

POWER AND LEGITIMACY

CAS IR 546

Spring 2017

Monday/Wednesday 2:30 p.m. - 3:45 p.m.

CAS B-25A

Igor Lukes

154 Bay State Road

358-1776 or lukes@bu.edu

SCOPE AND OBJECTIVES

The course is focused on various political theories and their role in forging the world of today. Primary sources provide the framework for an inquiry into the relationship between power and legitimacy and the manner in which elites use ideas and ideologies not as metaphysical schemes but as façades behind which they hide their interests. The course explores the proposition that our history is the history of the replacement of elites, and that the central question of all political systems is: "Who is going to rule and why?"

The course will be conducted in a lecture-and-discussion form. Scheduled presentations and other forms of input by students are centrally important. Familiarity with assigned texts is essential. Attendance and active course participation are required. Please come prepared to be challenged.

IMPORTANT DATES

First lecture	23 January 2017
Midterm examination hand-out	15 March 2017
Midterm examination hand-in	22 March 2017
Final examination hand-out	3 May 2017
Final examination hand-in	12 May 2017
Commencement	21 May 2017

OFFICE HOURS

I am available for consultations during my office hours every Monday and Wednesday from 12:45 p.m. to 2:00 p.m. I am also always happy to speak with you before and after each lecture. If you are unable to see me during my office hours, I will make a prompt arrangement for us to meet as soon as possible. I am often free to meet on most Wednesdays and Fridays.

POLICY ON INCOMPLETES

No incomplete grades will be reported unless the student has presented a plausible explanation why the coursework could not be finished on time. The student will then fill in a form requesting an incomplete grade; this will include a written commitment to satisfy the outstanding obligations by a specific date.

GENERAL COURSE REQUIREMENTS

- a. Attendance (obligatory)
- b. Active participation (20 percent)
- c. Class presentation (20 percent)
- c. Midterm examination (30 percent)
- d. Final examination (30 percent)

I.

The midterm and final examinations follow the take-home and open-book format. Each must be five pages long and double-spaced.

1. You will be asked to write an analytical essay on one out of three or more topics.
2. The topics will hold you accountable for the material covered in lectures, assigned readings, and class discussions.
3. You must clearly distinguish between ideas that are yours, and those you have heard from someone else or encountered in a publication.

II.

The format of the class presentation. You are required to do a 15 minute presentation in which you reconstruct an argument. A reconstructed argument is presented as a sequence of easy to follow numbered steps leading to a conclusion.

1. *Find your argument.* You are encouraged to use your own judgment to design an argument that fits within the framework of this course and with which you will feel comfortable. For inspiration, please consult the list of possible arguments that is included at the end of this syllabus. Consult me, please.

2. *Identify your argument and its context.* Be sure to indicate clearly where your argument appears to fit in the context of the assigned readings and our classroom debates. Note that your presentation should not start with a fact that no one disputes, e.g., "Machiavelli was born in 1469 in Florence." It should instead identify some of his controversial ideas and engage them critically.

3. *Time and schedule.* Talk to me about your choice. Make sure that we have agreed – as soon as possible – on a specific date for your presentation. The sooner you do this, the more likely it is that your preferred date will be still available.

3. *Understand your argument.* Read carefully all the relevant texts. It is not necessary to draw on any secondary sources, and it could be a waste of time to

distract yourself with other peoples' views. But you should feel free to make use of commentators if they say something that helps you understand the argument.

4. *Prepare a one-page handout* for your presentation. The handout will make it easier for your audience to follow your reasoning. It should consist of several bullet points.

5. *Rehearse your presentation*. Ask your friends to evaluate it. Make sure you time yourself – until you can safely stay within the 15 min limit.

6. *Conclude with a question* that will stimulate further debate.

7. *Get us thinking about your argument*. You should view your presentation as an invitation to the rest of the class to work together to understand and assess the topic of your presentation.

CODE OF CONDUCT

All students are expected to maintain high standards of academic honesty and integrity. In your coursework please provide citations for all quotations, paraphrases, and ideas taken from any source. Boston University has strict standards for intellectual integrity. Punishment for plagiarism may be severe, and can include expulsion from the university. For more on the definition of plagiarism and the standards to which you will be held, see the CAS Academic Conduct Code, available at <http://www.bu.edu/academics/policies/academic-conduct-code/>

GRS students, please consult <http://www.bu.edu/cas/students/graduate/grs-forms-policies-procedures/academic-discipline-procedures/>

DISABILITY ACCOMMODATION

Boston University accommodates students with disabilities in conformance with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and with the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. Requests for disability accommodations should be made to Disability Services, 19 Deerfield Street, Boston, MA 02215; 617-353-3658 (Voice/TTY). Students seeking accommodations should submit relevant medical documentation and comply with the policies and procedures of Disability Services.

SSIGNED TEXTS

1. Plato, *The Apology*
2. Dostoevsky, "The Grand Inquisitor"
3. Spinka, *Jan Hus*
4. Machiavelli, *The Prince*
5. Le Carré, *The Spy Who Came in From the Cold*
6. Hobbes, *The Leviathan* (the Chap. "Of Commonwealth")
7. Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*
8. Marx and Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*
9. Lenin: Selected Documents (See Blackboard)
10. Milosz, *The Captive Mind* ("The Pill of Murti Bing," "Ketman")
11. Chesterton, *The Man Who Was Thursday*
12. Lukes, "The Tukhachevsky Affair"
13. Stalin, *On Linguistics*
14. Kovaly, *Under a Cruel Star*
15. Havel, *The Power of the Powerless*
16. Kolakowski, "Hope and Hopelessness"

COURSE OUTLINE
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Spring Semester 2017

- Lecture 1, 23 Jan.** Introduction
- Lecture 2, 25 Jan.** Who shall govern? By what right?
- Lecture 3, 30 Jan.** Socrates and the *Daimonion*
- Lecture 4, 1 Feb.** The Grand Inquisitor: *the truth is the end of the world*
- Lecture 5, 6 Feb.** The essence of government: *miracle, mystery, authority*
- Lecture 6, 8 Feb.** Jan Hus & Jeanne d'Arc: the doctrine of two swords
- Lecture 7, 13 Feb.** Jan Hus: *Defend the Truth, Live the Truth, Die for It*
- Lecture 8, 15 Feb.** *Malleus Maleficarum* and the Witch Trials
- Lecture 9, 21 Feb.** Machiavelli. A cynic?
- Lecture 10, 22 Feb.** Machiavelli. A moralist!
- Lecture 11, 27 Feb.** *The Spy Who Came in From the Cold*
- Lecture 12, 1 Mar.** Hobbes: *Homo homini lupus est*
- Lecture 13, 13 Mar.** Hobbes: the high priest of order
- Lecture 14, 15 Mar.** Comenius
- Lecture 15, 20 Mar.** The French Revolution
- Lecture 16, 22 Mar.** Burke *contra* metaphysical schemes in politics
- Lecture 17, 27 Mar.** Goethe: *Faust*
- Lecture 18, 29 Mar.** Hegel's "Herr und Knecht"
- Lecture 19, 3 Apr.** Miłosz: The (Marxist) Pill of Murti Bing
- Lecture 20, 5 Apr.** Marx: Prometheus? Procrustes!
- Lecture 21, 10 Apr.** Lenin: The Vanguard of the Proletariat
- Lecture 22, 12 Apr.** The Tukhachevsky Affair, and Other (Soviet) Witch Trials
- Lecture 23, 19 Apr.** Stalin as a Revisionist: *On Linguistics*
- Lecture 24, 24 Apr.** Miłosz's Ketman and *The Man Who Was Thursday*
- Lecture 25, 26 Apr.** Kovaly's *The Cruel Star*

Lecture 26, 1 May Havel and his greengrocer

Lecture 27, 3 May The Plastic People: How to Resist Hopelessness

PRESENTATION TOPICS
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1. The Athenians had to sentence Socrates to death in order to protect the unity of their POLIS.
2. Socrates is the first well known, though certainly not the last, intellectual who was put to death by a brutal and ignorant state.
3. Political ideologies are just persiflage, fluff that makes no significant impact on the world in which we exist. What matters in politics is power. Nothing else.
4. Political ideologies are vital components of power. On occasion they may become more powerful than power itself.
5. The state is a divine institution. It is greater than any individual or the sum of all its citizens. It embodies what is best about humans.
6. States are flawed human constructs. Created by people, they can be destroyed by people.
7. Dostoyevsky's Grand Inquisitor is an appalling cynic. He pushed Christ's accent on love, mercy, humility, and compassion from the center and substituted for it political power, riches, and military prowess. He killed Christianity before it could take root and flourish.
8. The Grand Inquisitor is an idealist who worked to save all humanity, especially the weak and underprivileged. He distorted Christ's teachings but he did so in order to give meaning to the meaningless universe and to provide hope to the despairing.
9. Jan Hus chose to die at the stake because he was a moral exhibitionist, an extremist who sought the world's attention, not reasonable reform.

10. Jan Hus had the duty to tell the truth, as he understood it, even though it would split the church and trigger religious wars and conflicts for centuries to come.
11. Some in Washington reacted to the terrorist attacks on 9/11 by suggesting that the U.S. Constitution should not be an obstacle in the war on terror. This may be in line with the view that politicians are judged by their results, not their honesty and respect for the rule of law.
12. No one has the right to obey laws and respect the truth only when it is comfortable and convenient. It is a permanent obligation. Hus was right to insist on his duty to "Seek the truth, listen to the truth, learn the truth, love the truth, speak the truth, hold the truth, defend the truth until death."
13. Machiavelli reduces everything down to power. He is the destroyer of morality in politics.
14. Machiavelli taught how to gain power in order to do public good. He is a patriot.
15. Everybody knows that Machiavelli is a cynic and advocate of violence and deception in politics.
16. A cynic says that values do not matter. Machiavelli insists that they do. He is an idealist.
17. Control (chief of British Intelligence in John Le Carré's *The Spy Who Came in From the Cold*) is a public servant who takes upon himself the burden to do what is unethical and wicked – so that others can sleep peacefully at night.
18. Control is a power-driven misanthrope who does what it takes to win – by whatever means and at whatever cost. Viewed morally, there is no difference between Control and his Communist opponents.
19. Hobbes wants all of us to give up political power in order to achieve tranquility and peace. For him virtue is an efficient calculation to ensure survival. But life cannot be reduced only to postponement of death.
20. Hobbes is right not to trust human judgment when it comes to politics and power. Just look at Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Somalia today. Surely the migrants and refugees would be better off living at home under the rule of a Leviathan than facing danger, discrimination, and poverty as homeless refugees in Europe.

21. The French Revolution and other epochal events are triggered by great causes: wars, famines, and by the ideas that come from public intellectuals (Voltaire, Marx, Lenin). Personalities are merely tools through whom the great forces of history make themselves present on the world stage.
22. Historical events, including the French Revolution, are often, though not always, driven by coincidences, errors, and idiosyncratic personalities. Some people influence the course of history because they are strong (e.g., Napoleon), while others play major roles in channeling events because they are weak (e.g., Louis XVI).
23. Prometheus gave humanity the gift of fire. Marx performed a similar function when he discovered the laws of history. He demonstrated that history moves inevitably through stages toward its final destination, viz., communism.
24. Marx was wrong. He underestimated the ability of capitalism to learn from its crises, to improve, and correct itself. Consequently liberal capitalist democracy still remains an organized form of human activity that satisfies the needs of the largest number more efficiently than other systems.
25. Marx argued that there was no need for a revolution because capitalism produced the seeds of its own destruction. It was bound to collapse and be replaced by socialism and communism.
26. Revolution was the key to historical change, argued Lenin, who rejected the concept of the inevitable collapse of capitalism. The overthrow of the old regime could be brought about only by a small and fanatically disciplined political organization that would inspire and lead society to communism, i.e., the Communist Party.
27. In classical Greece, politics was not only about power. It was also the highest form of art. However, politics was gradually reduced to the question: Who will govern, and why? According to Plato and Aristotle, only the best and brightest were supposed to govern. These days it seems that only the richest among us can gain any significant political authority.
28. Marxism is the solution of the puzzle of human history. It shows where we are and where we will inevitably end up. It accurately analyzes the past and the present, and reveals the future. The best among us, the revolutionary vanguard, will guide us along the way.

30. Believers study and worship the New Testament, the Torah, the Quran, and other holy texts on a regular basis. Very few Marxists have ever read *Das Kapital* by Karl Marx. Marxism is an illusion, a drug, much like the Pill of Murti Bing. It is not an accurate answer to the puzzle of human existence.

31. Karl Marx approached philosophy not as an abstraction but as an instrument for changing the world. See his 11th Thesis on Feuerbach: "So far the philosophers have only interpreted the world in different ways. Now the time has come to change it."

32. Some say that *Vox populi, vox dei*, i.e., the voice of the people is the voice of God. However, others have noted that voters occasionally make horrible choices. We should either "vote well, or not at all."

33. After the Brexit vote in Great Britain and with the rise of the National Front in France, has democracy lost its meaning?