



The Hebrew University of Jerusalem

Syllabus

Fundamental Issues in Political Theory: Solidarity - 56886

Last update 28-09-2023

HU Credits: 4

Degree/Cycle: 2nd degree (Master)

Responsible Department: Political Science

Academic year: 0

Semester: Yearly

Teaching Languages: English

Campus: Mt. Scopus

Course/Module Coordinator: Dr. Charles Lesch

Coordinator Email: charles.lesch@mail.huji.ac.il

Coordinator Office Hours:

Teaching Staff:

Dr. Lesch Charles

Course/Module description:

Questions of solidarity—of what binds us together and motivates us to act for one another—have been central to political theory since its inception: Are founding narratives or myths necessary for social unity? Do states need a shared religion to cultivate moral commitment? How much agreement about norms does a given collective need, and how much space should be made for the individual? Does secularization threaten solidarity, and if so, can something take the place of religion? Can the basis of solidarity be political, or must it precede politics? Is nationalism morally justifiable as a means for achieving solidarity? Is patriotism? This course uses these and other dilemmas to introduce doctoral students to core methods, approaches, and texts in political theory.

Course/Module aims:

Learning outcomes - On successful completion of this module, students should be able to:

Students will engage in three primary modes of inquiry in political theory: 1. Interpretation of important texts in politics, ethics, and philosophy. What is the text saying? What is its argument? 2. Critical reflection on ideas and theories contained in these texts. Does the argument make sense? How does it compare to other thinkers or theories? 3. Normative evaluation of central moral and political questions. How should we act? What's the right thing to do?

Attendance requirements(%):

100

Teaching arrangement and method of instruction:

Course/Module Content:

Meetings will alternate between elucidation of the course texts and discussion of challenging moral and political questions. We will spend between four and five classes working to understand the key ideas and arguments of different texts. We will then devote half a class to collectively debating an important normative question that emerges from them.

In Unit 1, we rethink the classical distinction between “Athens and Jerusalem,” examining especially the use of origin stories in both the Hebrew Bible and Plato. Unit 2 moves to consider proposed roles for religion in realizing solidarity, including theocracy, state establishment, and civil religion. Unit 3 shifts our focus from the state to the self, focusing in particular on freedom, equality, and the tensions between social cohesion and individual autonomy. In Unit 4, we probe the effect on solidarity of secularization, and ask whether moral life is indebted to religion in some sense. Unit 5 takes up the status of politics itself, evaluating whether people should preferably be united by political life, broadly defined, or some kind of prepolitical bond. Finally, we conclude in Unit 6 by turning to nationalism and some of political theory’s most urgent and dynamic questions, including the normative status of nations, boundaries, and particularistic loyalties.

Required Reading:

- Hebrew Bible, selections from Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy.*
- Plato, The Republic.*
- Ibn Khaldun, selections from The Muqaddimah.*
- Hobbes, selections from On the Citizen.*
- Rousseau, Second Discourse, selections from The Social Contract and Considerations on the Government of Poland.*
- Tocqueville, selections from Democracy in America.*
- Durkheim, selections from The Division of Labor in Society and The Elementary Forms of Religious Life.*
- Schmitt, Political Theology and The Concept of the Political.*
- Habermas, selections from The Theory of Communicative Action and Between Naturalism and Religion.*
- Levinas, selections from Totality and Infinity, Beyond the Verse, and Difficult Freedom.*
- Buber, selections from On Judaism, Between Man and Man, and Paths in Utopia.*
- Arendt, selection from The Origins of Totalitarianism.*
- Böckenförde, selection from State, Society, and Liberty.*
- Benedict, “Prepolitical Moral Foundations of a Free Republic.”*
- Anderson, Imagined Communities.*
- Gellner, selections from Nations and Nationalism.*
- A. Smith, selections from The Ethnic Origins of Nations.*
- Banting and Kymlicka, selection from The Strains of Commitment.*
- Walzer, selections from Spheres of Justice.*
- Kymlicka, selection from Multicultural Citizenship.*
- Tamir, Why Nationalism.*
- Hazony, selection from The Virtue of Nationalism.*
- S. Smith, Reclaiming Patriotism in an Age of Extremes.*

Additional Reading Material:

Grading Scheme:

Essay / Project / Final Assignment / Home Exam / Referat 40 %
Submission assignments during the semester: Exercises / Essays / Audits / Reports
/ Forum / Simulation / others 30 %
Presentation / Poster Presentation / Lecture 10 %
Attendance / Participation in Field Excursion 20 %

Additional information: