



# What is 'Political'?

**2<sup>nd</sup> term seminar 2017-2018**

Organised by Stefano Bartolini

Register [Online](#)

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## Description

'Politics' is a noun that points to a field or sphere of human activity and interaction. 'Political' is an adjective that usually associates with other names to qualify and specify them. Political behaviour, political institutions, political participation and political groups denote special kinds of behaviour, institutions, participation and groups whose specialty resides in their being 'political'. What does this specification refer to? This is the question at the core of this seminar. In order to overcome characterisations that focus on mere activities, institutional locations or functions, an inquiry into politics as a field or sphere requires a micro-definition of the distinctive political element in human action. Hence, the emphasis in this course is on 'the political' and on 'political action,' leading to an understanding of politics. The seminar focuses on 'politics' understood as the production and distribution of 'behavioural compliance,' as opposed to the view of politics as a distribution of values, an aggregation of preferences or a solution to social dilemmas. Starting from a motivational definition of elementary political action, the endeavour proceeds to a differentiation of compliance instigations in different social fields of interaction, characterised by various levels of confinement of the actors and of monopolisation of command. Eventually, the work concentrates on the single 'meta-good' exclusively and unavoidably reserved for the political: the production of a generalised and stabilised positive attitude towards complying with any possible mechanism of production and distribution of any other good. This change of perspective is theoretically profitable. It helps to distinguish the changing phenomenology of politics as conventionally understood from its essential and stable core. It may help to more precisely define the knowledge task of the political scientist.

## Audience

The seminar is open to all researchers.

## Requirements

The course takes as a reference a manuscript of my own that is forthcoming and that discusses the topic in relation to classic and contemporary literature. Beyond this text a restricted list of additional readings is offered. Participants are expected to read them thoroughly and attentively so as to use them in the discussions throughout it. The ten meetings will be opened by an introduction of the weekly theme by the professor followed by a critical remarks paper of two participants and by a general discussion. Creditation requires attendance and the presentation of at least one critical paper.

This seminar is worth 20 credits.

## Schedule

Session 1	11 January	Thursday 17-19h	Seminar Room 2
Session 2	18 January	Thursday 17-19h	Seminar Room 2
Session 3	25 January	Thursday 17-19h	Seminar Room 2
Session 4	1 February	Thursday 17-19h	Seminar Room 2
Session 5	8 February	Thursday 17-19h	Seminar Room 2
Session 6	12 February	Thursday 17-19h	Seminar Room 2
Session 7	22 February	Thursday 17-19h	Seminar Room 2
Session 8	1 March	Thursday 17-19h	Seminar Room 2
Session 9	8 March	Thursday 17-19h	Seminar Room 2
Session 10	15 March	Thursday 17-19h	Seminar Room 2

## Syllabus

### Session 1) Introduction

- Organizational matters
- Why a continued debate?
- The historical development of the lemma 'politics'

### Session 2) The definition of nuclear political action

- What is 'political action'?
- Conceptions of politics and political action
- Political action versus other types of action

### Session 3) Five objections to 'political action' as search for compliance

**Session 4) Behavioural compliance and the concept of power**

**Session 5) The conditions of political action: confinement of actors**

**Session 6) The conditions of political action: monopolization of command**

**Session 7) The analytical definition of the fields of political action**

-Closed and open fields

-Monopolized and non-monopolised fields

**Session 8) Compliance search and types of final values**

**Session 9) What is 'politics': The political good**

**Session 10) The character of politics in governmental fields**

-Public goods and social dilemmas

-Stratification

-Autonomy

-Ultimacy

-What is left out and what's next?

### **Readings for the seminar (available on Collab):**

Bartolini, Stefano (1917), *The Political*, manuscript

Schmitt, Carl (1927, 1966), *The Concept of the Political*, translated by George Schwab, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, pp. 27-37 (or ed. 'Der Begriff des Politischen', *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaften und Sozialpolitik*, 58: 1-33).

de Jouvenel, Bertrand (1963), *The Pure Theory of Politics*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, pp. 67-95.

Eckstein, H. (1973), 'Authority Patterns: a structural basis for political enquiry,' *American Political Science Review*, 63: 114-116.

Frohock, F. M. (1978), 'The Structure of Politics', *American Political Science Review*, 72: 859-870.

Mark E. Warren (1999), "What Is Political?" *Journal of Theoretical Politics*, 11: 207-231, p. 218.

Miller, E. F. (1980), 'What does "Political" Mean?', *The Review of Politics*, 42: 56-72, pp. 63-65.

Burns, Tony (2000), 'What is Politics? Robinson Crusoe, deep ecology and Immanuel Kant', *Politics*, 20: 93-98.

Palonen, Kari (2006), 'Two Concepts of Politics: Conceptual History and Present Controversies', *Scandinavian Journal of Social Theory*, 7: 11-25.

Alexander, J. (2014), 'Notes Towards a Definition of Politics', *Philosophy*, 89: 273-300;

### **Further readings suggestions on some of the key points of the manuscript (optional and not available on Collab):**

#### **On the lemma of 'politics my suggestions include:**

Sartori, Giovanni (1973), 'What is "Politics"', *Political Theory*, 1: 5-26,

Sellin, Volker (1978), *Politik*, in *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, Band 4, Stuttgart, Klett-Cotta, pp. 789-874;

Bordes, J. (1982), *Politeia dans la pensée grecque jusqu'à Aristotele*, Paris, Les Belles Lettres.

Ornaghi, Lorenzo (2013), *Politica*, in *Nell'età della tarda democrazia. Scritti sullo stato, le istituzioni e la politica*, Milano, Vita e Pensiero, pp. 65-73.

#### **On Politics seen through the concept of power:**

Lasswell, H. D. and A. Kaplan (1950), *Power and Society; A Framework for Political Inquiry*, New Haven, Yale University Press.

Parsons, Talcott (1963), 'On the concept of political power', *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, 107: 232-262.

Luhmann, Niklas (1969), 'Klassische Theorie der Macht: Kritik ihrer Pramissen', *Zeitschrift für Politik*, n. 16, pp. 453-465.

Popitz, H. (1992), *Phaenomene der Macht*, Tübingen, J.C.B. Mohr, 2nd ed. (An English translation of the first chapter of this very important work is available in Poggi, G. (2014), *Varieties of Political Experiences*, cit., pp. 163-165.)

Stoppino, M. (1976 , 2001 3rd ed.), *Potere e teoria politica*, Milano, Giuffrè, pp. 2013-216.

Lukes, Steven (1974), *Power: a Radical View*, London, Macmillan.

Gordon, Colin (1980), *Forward by to Foucault Michel, Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*, New York, Pantheon Books.

### **On exit options and open and closed fields:**

Weber, M. (1921-22, 1978), *Economy and Society*, Vol. 1, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, University of California Press, p. 43 and ff.

Hirschman, A. O. (1970), *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty. Responses to Decline in Firms, Organizations, and States*, Cambridge (Mass.), Harvard University Press.

Hirschman, A. O. (1978), 'Exit, Voice and the State', *World Politics* 31: 90-107.

On boundaries as 'locking-in' mechanisms for individuals, resources and territories see Rokkan, Stein (1999), *State Formation, Nation Building, and Mass Politics in Europe. The theory of Stein Rokkan*, edited by Peter Flora with Stein Kuhnle and Derek Urwin, Oxford, Oxford University Press, pp. 97-107.

For an elaboration of the concept of 'exclusion': Murphy, R. (1988), *Social Closure. The Theory of Monopolization and Exclusion*, Oxford, Clarendon Press.

### **Foer 'circumscription theory:**

Carneiro, R. L. (1970), 'A Theory of the origins of the state', *Science* 169: 733-738;

Carneiro, R. L. (1988), 'The circumscription theory', *American Behavioural Scientist* 31: 497-511.

Carneiro, R. L. (1978), *Political Expansion as an expression of the principle of competitive exclusion*, in R. Cohen and E. R. Service (eds.), *Origins of the state*, Philadelphia, Institute for the Study of Human Issues, pp. 205-223;

### **For those interested in mechanisms of monopolization and enforcement in the economic theory perspective:**

Mantzavinos, C. (2001), *Individuals, Institutions and Markets*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

Articles in Ménard, C. (ed.) (2000), *Institutions, Contracts and Organizations. Perspectives from New Institutional Economics*, Cheltenham (UK), Edward Elgar.

In particular Barzel, Yoram, *The state and the diversity of third-party enforcers*, pp. 211-233;

### **On primordial political predicaments my suggestion is:**

Golding, E.G. William (1954), *Lord of the Flies*, London, Faber & Faber

De Jouvenel, Bertrand (1963), *The Myth of the Solution*, Addendum to *The pure theory of politics*, cit