

LECTURE / DISCUSSION / DEBATE
THE PROBLEM OF POWER IN THE STUDY OF POLITICS

Terms and concepts to know:

Political theory	Political philosophy
Ideas and ideology	Facts and values
Empirical theories	Normative theories
The contestability thesis	Power vs. authority
Negative vs. positive power	Lukes and three-dimensional power

Study and discussion questions:

1. Is it possible to devise political concepts that have no normative implications, and are thus value-free in character?
2. Can someone make a statement about politics without theorizing at the same time?
3. Rob Urie makes the suggestion that “[t]he cynical brilliance of the New Democrats of the 1990s lies in their realization that capitalist democracy is an illusion, and that political power is economic in nature.” What do you think he means by this? Is it even possible that political power can have an economic basis?
4. Should political theory embrace or seek to avoid controversy?
5. Do teachers of political theory make practical political judgements?
6. Is the use of logic and the resort to factual evidence ethically neutral?
7. Explain Schmockler’s ‘parable of the tribes’. Is his contention that “a selection for power among civilized societies is inevitable” a true statement in your opinion? Why or why not?
8. Explain what Wright means by a ‘progress trap’. Can you find any examples in the contemporary world?
9. What salient points do you find in Eric Liu’s short documentary *How to Understand Power*? What questions does this short talk present for the current human condition?

Readings:

Hoffman and Graham: Introduction and WEB.

Video:

Noam Chomsky: Knowledge and Power.