

RECENT POLITICAL THOUGHT

Course Syllabus, Study guide

PS 160C, section 1, Fall 2009

Course code: 41330

(T Th 1030-1145, HGH 116)

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Office hours:

Tue, Thurs 9:00-10:00

Wed 2-3

Tue 12:30-2:30

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Many useful supplementary materials are posted on my website for this course:

<http://www.sjsu.edu/people/kenneth.peter/courses/pols160C/>

I. Greensheet:

1. Course description.

Content:

We cannot hope to change our political world if we do not understand its origins. This course, the last in a series of independent (but sequential) courses surveying Western political thought, has two general tasks. First, it seeks to understand the ideas of several key intellectuals which have transformed both our society and the way we view it. What are the ideological origins of our politics? Second, the course will examine the ideas of several contemporary thinkers, who reveal different visions of the future. What are the contemporary alternatives for thinking about politics?

It takes time for ideas to move from a single intellectual into broad usage. Because of this time-lag, our society today is in great measure the product of nineteenth and early twentieth century ideas. For example, Marx, Freud, and Weber forced us to view politics through the lenses of economics, psychology, and sociology. From their perspectives, politics is a by-product of non-political forces. So powerful were their ideas that today we cannot talk of politics without using their terms and concepts: class, alienation, revolution, unconscious, charisma, bureaucracy etc. J.S. Mill, on the other hand, crystallized into his theory an old tradition of thought which, some would argue, has recently succeeded in sweeping the world--democratic liberalism. In short, many would argue that the politics of our own day were shaped by developments in the nineteenth century.

It is comparatively easy to see in retrospect how the ideas of a hundred years ago affect us today. The last portion of the course attempts to do something more difficult--it looks at contemporary thinkers and speculates how they may anticipate the future. In what ways should we move beyond a world based on nineteenth-century ideas?

Political Theory in general:

Political theory, while taught within political science departments, shares many similarities with literature, history, philosophy, and the humanities. It cultivates a kind of thinking more than it disseminates a body of knowledge. Students learn to criticize ideas, analyze texts, create theories, and construct arguments, among other things. Memorization skills and objective knowledge play little role in it. For these reasons, the course is well suited for students who wish to cultivate their writing, their analytic skills, their ability to appreciate literature, as well as their understanding of ethical, social, and political problems.

2. What requirements does this course fill? What prerequisites are suggested?

The B.A. in Political Science require majors to take a minimum of one upper division course in political thought. This course fulfills that requirement, as well as counting towards the normal total of upper division courses.

This course is not designed only for political science students. Students from many other majors have proven that they can do as well in this course as the Political Science majors. All students, however, need some background in the critical reading of original texts. Political Science 3 is the suggested prerequisite, but philosophy, literature, and history courses frequently can provide sufficient practice in reading original sources.

3. Student ethics and responsibilities.

1. *Reading.* This is a reading course. Students should read each scheduled assignment prior to coming to class. Most students find they need to reread part or all of the material after the lecture, since the lecture helps them to further understand it, but reading it prior to the lecture helps students to be able to ask questions and even to listen intelligently. You will find that you cannot simply read the primary source materials just once—you must refer back to the texts repeatedly while fulfilling the assignments.
2. *Time commitment.* Students surveyed upon completion of this class report that they spend 2-4 hours a week completing the reading for this course. The standard rule of thumb for college level work is 2-3 hours of outside work per unit, meaning that a 3 unit class would demand 6-9 hours of outside work, with lower division classes on the lower end and upper division classes on the high end. Surveyed students overwhelmingly find that this course does not demand 9 hours of homework a week, but they do find that it demands more time than they are used to with some other college courses. Much will depend upon your reading speed and comprehension with difficult texts.
3. *Penalties for missed or later assignments.* It is the student's responsibility to make arrangements for any planned absences which will interfere with assignments, and to contact Prof. Peter at the first available opportunity concerning emergencies which cause a missed assignment.
 - a. *In class exams.* Students who miss in-class exams due to a verifiable emergency or University activity that cannot be changed will be allowed to take an alternate exam during a make-up period. Dr. Peter may request or independently seek verification. Otherwise, the exam will not be made up and a 0 will be recorded.
 - b. *Writing assignments turned in late.* Writing assignments turned in late without a verifiable excuse (as for exams, see above) will be deducted 1/3 of a letter grade if turned in before an intervening weekend. For each intervening weekend, there will be an additional 1/3 of a grade deduction. Late assignments will also have the lowest priority for receiving full feedback and commentary from the Professor. Papers turned in after the last day of class may not be accepted, resulting in a failing grade for the paper and possibly the course.
4. *Cheating and plagiarism.*

“Your own commitment to learning, as evidenced by your enrollment at San José State University, and the University’s Academic Integrity Policy requires you to be honest in all your academic course work. Faculty members are required to report all infractions to the Office of Judicial Affairs. The policy on academic integrity can be found at

http://sa.sjsu.edu/judicial_affairs/students/index.html.

All students are responsible for informing themselves about these rules

Plagiarism is a topic that can be confusing to uninformed students. For papers that you write outside of class, ***you should credit every source you consult by listing it in a bibliography***, whether you quote the source or not. Any source you paraphrase, precis, quote or summarize must be directly credited with a footnote of some sort to prove that you are not attempting to take credit for someone else’s work—note that this is not only direct quotes. In this course some footnoting shortcuts will be offered to make your job easier, but the basic principle of always giving credit to the sources you consult never changes.

Note in particular that use of the internet qualifies in the same way as consultation with any other source—internet materials must be fully cited if you have consulted them. Dr. Peter reserves the right to verify the originality of papers.

“Recycling” papers from other courses, even if they are your own original work, is not acceptable. If you have written a paper on a similar topic I am willing to consult with you to find ways to adjust course requirements to incorporate, expand, and build on your previous work.

5. *Collaboration.* Students may collaborate in their studies and are encouraged to do so. However, no collaboration during in-class exams will be allowed. In their studies, collaborating students should not go so far that they memorized answers "cloned" from a single model. A good way to study together without exceeding the boundaries of appropriate collaboration is to discuss possible answers orally but not to share written sample answers.
6. *Courtesy.* Proper classroom etiquette includes arriving on time and staying for the full lecture, refraining from distracting other students during the lecture, listening attentively until the professor dismisses the class, and treating the opinions of other students with respect. The professor reserves the right to deduct from the overall grade for particularly egregious examples of poor classroom etiquette, and to reward students for outstanding displays of collegiality.
7. *Attendance.* Regular, on-time attendance is especially important for these reasons:
 - a) Lectures help explain the original-source readings we do. Most students report that they have a difficult time understanding the readings without the help of the lectures.
 - b) Lectures often cover materials completely independent and/or supplementary to the texts.
 - c) Lectures provide an opportunity for questions, participation, and getting motivated to do the rest of the work.
 - d) Often, important announcements are made at the beginning of class--sometimes clarifying or changing assignments.
 - e) Participation credit is awarded to students who consistently and effectively participate. One cannot participate while absent.
 - f) If you are absent, it is your responsibility to get notes on what you missed. If an assignment or the syllabus was changed during your absence, you are responsible for finding this out.
 - g) If attendance in the class becomes a serious problem, Dr. Peter reserves the right to change course requirements and institute more in-class evaluations.
8. *Grading policy.* Incompletes, academic renewal, course drops, “WU”s vs “F”s.
 - a) Sometimes students “get in over their heads” and need alternatives to finishing the course. I will be happy to issue an incomplete if 1) a student has made arrangements for making up the course by coming to me and filling out the department incomplete form prior to the time of the final exam, 2) the student has completed 2/3 of the assignments, and 3) the student offers a good reason. However, be aware that you will have just one year to make up the assignments or the incomplete automatically turns into an “F”. University rules specifically prohibit professors from giving incompletes to students who need to attend a significant portion of the course to be able to finish it.
 - b) An alternative for students who do not qualify for the incomplete (for example, if you have done less than 2/3 of the assignments or you need to attend a lot of lectures) is to retake the course under academic renewal. You are limited to a certain number of courses over your college career, but this can be an excellent option in certain situations.
 - c) I will cooperate with any student wishing to drop the course for any reason. However, the University has adopted strict rules against dropping a course after the first few weeks unless you have very compelling evidence (death certificate, etc.) I disagree with the policy but cannot change it.
 - d) I am required to issue “WU”s (Withdrawal Unauthorized) to students who do not drop the course but who stop coming to class and doing the assignments. I give “WU”s to those students who “disappear” after doing no graded assignments, and “F”s to those students

who “disappear” after doing at least one graded assignment. But both grades are equally bad, so avoid them both!

e) Check the Catalog for the latest academic rules that might affect you.

9. Disabilities. “If you need course adaptations or accommodations because of a disability, or if you need special arrangements in case the building must be evacuated, please make an appointment with me as soon as possible, or see me during office hours. Presidential Directive 97-03 requires that students with disabilities requesting accommodations must register with DRC to establish a record of their disability.”

4. Assessment of student learning

1. *Criteria.* To see the specific criteria I use for grading, as well as for helpful suggestions on the assignments, see the relevant sections of the online supplement.

2. *Assignment Matrix.*

25% Final

25% Midterm

25% 1st Essay

25% 2nd Essay

3. *Description of assignments:*

a. Final and Midterm. These exams will consist of a series of specific short essays focused on the lectures and the reading. You will have some limited choice on the topics on which you choose to write. For example, you may be asked to write on 7 of 10, or on 10 of 12. Each question will tend to focus on a main idea from a given lecture or given text. Perhaps this seems obvious, but as you take notes in class, do the reading, and study for the exams, you should be thinking about the *political theories* and preparing to discuss them. The midterm and final are each comprehensive over their respective halves of the course.

- b. *Essays.* The essay topics will be distributed appx. two week before they are due. For each essay, you are to write a five-seven page essay, appx. 1250 words. The online supplement contains helpful advice. These essays are not intended to be comprehensive, but are structured to encourage you to do in-depth analysis of 1-3 of the texts we read.

Rewrite of the first essay: Anyone wishing to re-write their essay after receiving my evaluation may do so. The final overall essay grade when a re-write is done is the average of the original and the rewritten essays. The original essay and my original comments must be attached. Minor changes to the paper will not be rewarded—take this option only if you are willing to do a substantial rewrite.

- c. Oral participation: The cumulative contribution of a student over the course of the semester can raise a grade by up to .33 gpa. This often makes a crucial difference in deciding between B+ grades and A- grades, for example, and can often “tip the scales” at many breakpoints. It is rare for a student to earn a solid “A” without getting this boost. See online supplement for advice.

5. Texts

Arendt, Hanna. *The Portable Hannah Arendt* (ed. Baehr). Penguin.

Freud, Sigmund. *Civilization and its Discontents*. Norton.

Marx, Karl. *The Marx-Engels Reader 2nd Edition* (ed. Tucker.) Norton.

Mill, John Stuart. *Basic Writings*. Modern Library.

Rawls, John. *Justice as Fairness: A Restatement*

Weber, Max. *From Max Weber* (eds. Gerth and Mills.) Oxford.

Wolin, Sheldon. *Democracy Inc.: Managed Democracy and the Specter of Inverted Totalitarianism*.
Princeton.

II. Weekly Study Guide and Calendar: A weekly listing of readings and assignments.

Week One, August 25, 27

Introduction: (Tuesday) What is political theory?

Mill: (Thursday) Introduction to Mill

Reading: Course syllabus
On Liberty, Chs. 1-2.

1. How does Mill define liberty?
2. What is the one "simple principle" that Mill says should guide our behavior with regard to liberty?
3. What are the several reasons Mill gives for allowing others to speak and think freely, even when we are sure they are wrong?
4. What would Mill say about Nazi marches? Flag burning? Hate-speech?
5. How is it that Mill bases his defense of free speech, (which Americans commonly regard as a *right*), upon social *utility*? Is the argument from right stronger or weaker than the argument from social utility?

Week Two, Sept 1, 3 Mill 2

Reading: *On Liberty*, Chs. 3-5.

1. What is the basis of Mill's belief in individuality?
2. What does Mill mean by the battle between genius and mediocrity, and how is this battle related to individuality?
3. How should society intervene to protect itself from individuals? Where do we draw the line between an action that harms only an individual and an action that harms others? What would Mill say about euthanasia/ Drug laws? Motorcycle helmet laws?
4. What does Mill think of social pressures? Do you detect a contradiction in his thought on this subject?

Week Three, Sept 8, 10 Mill 3

Reading: *Utilitarianism* (all)
OR
The Subjection of Women (all)

1. What is the "Greatest Happiness Principle"?
2. How does Mill modify and extend the Greatest Happiness Principle? Would he say that professional wrestling is equivalent to opera in its ability to produce happiness?
3. What happens when social utility would necessitate the sacrifice of an individual for the greater good of the community? On what basis could the individual defend his/her rights?
4. Sometimes utility and justice are thought to be different things. In what way does Mill seek to link the two?
5. Other than the fact that it seems remarkable that Mill, a man, was one of the 19th century's foremost feminists, what can you say about the theory behind his feminism? Is it connected to utility? To liberty?
6. How does Mill attack the notion that women have "natural" limitations to their capabilities?

Week Four, Sept 15, 17 Marx I

Reading: Selections from the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* (Tucker 70-81.)
 Theses on Feurbach (Tucker 143-145).
 Selections from the German Ideology (Tucker 149-163.)

1. What does Marx mean by "estranged labor" (often translated as "alienation?") What are the various forms of this estrangement? What are its consequences? What would work that was NOT estranged be like?
2. What is your reaction to Marx's claim that paying a worker more would only be "better payment for the slave?" How is it that alienation takes place regardless of the amount of pay that a worker receives?
3. What is Marx's theory of history? How is it related to ideology?

Week Five, Sept 24 Marx 2

NOTE: Tuesday September 22 is a mandatory furlough day. Campus will be closed and I am not allowed to present a lecture on that day. However, the assignments remain the same—please keep up with the reading and I will attempt to get us caught up in lecture on subsequent days.

Reading: "Alienation and Social Classes" (Tucker 133-135.)
 "Class Struggle and the Mode of Production" (Tucker 220).
Manifesto of the Communist Party (Tucker 469-500.)

1. What does Marx mean by class? Do you agree that history is dominated by class struggles?
2. Why does he believe that capitalism is inherently exploitative of workers?
3. What is the rationale for the abolition of private property?
4. Do you agree that the ruling elite manufacture the dominant ideas of each age? What does this imply for history?
5. Why does Marx think that the proletariat will rebel? What are the advantages and disadvantages of a theory that calls for revolution?
6. Some of the measures Marx lists in the Communist Manifesto have already been implemented in the United States. Why hasn't this led to communism?

Week Six, Sept 29, Oct 1 Marx 3**1st Essay Due Thursday October 1.**

Reading: *Capital I*, Part I, "The Fetishism of Commodities" (Tucker 319-329.)
 "Non-Violent Revolution" (Tucker 522-524.)
 "Critique of the Gotha Program I and IV" (Tucker 525-534, 537-539).
 "After the Revolution" (Tucker 542-548).

1. What is the "fetishism of commodities"? Why is it important?
2. What is the positive image Marx paints of communism, as opposed to the negative view of capitalism? Is Marx's vision of a post-revolutionary society clear? Is it what you expected?
3. Would Marx have agreed with Jefferson that bloodletting is a necessary component of social change?

Week Seven, Oct 6, 8 *Freud*

Reading: *Civilization and its Discontents*, entire.

1. Are humans rational animals, or are there underlying sources human behavior of which the conscious mind is unaware? What do you think Freud would say about the increasingly dominant mode of analysis in political science: "rational-choice theory"?
2. How does Freud construct a social theory on the basis of what had been his theory of individual psychology? Why does he feel it necessary to add the concept of the death-wish to his original theory?
3. What is Freud's criticism of religion?
4. How would you compare Freud with Marx?

Week Eight, Oct 13, 15 *Weber I*

Reading: Portions of "Politics as a Vocation", (G & M 77-79 and end, 118-128 beginning "Now then, what relations do ethics and politics really have?").
"Science as a Vocation", (entire).

1. In "Politics as a Vocation", how does Weber define *politics*? The *state*? Do you accept his definition? What does this imply about *violence*? Where does *legitimacy* come in? *Domination*?
2. What is the relationship of ethics and politics? Is it an ethics of ends or of responsibility?
3. In "Science as a Vocation", what does Weber say of the *inward* calling for science? Does creativity play less of a role in science than in art?
4. What does Weber mean when he says the modern world is *disenchanted*? is his description of modern life accurate--that we become tired of life but never satiated with life?
5. In what way does Weber believe that science is meaningless? Why does he pursue it anyway? What are the three things that Weber says science can accomplish?
6. What do you make of the last two pages of "Science as a Vocation?" What is the "rationalization and intellectualization" of modern life? What "demon" holds our lives?

Week Nine, Oct 20, 22 *Weber 2*

MIDTERM THURSDAY OCTOBER 22

Reading: "Bureaucracy" 1, 5, 6, 9-12 (G & M 196-198, 212-216, 224-235.)
"Charisma" (G & M 245-252).

1. How does Weber define bureaucracy? Given the common view that "bureaucracy" is synonymous with "inefficiency", how can you explain Weber's view that "precision, speed, unambiguity" etc. are raised to the "optimum point" in bureaucratic authority?
2. What is the relation between bureaucracy and democracy? What is his view of democracy?
3. Is Weber optimistic or pessimistic about the long term future of bureaucracy?
4. In what ways might charisma be an antidote to bureaucracy? Has the twentieth century experience given us reason to hope that it can? Can you apply Weber's analysis to contemporary charismatic figures?

Week Ten, Oct 27, 29 *Arendt 1*

Reading: From Section IV The Vita Activa “The Public and the Private Realm” pp. 182-218.
From Section VI Revolution and Preservation “The Revolutionary Tradition and its Lost Treasure” pp. 508-535.

- Questions:
1. What does Arendt mean by the contrast between the polis and the household? The public and the private?
 2. In what way does Arendt hope that a clearer understanding about these distinctions will help us understand our modern situation?
 3. How is the term “political economy” a contradiction in terms, according to Arendt?
 4. How does Arendt trace the growth of the private realm over history? What does she mean by “the rise of the Social”?
 5. Is Arendt being nostalgic for the ancient Greek world? Is she merely charting the historical development of our modern focus on private life and wealth?
 6. How do successful revolutions betray the spirit of revolution? Is this inevitable?
 7. How does Arendt think that the American Revolution was a “tragedy”?
 8. What does Arendt think of Jefferson and his view of the American Revolution? Why was the township important to Jefferson?
 9. What is a “soviet” and what happened to the “soviets” in the so-called “Soviet Union”?
 10. What new form of politics have all modern revolutions created, and why have these new forms not lasted?

Week Eleven, Nov 3, 5 *Arendt 2*

Reading: Section V “Banality and Conscience: The Eichmann Trial and its Implications.” pp. 313-414.

- Questions:
1. What was Eichmann’s background? Was there anything in his background, occupation, family, or friends early in his life that would have predicted his role in the Holocaust? Was he anti-Semitic early in life?
 2. What does Eichmann’s statement “I will jump into my grave laughing, because the fact that I have the death of five million Jews on my conscience gives me extraordinary satisfaction” tell Arendt about him?
 3. How intelligent was Eichmann? How did he speak? Why does Arendt highlight his constant use of clichés?
 4. Is Arendt critical of Eichmann’s trial? Why?
 5. What was the Wannsee Conference and what was Eichmann’s role in it?
 6. Why was Eichmann’s execution controversial?
 7. How do most Jews, according to Arendt, misunderstand the Holocaust? (Note, Arendt was Jewish and fled to America just before the Holocaust began.) Can you see why Arendt’s views would be controversial?
 8. What does Arendt mean by “the banality of evil”?

Week Twelve, Nov 10, 12 *Rawls 1*

Reading: John Rawls, selections from *Justice as Fairness*, to be announced..

Questions: To be announced.

Week Thirteen, Nov 17, 19 Rawls 2**2nd Essay DUE Thursday November 19**

Reading: John Rawls, selections from Justice as Fairness, to be announced..

Questions: To be announced.

Week Fourteen, Nov 24 Wolin 1 (Nov 26 is Thanksgiving)

Reading: Sheldon Wolin. Democracy Inc.
Ch 1 (pp. 1-3), 3 (pp. 44-68), 8 (pp. 131-158)

- Questions:
1. How does Wolin compare the burning of the Reichstag in 1933 with the destruction of the World Trade Center in 2001? What was the symbolic meaning of these events? What does he mean by “iconography”?
 2. How would you answer Wolin’s question (p. 6) “How is it possible that a society that makes a fetish of freedom of choice can produce a unanimity eerily comparable to that of a more openly coercive system?”
 3. What does Wolin mean by “political imagination” and the related term, “the political imaginary”? What is the “power imaginary” and what is “the constitutional imaginary”? How does Wolin tie a shift between these two “imaginaries” to historical developments beginning with the New Deal and moving through WWII and the Cold War ?
 4. What does Wolin mean by “inverted totalitarianism”? How can he compare the United States to a totalitarian regime? Read carefully his definition in the first paragraph of p. 44.
 5. What do you make of Wolin’s theory that a new form of conservatism is growing that is totalizing and statist (etatisme)? (Hint: see the Terri Schiavo example.)
 6. Why does Wolin believe that the new system of totalitarianism is “inverted”? In what ways does “inverted totalitarianism” differ from “classical totalitarianism”?
 7. What does Wolin mean by “superpower”? What is the new meaning of “empire” in such a system?
 8. Why does Wolin do extensive analysis of Machiavelli (pp. 151-154)? How did his ideas pass into American politics? How did we become a “managed democracy” rather than a “popular democracy”?

Week Fifteen, Dec 1, 3 Wolin 2

Reading: Sheldon Wolin. Democracy Inc.
Ch 11, 12, 13 (pp. 211-292.)

1. What do you think of Wolin’s comparison of the American election in 2000 with the Ukrainian elections and protests in 2004?
2. How does the economy increasingly come to dominate the political? What does the privatization of education and other formerly public functions represent?
3. Why does Wolin call the American Constitution a “counterrevolution”? What does he mean when he says the founders underwent contortions “in order to contain demotic power”? How did Madison produce a theory of how to prevent majorities from becoming coherent and organized?
4. Why does Wolin think “the blame game” over Iraq conceals the real problem behind the war?
5. Review Wolin’s three “demotic” moments—points in time when democracy began to bloom: Athens, the English Civil War, and the American founding. Were you aware of

- how rare and how fragile democracy is?
6. Why does Wolin believe that we must choose between two forms of government: superpower and democracy?
 7. What kind of a culture is needed for democracy? Can it exist in a culture of lying and deception? How does Wolin analyze this with the help of Plato's allegory of the cave?
 8. How does social fragmentation retard prospects for democracy?
 9. How must "the people" change themselves if a genuine democracy is to come into being?

Week Sixteen, December 8 (last day)

Reading: None

Course Conclusion

Final Exam Monday December 14, 9:45-1200