

LECTURE / DISCUSSION / DEBATE  
UNDERSTANDING AND CRITICALLY ANALYZING  
POLITICAL THEORY AND BUDDHISM

**Terms and concepts to know:**

Authoritative power	Coercive power
Political “influence” or persuasion	Political manipulation
Political philosophy	Systematic political theory
Ideology	Nation-State
Unitary v. Federal system	Historicism
Straussians	Logical-Analytical Interpretation
Deconstructionism	Social Science criticism
Winch / MacIntyre	American Social Science (scientism)
Political Science criticism	Strauss / Ricci / Seidelman
The Separate Tables Discussion	Paradigm
“Normal” science	Scientific “revolution”

**Study and discussion questions:**

1. Have political theories contributed to making the world a better, safer, more humane place to live? Or have they been to “narrow” in their orientation and thus not useful to people’s everyday existence?
2. John Horgan says you can’t study politics “scientifically.” He says the “hardies” (people who believe the social world can be studied in the same way one studies molecular biology) often fight with the “softies” (who argue you can’t). Who’s right in your estimation and why? If we can’t study politics scientifically, how should we study it?
3. Give some examples of research topics that might be of interest to you and then discuss whether it would be possible for you to approach in a neutral or objective fashion. Why could you accomplish or not accomplish this task?
4. In terms of views of society, do you agree with Hegel that society should be viewed as “organic,” that is, individuals should be viewed as integral parts of a larger whole or community? Or do you agree with Bentham, that there is no such thing as society, instead, “there are only discrete individuals who live, work, and play together.” How does each view affect your choice of political theories?
5. Discuss the concept of “historicism” and the implications of being a historicist.
6. Which criticism of political science do you find most compelling or is all criticism of the discipline misplaced?
7. Buddhism’s first precept is: “all of life is suffering.” Is this true for you and in what ways?

**Readings:**

Heineman. *Political Science*, Chapters 2 and 18.  
Stevenson. *Twelve Theories*, Chapter 3

**Video:** *The Lottery of Birth*.