

Dr. Randy LeBlanc
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rleblanc@uttyler.edu

113 CAS
Office Hours (Zoom Only): T 1:30pm-3pm; W 9:30am-12 noon
and by appointment

Graduate Study in Political Theory

Political theory is an approach to political phenomena that asks after the assumptions and causes behind appearances that make up our political life. With an eye toward re-visioning and, where necessary, reforming our collective political lives, *political theory clarifies concepts, identifies and studies the relationships among ideas, and how those ideas and relationships shape the way we think about and do politics*. The Western tradition in political theory concerns itself with questions of human nature, of the proper balance between individual autonomy and community, of the nature of justice, and of the relationship between freedom and responsibility. In this course, using the work of prominent but very different scholars, we will engage the very idea that there is such a tradition, explore its content and how it works, and interrogate the power and consequences of having such a “tradition.” Engaging these perspectives—and they are not the only possible perspectives--will allow us to critically reevaluate the preconceptions upon which our political institutions are built, and, in doing so, fashion for ourselves a working conception of the value and necessity of careful reflection upon ‘politics.’

Because political theory is about ideas and their political manifestations, *the student’s focus, should be on the ideas, their implications, and the many ways they have been and could be used (for good and ill). Like the thinkers we read, our experiences and beliefs are important, but also like these thinkers, those experiences and beliefs are not all there is. A critical analysis in political theory is, quite literally, a method of describing and evaluating an argument by separating that argument into its various parts or elements*. Students will be challenged to do this in both their oral and written work in this course. Therefore, the following are both learning objectives for the course as a whole and they are to be applied to the works and authors we encounter in both your written and oral work in the course.

Brief Course Outline:

The course and our discussion will proceed in three “modules”:

Module 1: Political Theory as Tradition and Practice

Module 2: Wolin: A Theorist Comes to Terms

Module 3: Western Theory from Without: Mbembe’s Necropolitics

Course Learning Outcomes

By the end of this course,

- (1) Identify the key elements of the political theorist’s approach through direct engagement with primary texts in political theory.
- (2) Recognize and apply the methods of political theory to key questions of modern political life through reading and reflection, written and oral communication, and both formal and informal modes of interpersonal interaction.
- (3) Identify and be able to practice select norms of the political science profession, including peer evaluation, presentation of work, and the development of a collaborative and scholarly intellectual community.

CANVAS: All written and graded assignments will appear on Canvas. Assignments can be found under the “Syllabus,” “Assignments,” and “Modules” tabs on the Course page. All written and graded work will be submitted via Canvas. Students will also find supplementary handouts and readings on Canvas. All modules, essays, and attendance/participation grades are weighted as part of your final grade.

Texts: *The following texts are required* and available at the UT-Tyler Bookstore:

- Sheldon S. Wolin, *Politics and Vision: Continuity and Innovation in Western Political Thought*, expanded edition (Princeton University Press, 2016)
- Achille Mbembe, *Necropolitics*, translated by Steven Corcoran (Duke University Press, 2019)
- All other REQUIRED texts are available on Canvas.

Course Requirements

All grading is done on a 10-point scale: A = 90-100; b = 80-89; C = 70-79... Remember that in graduate courses, a grade of “C” or below is considered a failing grade. The formal requirements of the course and their relative impact on your grade are as follows:

(1) Class Attendance and Participation

10%

Political theory necessarily involves discussion and, in that vein, discussion involves taking cues from gestures, tone of voice, etc. To serve this end, *we will be meeting weekly in person. To meet the attendance and participation requirement, you are expected to attend these class meetings and to participate in our class discussions.* Students will also be assigned readings each week and called upon to set up our class discussions. Bring your understanding of the readings, your questions, your answers, and your insights to our class meetings and be ready to articulate and discuss them.

(2) Modules: Readings and Assignment Worksheets

3 Modules (20%; 15%; 10% = 45%)

The course is divided into 3 units or modules. You can find the modules under the “Modules” tab on the course’s Canvas page. Each module consists of the occasional video and your assigned readings. Each module is also divided into worksheet assignments. Each assignment contains both specific readings and an *Assignment Worksheet* that must be completed in the week that it is assigned. *These assignments cannot be made up.*

The Assignment Worksheets require you to write *Analytical Summaries* of assigned readings. For each reading, you will be asked to post a *one paragraph* (neither more nor less than 200 words) analytical summary of the assigned reading on Canvas. Your analytical summary paragraph should (1) identify the main argument(s) of the work, (2) the major points the author is trying to make, and (3) how he or she used those points and examples to make the argument. *Your paragraph should NOT be a list of answers to the above questions, a set of statements from your notes, or a list of any sort. Rather, it should be a well-conceived and readable description of the work that would communicate its meaning and significance to someone who, while being a professional colleague, has not read the work. NOTE: You are graded by Module and each worksheet makes up a significant percentage of each module grade. Missed worksheets cannot be made up.*

(3) Two Semester Essays (10%; 15%) and Final Essay (20%)

45%

Students will be asked to write analytical essays on some aspect of the class material using specific works we have read. *These WILL NOT be research papers.* Students are expected to limit themselves to the material we have read and discussed and their own substantial analytical abilities. The first two essays will be five pages in length and be due on Canvas Monday, February 28 and Monday, April 4 at 12 noon. *Students will present their papers in class those evenings and the class will discuss them.* The final will be 6-7 pages in length and will be due on Monday, April 25 at 12 noon. *All essays must be submitted on Canvas as Word documents, 12-point Times New Roman font, double-spaced, etc.* An essay stylesheet is available on Canvas. Students are expected to follow it. In addition, below are some further guidelines for writing your essays:

WARNING: IGNORE THE FOLLOWING PAPER GUIDELINES AT YOUR PERIL:

(1) DO NOT try to avoid addressing the issues by talking about the author's writing style, difficulty, etc. In this class, as in each of your graduate courses in political science, **you are considered a professional willing to work to understand difficult material.** You can always ask the professor for help, too, but do it BEFORE the day you turn in/present your paper.

(2) Write in reasoned, professional terms. Use your best English: there is no excuse for misspellings; make sure all of your sentences have subjects, verbs, and objects; make sure they match in number; do not use contractions; write in paragraphs (change to a new *but related* thought = new paragraph) above all, do not write the way you speak! Write like a professional.

(3) Focus on one or two ideas or issues that are common to all the readings. Do not simply rehearse the argument of the author—in the allotted space, you do not have the time! Your task is to discuss the readings in terms of the one or two most important ideas or issues that you have identified. As a start, consider the issues raised in our discussions in class and where this author/idea fits. **Add your own insights where appropriate. Raise questions and critical issues—do not rant.**

(4) These are NOT research papers. Limit yourself to the text before you. The assignment is designed to get you to read closely, carefully, and analytically. Resist the urge to run to the internet. Force yourself to deal with the text, come to some understanding of the issues raised, and, craft your own argument.

SYLLABUS

All assignments may be found on Canvas and may be accessed through either the “Modules” link, the “Assignments” link, or the “Syllabus” link. Work for each module will be turned in on Canvas and is due by the end of the week it is assigned (Sunday @ 11:59pm, except for the week after Thanksgiving break when it will be due on Monday @ 12 noon). Assignments will be closed thereafter. Students are strongly encouraged to read ahead and to turn in their Worksheet Assignments before the Sunday deadline.

MODULE 1: Political Theory as Tradition and Practice***1.0. Introduction: Political Theory—What, Why, and How?***

Jan 10 M **Texts:** Leslie Paul Thiele, *Thinking Politics*, Chapter 1 (Canvas)
--bell hooks, “Theory as Liberatory Practice” (Canvas)

Jan 17 M MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. DAY HOLIDAY

1.1. Political Philosophy / Political Theory

Jan 23 Su Worksheet Due @ 11:59pm.

Jan 24 M **Texts:** Leo Strauss, “What is Political Philosophy?” (Canvas)
--Hannah Arendt, Interview with Gunter Gaus (youtube)
--Phillips, “Universal Pretensions in Political Thought” (Canvas)
--Sheldon Wolin, *Politics and Vision*, Chapter 1: “Political Philosophy and Philosophy”
(pp. 3-26)

1.2. Wolin: *Philosophy, Space, and Disappearing Politics*

Jan 30 Su Worksheet Due @ 11:59pm

Jan 31 M **Texts:** Wolin, *Politics and Vision*, Chapters 2 and 3
--Chapter 2: "Plato: Political Philosophy versus Politics" (pp. 27-62)
--Chapter 3: "The Age of Empire: Space and Community" (pp. 63-85)

1.3. Wolin: *Politics and Technique*

Feb 06 Su Worksheet Due @ 11:59pm

Feb 07 M **Texts:** Wolin, *Politics and Vision*, Chapters 7 and 8
--Chapter 7: "Machiavelli: Politics and the Economy of Violence" (pp. 175-213)
--Chapter 8: "Hobbes: Political Society as a System of Rules" (pp. 214-256)

1.4. Wolin: *Liberal Theory and its Discontents*

Feb 13 Su Worksheet Due @ 11:59pm

Feb 14 M **Texts:** Wolin, *Politics and Vision*, Chapters 9 and 10 sections I-III
--Chapter 9: "Liberalism and the Decline of Philosophy" (pp. 257-314)
--Chapter 10, sections I-III: "The Age of Organization and the Sublimation of Politics" (pp. 315-330)

1.5. Wolin: *Organization and the Fate of the Political*

Feb 20 Su Worksheet Due @ 11:59pm

Feb 21 M **Texts:** Wolin, *Politics and Vision*, Chapters 10 and 11
--Chapter 10: "The Age of Organization..." (pp. 331-389)
--Chapter 11: "From Modern Power to Postmodern Power" (pp. 393-405)

Feb 28 M **ESSAY #1 DUE @ 12pm (noon)****
In-class Presentations beginning at 6pm**

MODULE 2: Wolin: A Theorist Comes to Terms

2.1. Wolin: *Paradigms of Liberal Modernity*

Mar 14 M Worksheet Due @ 6pm

Mar 14 M **Texts:** Wolin, *Politics and Vision*, Chapters 12 and 14
--Chapter 12: "Theorist of the Political Economy..." (pp. 406-453)
--Chapter 14: "Liberalism and the Politics of Rationalism" (pp. 495-523)

2.2. Wolin: *The End(s) of Liberal Democracy*

Mar 20 Su Worksheet Due @ 11:59pm

Mar 21 M **Text:** Wolin, *Politics and Vision*, Chapters 15 and 16
--Chapter 15: "Liberal Justice and Political Democracy" (pp. 524-556)
--Chapter 16: "Power and Forms" (pp. 557-580)

2.3. Wolin, Mbembe, and Democracy

Mar 27 Su Worksheet Due @ 11:59pm

Mar 28 M Text: Wolin, *Politics and Vision*, Chapter 17: “Postmodern Democracy: Virtual or Fugitive?” (pp. 581-606)

--Achille Mbembe, *Necropolitics*, Introduction: “The Ordeal of the World” (pp. 1-8) and Chapter 1: “Exit from Democracy” (pp. 9-41)

Apr 04 M **ESSAY #2 DUE @ 12 noon on Canvas******

In-class Presentations beginning at 6pm

MODULE 3: Western Theory from Without: Mbembe’s Necropolitics

3.1. Mbembe: Mbembe’s Necropolitical (Dis)Order

Apr 10 Su Worksheet Due @ 11:59pm

Apr 11 M Texts: Achille Mbembe, *Necropolitics*, Chapters 2-4

--Chapter 2: “The Society of Enmity” (pp. 42-65)

--Chapter 3: “Necropolitics” (pp. 66-92)

--Chapter 4: “Viscerality” (pp. 93-116)

3.2. Mbembe: Fanon’s Pharmacy

Apr 17 Su Worksheet Due @ 11:59pm

Apr 18 M Text: Achille Mbembe, *Necropolitics*, Chapters 5, 6, and Conclusion

--Chapter 5: “Fanon’s Pharmacy” (pp. 117-155)

--Chapter 6: “The Stifling Noonday” (pp. 156-183)

--Conclusion: “The Ethics of the Passerby” (pp. 184-190)

Apr 25 M **FINAL ESSAY DUE @ 12 noon on Canvas******

IMPORTANT: This syllabus reflects the minimum requirements of our professional relationship over the course of this semester. By staying in this class, you signify that you understand the contents of this syllabus and you agree to the terms and conditions stated herein.

Class sessions may be recorded by the instructor for use by students enrolled in this class. Recordings that contain personally identifiable information or other information subject to FERPA shall not be shared with individuals not enrolled in this course unless appropriate consent is obtained from all relevant students. Class recordings are reserved only for the use of students enrolled in the class and only for educational purposes. Course recordings should not be shared outside of the class in any form without express permission.