

Sovereigns, Subjects, Power, Truth (Graduate Seminar 2014)

Professor: Matthew Scherer

Course Description:

This graduate seminar in political theory has two primary objectives: The first is to pursue a series of questions about concepts central to politics in late modernity – sovereignty, subjectivity, power, and truth. These questions include: How is contemporary political power constituted? And how are subjects constituted (de-constituted, and re-constituted) within regimes of power and truth, and through the specific mechanisms of biopower, governmentality, and neoliberalism? How can the contemporary forms taken by power, truth, subjects, and sovereignty be contested and reshaped through political practices? How does power take hold of life itself, and how can life elude its grasp?

The second objective is to practice political theory as a deep and sustained engagement with thinkers and texts – as an apprenticeship in thought meant to enlarge one’s capacity for thinking critically, conceptually, and creatively about political problems. To this end, we will read classical works by St. Paul, St. Augustine, John Calvin, Thomas Hobbes, Max Weber, and Giorgio Agamben in order to construct the problems of sovereignty, power, truth, and the formation of ethical subjects in a rigorous form. With this framework in place, we will examine how these problems are addressed – and reinvented – by two of the most probing, challenging, insightful, and rewarding thinkers of the modern canon of political thought, Friedrich Nietzsche and Michel Foucault. We will alternate between readings from Nietzsche’s works from the 1880s, and readings from Foucault’s lectures at the Collège de France from the mid to late 1970s. Our task will be to allow each thinker to clarify, challenge, and illuminate the other; and to let the conversation between Nietzsche and Foucault enrich our own thinking about sovereigns, subjects, power, and truth in contemporary politics.

Schedule

1. 1/22 Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the “Spirit” of Capitalism*
 2. John Calvin, *The Institutes of Christian Philosophy* (1536 edition):
 - a. “Chapter I: The Law: Containing an Explanation of the Decalogue”*
 - b. “Chapter II: Faith: Containing an Explanation of the Creed (Called Apostolic)”
 - b. “Chapter VI: Christian Freedom, Ecclesiastical Power, and Political Administration”*
- St. Paul, *Romans**
- St. Augustine, *The Rule of St. Augustine**

3. Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* Intro, 4–6, 10–21*
4. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*
5. Michel Foucault, "Society Must Be Defended": Lectures, Collège de France, 1975-1976
6. Michel Foucault, "Society Must Be Defended": Lectures, Collège de France, 1975-1976
7. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*
8. No Class, Spring Break
9. Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures, Collège de France 1977–1978*
10. Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures, Collège de France 1977–1978*
11. Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer*
12. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morals*
13. Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures, Collège de France, 1978--1979*
14. Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures, Collège de France, 1978--1979*
15. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*