

III. POLITICAL SCIENCE AND CLASSICAL POLITICAL THEORY: Other Readings

The assigned readings on classical political theory have been limited to one analytical overview (Germino) and substantial portions from one classic (Leviathan). But do not think that the general topic of normative theory will be exhausted with these two selections, for we will investigate several aspects of normative analysis in subsequent sections of the course, most notably in the next part, "Epistemology and the Question of Values," and Part VII, "Issues in Normative Analysis of Political Science."

I have chosen to separate "classical" political theory from normative analysis more generally, because I think that the classics (e.g., writings of Plato, Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau) pose a different type of problem for political science. Germino says, "It is difficult to imagine a single key concept of political science which does not have its roots in one of the classics of political philosophy" (p. 230) and that we "need" the classics to study politics properly. On the other hand, some argue that the classics might properly be studied in the context of the history of political thought but they are hardly necessary (and perhaps of little relevance) to the central task of political science--explaining and predicting macro and micro patterns of political behavior in the contemporary world.

The literature on classical political theory and its study is enormous. I offer only a few idiosyncratic selections which represent some positions or highlight some issues I find particularly important.

Hyneman, Charles S. The Study of Politics. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1959.

Hyneman's last chapter is entitled, "What Shall We Do with the Classics?" Although he really furnishes no answer to this question, Hyneman probes both sides of what he regards as the three main issues it harbors: "(1) Whether much of the content of the classics is relevant to and useful in political science. (2) Whether those who study and teach the classics (teachers of 'political theory') adequately exploit their contents. (3) Whether political scientists who study contemporary problems and teach the other courses in political science adequately exploit the classics." (p. 195)

Tinder, Glenn. Political Thinking: The Perennial Questions. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1970.

Germino makes the point that the classics should be read because the classical philosophers have something to say about timeless questions. Tinder thinks so too, and in this little book he explores what the great philosophers have said on 29 perennial questions, such as "Are men unequal, in essence?" and "Who should be entrusted with power?" It is basically an introductory book but useful for its purpose.

MacFarlane, L. J. Modern Political Theory. London: Nelson and Sons, 1970.

This book is along the same lines as Tinder's, but MacFarlane's at 260 pages is about twice as long and probes more deeply into only six major issues (e.g., "Liberty and Tyranny" and "The Form of the State"). Like Tinder, MacFarlane argues that the great philosophers should not be expected to supply ready-made answers to the great questions but that they should be read to stimulate one's own thinking about possible solutions.

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Sabine, George H. and Thomas L. Thorson, A HISTORY OF POLITICAL THEORY. 4th Ed. Hinsdale, Illinois: Dryden Press, 1973.

If you want simply to consult a good history of political thought, this is a volume that should serve your purpose. Its 800 pages range broadly from the Greeks through communism and fascism. When I was a graduate student, "Sabine" was the standard summarization of political thought. George Sabine died after the third edition appeared, and some traditionalists may still prefer that 1961 edition to this update by Thorson.

Gauthier, David P. The Logic of Leviathan: The Moral and Political Theory of Thomas Hobbes.

For every prominent political theorist, there are scores of students who specialize in analyzing his works. In contrast to the Sabine-type of tree-top survey of the major theorists, specialists work at ground level and below in an effort to achieve complete understanding of their theorists' thinking. This book by Gauthier is one such work on Hobbes that I found useful. Further below, I cite another one.

Strauss, Leo. "Political Philosophy and the Crisis of Our Time," in George J. Graham and George D. Carey (eds.), The Post-Behavioral Era. New York: McKay, 1972. PP. 217-242.

Classical political theory had no greater champion than the late Leo Strauss. In this article, Strauss argues in a general way what Tinder and MacFarlane seek to illustrate more specifically above: that political philosophers have something to say to the modern political scientists. Strauss especially attacked the value relativism of science and urged a return to pre-scientific understanding, which one can find in Plato's Politics, for instance. Strauss expands upon Germino's claim that the classical philosophers "were asking the question of essence" (Germino, 1975: 238), Strauss contending, "If there are essential differences, there can be essential differences between the common good and the private good" (Strauss, 1972: 230).

Oppenheim, Felix E. "The Language of Political Inquiry: Problems of Clarification," in Greenstein and Polsby (eds.), Handbook of Political Science, Volume 1, pages 283-235.

There is a branch of philosophy, analytic philosophy, which contends that searching for "essences" à la Strauss and Germino (above) is nonsense. Thus, Oppenheimer in this tradition criticizes efforts to discover the "true nature" of sovereignty or the "essence" of freedom (p. 290). Near the end of this long article, Oppenheim conducts an analysis of "The Language of Normative Political Inquiry" which argues that the rhetoric of normative theory, while colorful, often masks key issues of logic and understanding.

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Weldon, T.D. The Vocabulary of Politics. Middlesex, England: Penquin Books, 1953.

This little book, which is a bold statement of the analytical philosophy position in criticizing classical theory, has had a major impact in the field. Weldon states, "The central doctrine taken for granted by all classical theorists is . . . that words have meanings in the same sort of sense as that in which children have parents" (p. 18). In my view, Weldon's writings on the analysis of language in political philosophy is more readable than Oppenheim's **article, discussed above and taken up again below**.

Gavre, Mark. "Hobbes and His Audience: The Dynamics of Theorizing," American Political Science Review, 68 (December, 1974), 1542-1556.

In testimony to Weldon's destructive effect upon political philosophy, Gavre outlines a different approach to understanding classical theory and uses Hobbes as an example. Gavre contends that the assault by Weldon and the analytic school has rather thoroughly discredited attempts to "prove" ethical statements, which have as a result been demoted to "personal preferences." But he argues that political philosophy can be given new vitality if we employ a "jurisprudential analogy," recognizing that we seek to defend our ethical statements rather than "prove" them. "In other words, the value of a political or ethical statement is inseparable from its communicative power; an assertion which convinces no one has no value in political discourse." Thus: "The task confronting the political theorists is to build a case for his political and moral position that will appeal to the broadest possible spectrum of politically relevant groups" (p. 1543). Hobbes, he argues, drew upon the logic of Calvinism to persuade his Puritan audience of the need to support rather than attack the political order (p. 1555).

I have explained Gavre's position in some detail because it, along with the item below by Leo Strauss, helps us make the shift from classical political theory to "Epistemology and the Question of Values."

Strauss, Leo. "Natural Law, in International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences, Volume II. New York: MacMillan and the Free Press, 1968. Pp. 80-85.

Discussions of normative theory inevitably inquire into the nature of "natural law," which is complementary to the doctrine of essential differences. Strauss was favorable to the notion of natural law but recognized its general rejection by others: "Given the preponderance of positivism and historicism, natural law is today primarily a historical subject" (p. 80). His most succinct definition of natural law is "a law that determines what is right and wrong and what has power or is valid by nature, inherently, hence everywhere and always" (p. 80).

Note that Strauss speaks of the "validity" of natural law, which implies that he would reject Gavre's proposal to "defend" ethical statements rather than prove them. Can one prove a value statement? We will explore this basic issue in normative analysis in the next section.