the Greek polis and the emergence of a discourse on democracy, the relationship between politics and ethics, the search for good government and the just society, and the shift to early Realism in the context of the emergence of the modern state in Europe. *Occasionally.*

PSPA 217 Modern and Postmodern Western Political Thought; 3 cr.

A survey of the main Western traditions, philosophies, and themes in political thought from early European Modernity and the Enlightenment to the contemporary era, including Postmodern philosophies. The course will combine an in-depth analysis of the modern and postmodern paradigms in political philosophy, with a historical analysis of the intellectual, social and political context that led to the critique of the modern nation-state, nationalism, and democracy, and the search for new normative orders. *Annually.*

PSPA 218 Social Theories; 3 cr.

A survey of the main social theories that have contributed to an empirical understanding of the political at different levels of analysis and from different conceptual frameworks. The course will emphasize an interdisciplinary approach, through a comparison of theories produced in different disciplines (political science, sociology, anthropology, political psychology, economics) that focus on different objects of study (the state, the community, social classes, the individual). *Annually.*

PSPA 219 Arab Political Thought and Ideologies; 3 cr.

The aim of the course is to explore various intellectual and political debates in the modern Arab world. The course will provide an overview of the development of modern Arab political thought and will present some of the main political, intellectual, and

academic debates in this domain. Topics covered in this course include Arab nationalism, Marxism and Liberalism, modernity and tradition, secularism and Islam, Orientalism and the West, and other topics. *Annually*.

PSPA 290 Senior Seminars in Social and Political Thought:

PSPA 290A Senior Seminar in Political and Social Theory; 3 cr.

The seminar aims to explore specific schools of thought, theories, and paradigms that are relevant for empirical research, such as Critical Theory, Cultural Theory, Constructivism, Marxism, and others. *Occasionally*.

PSPA 290B Senior Seminar in Western Political Thought; 3 cr.

A seminar that explores special topics and/or traditions in Western political philosophy. *Occasionally*.

PSPA 290C Senior Seminar in Arab and Islamic Political Thought; 3 cr.

A seminar that explores special topics and/or traditions in Arab and/or Islamic political thought. *Occasionally*.