

Schools and Sects in the Study of Politics, #318

Illinois Wesleyan University

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“Just when we’re sure we’ve found the right answer, we realize we’ve been asking the wrong question.” – Carter Heyward

Course description and requirements:

This course surveys some of the most influential writings in our discipline with the goal of understanding better the evolution of the social sciences and developing the skills with which to interrogate social science literature and its changing epistemologies. We will closely examine why we ask the questions we ask and why we tend to look for the types of evidence we often gather. In this spirit, I explicitly encourage students to explore this collection of writings while paying at least as much attention to the theoretical and epistemological approaches used by the authors as to the substance of the authors’ specific findings and conclusions.

We begin the semester with a reading from the Scottish Enlightenment. David Hume highlights the importance of great caution when identifying what we consider to be facts and when drawing causal inferences. With this skepticism in hand, we then move to the mid-19th century to sample from a period when much of the work in the study of politics (not quite political *science* yet) was characterized by the elaborate telling of insightful stories and discussion of legal forms. Here we examine, among other pieces, writings by Francis Lieber (1860s), Woodrow Wilson (1880s), and Henry Jones Ford (1890s). During this period the study of politics was essentially still an offshoot of the study of history and law, though it had begun to distinguish itself by its focus on political institutions. Political science fully came into its own as an intellectual discipline in part as a result of the rise of behavioralism during the 1930s and 1940s (not to be confused with B. F. Skinner and the school of *behaviorism* in psychology). In time, this focus on the overt behaviors of political actors would give rise to pluralism, which in turn was reigned in by its critics – among them, Olson and Schattschneider – during the 1960s. As a reaction to these criticisms, a hybrid of sorts – interest-group pluralism – was articulated by Theodore Lowi during the late 1960s. Also during this period came the gradual adoption by political scientists of some tools from micro-economics, leading to the application of rational choice theory to political behavior in a variety of settings, from Congress to citizens’ voting behavior. The rational choice approach has not been without its critics, particularly those grounded in psychology. We sample from their works next, including pieces by Jon Elster. Following this, we consider the problematic nature of democracy and how preferences are often shaped by the institutions within which political actors operate. Specifically we will examine the difficulty of fairly arriving at collective choices in non-consensual situations as we read work by William Riker and other more contemporary writers within the school of new institutionalism. One of the more interesting recent developments from this work is scholarship that examines the intersection of political ideas (beliefs, culture, values) and institutions. This recent turn toward ideas as sources of political change, growing out of historical institutionalism, problematizes rational choice theory in its own way as it questions

whether actors' political ideas shape institutional design, or vice versa, or both, or whether political preferences are shaped by the surrounding culture and belief systems, largely separate and apart from the configuration of existing political institutions (i.e., majority rule and republicanism). Lastly, we review the ground we have covered as we read some commentaries on the implications of adopting one mode of theorizing instead of another and what such decisions mean for the advancement of our discipline.

Before taking this class, students will find it helpful (but not required) to take at least one 200- or 300-level course in political science. Non-political scientists are very welcome. Students must commit themselves to a significant weekly reading load. Our meetings will be spent discussing the texts. **THIS IS NOT A LECTURE COURSE.** Being prepared to discuss and critique the readings is imperative to your, and our collective, success. Each student will co-lead the group discussion a few times during the semester. On days when you co-lead the discussion, please prepare a two page summary/critique of the reading. Bring enough copies for everyone. Students will also write three short papers during the term critiquing a small collection of readings. There will be a final exam at semester's end.

Ten percent of the overall grade is determined by the thoroughness and thoughtfulness of your turns at group discussion co-leadership. Beyond taking your turns at helping to guide our conversations, overall participation in our discussions will be worth 10% of your final course grade. Part of class participation will consist of turning in two (typed) questions about the readings each week. Please bring two copies: one for me and one for the discussion co-leaders. Three reflection papers, collectively worth 60% of the course grade, will be due through the term. We will reach agreement on due dates once the semester is underway. These papers should critique a set of assigned readings. For each you are to compare, contrast, synthesize, and critique three pieces of writing by three different authors from the syllabus that speak to a common theme. You should spend very little space in your paper summarizing the readings and should instead focus on your critique/synthesis of the arguments and/or evidence offered by the authors. Pitting author against author is perhaps the most effective approach to these assignments. Each paper should be between five and six pages long, double-spaced. Each of your three papers must address a unique collection of readings and must not overlap with your other papers. Late papers will suffer a five percentage point reduction for each day they are late, weekends included. Late papers should be submitted electronically in order to stop the penalty clock at the time of sending. See the accompanying written description of expectations regarding these reflection papers. Below you will find some optional readings which may be used for your reflection papers but which we will likely not discuss in class. You may discuss the optional readings in your papers, but you must significantly involve three of the core readings in each paper. The optional readings are not on e-reserve. If you want to look at the optional readings, you'll need to find them on your own.

A final exam will be worth 20% of the course grade. Toward the end of the semester I will distribute a list of study questions designed to give you an idea of the types of questions I may ask on the exam. These questions should serve as a guide for your exam preparation and should not be assumed to be the actual question(s) you will face on exam day. *Failing to read and take copious notes throughout the term and/or waiting until the end of the term to prepare for the*

final exam will almost surely lead to a disaster on final exam day. Regular attendance is required. Each unexcused absence beyond the first one will result in a 2 percentage point penalty to your overall course grade. Responsibility for talking with me about class sessions you miss rests with you.

Final course grades will be assigned on the following basis: 90-100% = A/A-; 80-89% = B+/B/B-; 70-79% = C+/C/C-; 60-69% = D; below 60% = F. Taking a grade of incomplete in this course is very strongly discouraged. Barring cases of sudden illnesses, under no circumstance will a student be granted a grade of incomplete without discussing the matter with me well in advance of the end of the semester.

I am aware that academic dishonesty has become common at some institutions. While I am sure that very few, if any, Illinois Wesleyan students would cheat on class assignments, the university's policy and my policy on academic dishonesty bear repeating. Academic dishonesty fundamentally undermines the mission of the university and cheapens our collective enterprise. Students caught cheating on an exam or engaging in plagiarism on written assignments will receive a failing grade for the course. In these cases I will also file a formal complaint with the administration. Per the university's academic dishonesty policy, the administration will move to expel from the university any student who is the object of two such substantiated complaints. See the university catalog for further explanation.

This course carries general education credit in intellectual traditions.

Course readings:

The following texts are highly recommended for purchase and are at the university bookstore:

- David Hume – *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (Hackett Publishing Co.)
- Jon Elster – *Nuts and Bolts for the Social Sciences* (Cambridge Univ. Press)
- Donald Green and Ian Shapiro – *Pathologies of Rational Choice Theory* (Yale U. Press,)
- Mancur Olson – *The Logic of Collective Action* (Harvard Univ. Press)
- Thomas Kuhn – *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 3rd ed. (Univ. of Chicago Press)
- Theodore Lowi – *The End of Liberalism*, 2nd edition (W.W. Norton)

The remainder of the core readings are available either on library reserve or the on-line archive, J-STOR. Most of the reserve items are on traditional reserve at the circulation desk. A few, indicated below, are on e-reserve.

WEEKLY SCHEDULE OF READINGS

Week 1: Course introduction and overview

Week 2: Some early writings

David Hume – *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (1748); editor's introduction and sections 1 – 5, 7 & 12 **[purchase]**

Francis Lieber – *On Civil Liberty and Self-Governance*, 3rd edition (1877), editor's introduction, chapters 1, 14, 17, 18, 21, and 35 **[e-reserve]**

OPTIONAL: George Berkeley, *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge*, 1710

Week 3: Political science as storytelling, Part I: Institutions

Woodrow Wilson – *Congressional Government* (1885); Walter Lippmann's introduction, chapters 2 (House of Reps 1), 4 (Senate), 6 (conclusion) **[e-reserve]**

Henry Jones Ford, *The Rise and Growth of American Politics* (Macmillan & Co., 1898); preface and chapters 18, 19, 22, 27, 28 **[e-reserve]**

James Bryce, "The Relations of Political Science to History and to Practice," presidential address, 5th annual meeting of the American Political Science Association (1909), *American Political Science Review*, vol. #3, #1, February 1909 **[J-STOR]**

Week 4: Political science as storytelling, Part II: Behavior

Walter Lippmann – *Public Opinion* (Macmillan, 1922); chapters 1 (skim), 2-5, 16-20, 25, 27 & 28 **[e-reserve]**

John Dewey – *The Public and Its Problems*, (Holt & Co., 1927), chapters 1, 4 & 5 **[traditional reserve]**

Week 5: The rise of behavioralism in political science

Bernard Berelson, Paul Lazarsfeld, and William McPhee – *Voting: A Study of Opinion Formation in a Presidential Campaign* (Univ. of Chicago Press, 1954); chapters 1, 5, 10, 13 & 14 **[e-reserve and traditional reserve]**

David Easton – *A Framework for Political Analysis* (Prentice-Hall, 1965); chapters 1, 2, 7 & 8 **[traditional reserve]**

First reflection paper due in class on Thursday of this week

Week 6: The pluralists

David Truman – *The Governmental Process: Political Interests and Public Opinion*, 2nd edition (Knopf, 1971) [1st published in 1951]; chapters 1-3 & 16 **[e-reserve and traditional reserve]**

Robert Dahl – *A Preface to Democratic Theory* (Univ. of Chicago Press, 1956); chapters 1-3 & 5 **[traditional reserve]**

OPTIONAL: Robert Dahl, *Who Governs? Democracy and Power in an American City* (1961)

Week 7: Critiques of pluralism

E. E. Schattschneider – *The Semi-Sovereign People: A Realist's View of Democracy in America* (Dryden Press, 1960); chapters 1, 2, 4, 6 & 8 **[traditional reserve]**

Mancur Olson – *The Logic of Collective Action* (Harvard U. Press, 1964); chapters 1, 2, 5 & 6 **[purchase]**

OPTIONAL: William Domhoff, *Who Really Rules? New Haven and Community Power Reexamined* (1978)

Week 8: Interest group pluralism

Theodore Lowi – *The End of Liberalism*, 2nd ed. (W.W. Norton, 1979); chapters 2, 3, 5 (pp. 92-113, 124-126) **[purchase]**

Theodore Lowi – *The End of Liberalism*, 2nd ed.; chapters 8, 10 & 11

OPTIONAL: Grant McConnell, *Private Power and American Democracy*, Knopf, 1966

Week 9: The rational choice revolution

Anthony Downs – *An Economic Theory of Democracy* (HarperCollins, 1957); chapters 1-3, 8, 14 & 15 **[traditional reserve]**

Robert Clinton, "Game Theory, Legal History, and the Origins of Judicial Review: A Revisionist Analysis of *Marbury v. Madison*," *American Journal of Political Science*, vol. 38 #2, 1994 **[J-STOR]**

OPTIONAL: "The Rochester School: The Origins of Positive Political Theory," Amadae and Bueno de Mesquita, *Annual Review of Political Science*, vol. 2, 1999. See also, John Aldrich, "Rational Choice Theory and the Study of American Politics," ch. 9 in *The Dynamics of American Politics: Approaches and Interpretations*, ed. by Dodd and Jillsen (Westview Press, 1994).

Week 10: Critics of rational choice

Jon Elster – *Nuts and Bolts for the Social Sciences*; chapters 2-4, 6, 8, 11 & 13 **[purchase]**

Green and Shapiro – *Pathologies of Rational Choice Theory*; chapters 1-5 & 8 **[purchase]**

Gabriel Almond – *A Discipline Divided: Schools and Sects in Political Science*; chapter 4 **[traditional and e-reserve]**

Jonathan Cohn's essay in *The New Republic*, 10/25/99 **[handout]**

OPTIONAL: Jon Elster, *Sour Grapes: Studies in the Subversion of Rationality*, ch. 3 (Cambridge Univ. Press, 1983)

Second reflection paper due in class on Thursday of this week

SPRING BREAK

Week 11: The problem of thinking about democracy and collective choice

William Riker – *Liberalism against Populism* (Freeman, 1982); chapters 2, 3, 5 & 10 **[traditional and e-reserve]**

Michael Margolis and Gary Mauser – *Manipulating Public Opinion: Essays on Public Opinion as a Dependent Variable* (Brooks/Cole Publishing, 1989), chaps. 1 & 11 **[traditional and e-reserve]**

OPTIONAL: Dennis Mueller, *Public Choice III* (Cambridge Univ. Press, 2003); Lawrence Jacobs and

Robert Shapiro, *Politicians Don't Pander: Political Manipulation and the Loss of Democratic Responsiveness*, chaps. 1, 9 & 10 (Univ. of Chicago Press, 2000)

Week 12: The new institutionalism

Kenneth Shepsle, "Institutional Equilibrium and Equilibrium Institutions," in *Political Science: The Science of Politics* (Herb Weisberg, editor) (Agathon press, 1986) **[e-reserve]**

Ellen Immergut – "The Theoretical Core of the New Institutionalism," *Politics & Society* March 1998 (vol. 26 #1) **[handout]**

OPTIONAL: Julia Lynch, *Age in the Welfare State*, chaps. 6 & 7 (Cambridge Univ. Press, 2006)

Week 13: Institutions, ideas, and explanations of political change

Rogers Smith, "If Politics Matters: Implications for a 'New Institutionalism'", *Studies in American Political Development* vol. 6, spring 1992 **[e-reserve]**

Robert Lieberman, "Ideas, Institutions, and Political Order: Explaining Political Change," *American Political Science Review*, vol. 96, #4, December 2002 **[J-STOR]**

OPTIONAL: Mark Blyth, "Structures Do Not Come with an Instruction Sheet: Interests, Ideas, and Progress in Political Science," *Perspectives on Politics*, vol. 1, #4, 2003; Daniel Béland, *Social Security: History and Politics from the New Deal to the Privatization Debate*, ch. 1 (Univ. of Kansas Press, 2005); also see Joseph White, "The Horses and the Jumps: Comments on the Health Care Reform Steeplechase," in *the Journal of Health Politics, Policy and Law*, vol. 20 #2, 2005

Week 14: Conclusions

Thomas Kuhn – *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 3rd ed.; chapters 3, 9, 11, 12 **[purchase]**

Thomas Walker, "The Perils of Paradigm Mentalities: Revisiting Kuhn, Lakatos, and Popper," *Perspectives on Politics*, vol. 8, #2, June 2010 **[e-reserve]**

Gabriel Almond – *A Discipline Divided: Schools and Sects in Political Science*; chapter 1 **[traditional and e-reserve]**

John Dryzek – "Revolutions without Enemies," *APSR* vol. 100, #4, November 2006 **[J-STOR]**

OPTIONAL: "At the Court of Chaos: Political Science in an Age of Perpetual Fear," Ira Katznelson's presidential address to the August 2006 meeting of the APSA, *Perspectives on Politics*, vol. 5, #1, March 2007, pp. 3-15.

For a good overview of some issues in the philosophy of science with particular attention paid to the idea of scientific revolutions, see Ian Hacking's edited volume, *Scientific Revolutions* (Oxford Univ. Press, 1981)

Third reflection paper due in class on Thursday of this week

Week 15: Review session

Final exam: Friday, April 22nd, 8:00-10:00AM (cumulative – expect a pair of essay questions)