

Mark Brown
Department of Government
California State University, Sacramento
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Office: Tahoe Hall 3114
Office Hrs: Mon./Wed., 2:00-4:00,
and by appointment
Tel.: 916-278-6330
Email: mark.brown@csus.edu

GOVT 112
Current Political Thought
MW 12:00 - 1:15 AMD-260

Course Description

We live in a challenging time. Political theory provides resources that can help us better understand and respond to the challenges of our time. This course examines how a variety of political thinkers from the late-nineteenth century until today have thought about two of these challenges: the lack of a universally shared morality on the one hand, and the presence of social diversity on the other. We begin with a look at how Friedrich Nietzsche highlighted these two challenges in his critique of modern liberalism and its ideals of rationality and individuality. The remainder of the course presents various efforts to either answer or evade the questions raised by Nietzsche. John Rawls and other proponents of an egalitarian-liberalism have sought to rethink individual liberty and its relationship to social equality in light of widespread disagreement about the meaning of both liberty and equality. Libertarians have argued that egalitarian-liberals betray the central liberal ideal of individual freedom, and conservatives have charged them with neglecting the social and historical dimensions of politics. Communitarians have rejected both egalitarian and libertarian forms of liberalism, seeking instead to revive some sort of shared cultural foundation for morality and politics. Theorists of multiculturalism and feminism have developed new ways to think about social diversity, often revising or rejecting liberal categories. Advocates of civic republicanism and deliberative democracy have argued that citizens can bridge their cultural and epistemological differences through political speech and action in a shared public sphere. By engaging the ideas of these and other political theorists, students in this course will improve their ability to develop and articulate their own ideas about how to cope with some of the key political challenges of our time.

Required Texts

The following books are available at the campus bookstore. Additional required texts will be available on the course WebCT site.

- Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*. University Of Chicago Press; 2nd edition, 1998.
- Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. and ed. Marion Faber. Oxford University Press, 1998.
- Michael Oakeshott, *Rationalism in Politics and Other Essays*. Liberty Press; Expanded edition, 1991.
- John Rawls, *Political Liberalism*. Columbia University Press, 1995.
- Charles Taylor, *Multiculturalism*. Princeton University Press, 1994.

Requirements and Grading

1) Attendance and Participation (10%). Much of the reading assigned in this course is quite difficult, so you will need to take an active approach to understanding the texts. Students are expected to attend class having read (and sometimes re-read) *all* of the assigned reading,

prepared to ask questions and engage in discussion. In addition, there will be occasional in-class exercises, worksheets, and group projects that will contribute to your grade. I will also take attendance on randomly selected days throughout the semester. You may miss two classes without penalty. Any additional absences require a serious and appropriately documented excuse.

2) Ten Response Papers (20%): To facilitate discussion, students should prepare for class by writing brief responses to at least three of the study questions distributed in class prior to each week's reading. You are required to submit ten such Response Papers during the course of the semester. Response Papers will be graded on a hundred-point scale. You may choose any ten weeks to submit a paper, but you may submit only one paper per week (either Mon. or Wed.). *Response papers may only be submitted in class, and only during the week in which we discuss the reading they address.* You may submit up to three extra papers, each of which will increase your final grade by a maximum of two percentage points (depending on the grades they receive). Response papers should: (a) *concisely and thoughtfully answer three or more study questions of your choice*, and (b) *provide at least one quote from the relevant primary text(s) to substantiate one or more of your answers*. Response papers must be typed, single-spaced, with standard margins and 12-point font.

3) One analytical essay (25% paper; 5% rough draft and peer review = 30%). Students will be asked to draw on the course texts to analyze one of the key issues of the course in an essay of approximately 7 pages. A rough draft of approximately 5 pages is due November 29. Drafts will be rendered anonymous and distributed back to the class on the same day for in-class peer review—that is, we will devote part of class to students reading and commenting on each other's papers. Both drafts and peer review comments will be graded pass/fail. *If you do not complete a rough draft by the due date, you cannot participate in the peer review process and you will not receive credit for the draft or peer review.* Essay topics, grading criteria, and guidelines for peer review will be distributed in class. Final essays are due Dec. 15. I strongly encourage you to meet with me during office hours to discuss your rough draft and/or your final essay. Late final essays will be penalized by 5% for each day they are late.

4) Two exams (20% each = 40%). The exams will be in-class, closed-book. They will ask you to answer a set of short-answer questions and one essay question selected in large part from the study questions distributed during the previous half of the semester. (The final will cover only the second half of the semester.) There will be no additional study guides beyond the study questions distributing during the semester.

Please Note

Final grades will be calculated according to the traditional scale: A > 93%...A- > 90%...B+ > 88%...B > 83%...B- > 80%...etc.

Students who have a serious and appropriately documented excuse to miss a class, paper due date, or exam should contact me (beforehand or immediately afterward) to arrange a way to make up the work. However, there will be no makeup assignments for attendance/participation.

If you have a disability and require accommodations, please discuss your needs with me after class or during my office hours early in the semester. You will need to provide disability documentation to the CSUS Office of Services to Students with Disabilities (SSWD), Lassen Hall 1008, (916) 278-6955.

Finally, it should go without saying that all the work you submit for this class must be your own. If you are not sure what constitutes plagiarism, please ask me or consult the library

plagiarism information website at <http://library.csus.edu/content2.asp?pageID=353> Plagiarism will be punished in proportion to the severity of the case, but any plagiarism is likely to result in a failing grade for the course and may lead to additional administrative penalties, including expulsion from the University.

Preliminary Outline of Topics and Assignments

Assignments marked with an asterisk (*) are available on the course WebCT site.

INTRODUCTION: MODERNITY AND POLITICAL THOUGHT

- Sept. 6 Introduction
- Sept. 11 Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, Preface, Section 1, pp. 3-24.
- Sept. 13 Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, Section 2-5, pp. 25-92

LIBERALISM, LIBERTY, EQUALITY

Egalitarian Liberalism

- Sept. 18 Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, Lecture I, pp. 3-46.
- Sept. 20 Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, Lecture II, pp. 47-88.
- Sept. 25 Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, Lecture IV, pp. 133-172.
- Sept. 27 Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, Lecture VI, pp. 212-254.

Libertarianism

- Oct. 2 *Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, excerpt.
- Oct. 4 *Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, excerpt.

Conservatism

- Oct. 9 Oakeshott, "Rationalism in Politics," in *Rationalism in Politics*, pp. 5-42.
- Oct. 11 Oakeshott, "On Being Conservative," in *Rationalism in Politics*, pp. 407-437.

Communitarianism

- Oct. 16 *Michael J Sandel, "The Procedural Republic and the Unencumbered Self," *Political Theory* 12:1 (1984): 81-96.

- Oct. 18 MIDTERM EXAM

IDENTITY AND DIFFERENCE

Multiculturalism

- Oct. 23 Charles Taylor, "The Politics of Recognition," in *Multiculturalism*, pp. 25-73.
- Oct. 25 Comments by Wolf, Rockefeller, and Walzer, in *Multiculturalism*, pp. 75-103.
- Oct. 30 *Chandran Kukathas, "Liberalism and Multiculturalism: The Politics of Indifference," *Political Theory* 26:5 (1998): 686-99.
- Nov. 1 *Nancy Fraser, "Rethinking Recognition," *New Left Review* 3 (May/June 2000): 107-120.

Feminism

- Nov. 6 *Susan Moller Okin, "Mistresses of Their Own Destiny': Group Rights, Gender, and Realistic Rights of Exit," *Ethics* 112: 2 (2002): 205-230.
- Nov. 8 *Iris Marion Young, "Polity and Group Difference: A Critique of the Ideal of Universal Citizenship," *Ethics* 99 (1989): 250-74.

CITIZENSHIP AND DEMOCRACY

Republicanism

- Nov. 13 Arendt, *The Human Condition*, pp. 1-21
- Nov. 15 Arendt, *The Human Condition*, pp. 22-58.
- Nov. 20 Arendt, *The Human Condition*, pp. 175-212.
- Nov. 22 Arendt, *The Human Condition*, pp. 248-257, 289-325.
- Nov. 27 *Jürgen Habermas, "Three Normative Models of Democracy."
- Nov. 29 ROUGH DRAFT OF ESSAY DUE and IN-CLASS PEER REVIEW

Deliberative Democracy

- Dec. 6 *Amy Gutmann and Dennis Thompson, "Deliberative Democracy Beyond Process," *Journal of Political Philosophy* 10 (June 2002).
- Dec. 8 *John S. Dryzek, "Legitimacy and Economy in Deliberative Democracy," *Political Theory* 29:5 (2001): 651-669.
- Dec. 13 *Lynn M. Sanders, "Against Deliberation," *Political Theory* 25:3 (1997).
- Dec. 15 FINAL ESSAYS DUE
- Dec. 22 FINAL EXAM
10:15 a.m – 12:15 p.m.