

Mark Brown, Ph.D.
Department of Political Science
California State University, Sacramento
Email: mark.brown@csus.edu

Student Hours: TuTh: 1:30-2:45 p.m.,
and by appointment
Office: Tahoe Hall 3124
Zoom: <https://csus.zoom.us/j/6923582692>

POLS 112 Current Political Thought

Section 1: TuTh 10:30–11:45 AM, Alpine 212
Section 2: TuTh 5:30–6:45 PM, Douglass Hall 209
Fall 2022

Catalog description

Current issues in political thought, with emphasis upon developments in the political philosophies of democracy, fascism, communism, conservatism, liberalism. Ideas are analyzed with reference to assumptions on which they are based and their relevance for political institutions and problems.

Course description

Political theory offers conceptual resources that can help us better understand and respond to the challenges of our time. This course examines how selected political thinkers over the past one hundred years have thought about—and might help us think about—some of these challenges. The first part of the course examines a series of key concepts: power, politics, the state, and various forms of structural injustice and group identity. The second part of the course uses these concepts to explore some of the main ideologies that shape contemporary politics: liberalism, conservatism, socialism, anarchism, and fascism. Throughout the course, we will consider the implications of different political theories and ideologies for contemporary politics and public policy. The aim will not be to mechanically “apply” political theories to political debates, but to bring theory and politics into conversation with each other, using each to illuminate the other. Students in this course will improve their understanding of contemporary political thought, as well as their ability to develop and articulate their own ideas about the key political challenges of our time.

Learning objectives

- Knowledge: You know and remember basic facts about the course authors, their ideas, and their historical contexts.
- Understanding: You can read, interpret, and explain the course texts.
- Analysis: You can differentiate and compare course ideas and authors.
- Application: You can link the course ideas and authors to contemporary political issues.
- Evaluation and critique: You can critically assess the course ideas and authors, and you can formulate an argument of your own about them.

Course texts

Required texts. All the required readings will be in a printed course reader available for purchase. The readings are also available under the Modules tab on Canvas. If you do not

purchase the reader, I strongly encourage you to print out the readings yourself. It's very convenient to have them all in one place, and [research shows that students learn better when they read on paper](#). Also, some of the readings are printed in two columns per page, which is difficult to read on a screen.

Recommended texts. Links to recommended films, podcasts, and videos are in the module for each week on Canvas. I also recommend the podcasts [Philosophy Bites](#) and [The Political Theory Review](#), as well as the [School of Life](#) political theory videos on YouTube.

How to Contact Me

I'm happy to talk with you outside of class. Please see me after class or come to my student hours listed at the top of the syllabus. You can just stop by my office, no appointment needed. And if you'd like to make an appointment to meet either in person or on Zoom, especially if you're not available during my regular student hours, click on this link for my appointment page: <https://calendly.com/mark-brown-sac-state/student-hours>. You can also email me with the Canvas messaging system or at mark.brown@csus.edu. I will usually reply to emails on the same day, but generally not before 9:00 AM or after 5:00 PM. I may not reply during the weekend.

Most importantly, if you are ever having trouble with any aspect of the course, or if you would just like to talk over the material, please let me know. Don't wait until the end of the semester!

Course Modality, Attendance Policy, Late Assignments

This is an in-person course. We will use the course management system Canvas, which you can find on your [My Sac State](#) page. But our course meetings will not be recorded, and your success depends on regular in-person attendance and participation. Attending class will help you to do well on the quizzes, exams, and other assignments. More fundamentally, attending class will give you a chance to both teach and learn from your fellow students. I will take attendance, but attendance will not be graded, and if you miss a class you do not need to inform me or provide an excuse. Given the coronavirus pandemic, please err on the side of caution. If you feel sick do not come to class. If you arrive late, enter quietly. If you need to leave early, please let me know before class and sit near the door.

If you cannot meet the deadline for one of the exams or for a large number of small assignments, please let me know. If there are serious factors beyond your control, I will be glad to arrange alternative deadlines for you. Late assignments will usually receive a grade penalty of 10 percent per day, up to a maximum of 20 percent. It's much better to submit work late than not at all. Unless approved by me in advanced, any assignments not submitted by the last day of regular classes will receive a score of zero.

In calculating your workload for the semester, please consider that this course requires at least six hours per week outside of class (see the Sacramento State [Credit Hour Policy](#)).

Non-Graded Activities

Weekly study questions: Study questions for each week are on Canvas. They are intended to focus your attention on key points in the reading. *I recommend printing out the study questions and using them to guide your reading.*

Reading, lecture, discussion. In addition to regular attendance and participation, this course requires a lot of reading, some of it quite difficult, so be sure to set aside sufficient time to complete the reading *before* we're scheduled to discuss it in class. While you're reading, write down specific questions, including basic questions of understanding, and then ask your questions during class. Your questions might be about a difficult passage in the reading, a point from the study questions, or how the reading relates to current events. The more actively engaged you are in this course, the more you'll learn, and the livelier and more enjoyable it will be for everyone. To ensure that everyone feels welcome in this course, we will strive to create an inclusive classroom environment that facilitates robust discussion and disagreement in a supportive context of mutual respect.

Graded Assignments

Eight study question response papers (25 percent): In the weekly study questions posted on Canvas, the most significant questions are underlined. On any eight weeks you choose, write a one-page paper (300 words max) on one of the underlined study questions for that week. Write your response paper after you complete the assigned reading, but before our first class meeting of the week. The purpose is to help you to think carefully about the reading and develop useful questions before we discuss the material in class. Response papers are due each week on Canvas by Monday at 11:59 p.m. If you submit more than eight papers, only your highest eight scores will count for your grade. Additional guidelines are on Canvas.

Twelve online quizzes (25 percent). The quizzes will assess your understanding of the central points in the course readings and lectures, and they will help you to prepare for the exams. They will not ask you about minor details. They will consist of 5-10 multiple-choice questions. The questions will be based on the study questions for that week. Quizzes will open on Canvas each week on Thursday at 7:00 p.m., and they will be due on Friday at 11:59 p.m. Once you start the quiz, you will have 30 minutes and two attempts. Your final score will be the average of your two attempts. Incomplete quizzes will be automatically submitted at the deadline. Late quizzes will receive a 10 percent grade penalty per day. If you take more than 12 quizzes, I will count your highest scores.

Take-home Midterm Exam and Final Exam (25 percent each). The exams will ask you to demonstrate a clear understanding of the main ideas from the course readings and lectures. The midterm exam will cover the first half of the course; the final exam will cover the entire course. They will include both short-answer and essay questions. The questions will be adapted from the quizzes and study questions. The midterm exam will be available on Canvas on Friday morning of Week 6. The final exam will be available on Monday morning of finals week. You will have three days to complete each exam. Additional guidelines will be on Canvas.

Bonus points reviews. You can receive bonus points by writing thoughtful reviews of the films, podcasts, and videos that are posted in the Canvas modules for each week. Only those materials listed as "Recommended for Review" are eligible for bonus points. To submit your review, go to the Assignment tab on Canvas. Each review will give you up to 3 bonus points on the next exam. (If you review a film in Week 5, for example, it will increase your score on the midterm by up to 3 percent or about 1/3 of a grade). You may submit up to two reviews prior to each exam. (After the midterm, you may submit no more than two reviews before the final.) Reviews should be about 350 words (1-2 pages, 12-point font, double-spaced). Your review should: 1) carefully summarize the main themes, ideas, or arguments of the material; 2) provide specific examples; 3) critically discuss the material and how it relates to ideas from the course. Reviews should be carefully crafted and well written, with proper grammar, spelling, punctuation, etc.

Course Grades

Final letter grades for the course will be calculated as follows: A (100% to 94.0%), A- (<94.0% to 90.0%), B+ (< 90.0% to 87.0%), B (< 87.0% to 84.0%), B- (< 84.0 % to 80.0%), C+ (< 80.0% to 77.0%), C (< 77.0% to 74.0%), C- (<74.0% to 70.0%), D+ (<70.0% to 67.0%), D (<67.0% to 64.0%), D- (64.0% to 60.0%), F (<60.0%).

Academic Honesty, Plagiarism, Recordings

Please review the University's [Academic Honesty Policy](#). Plagiarism may be defined simply as presenting someone else's work as your own. It is a serious violation of academic integrity and university policy. 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 penalties, including expulsion from the University. If you are not sure what plagiarism is, please ask me or consult the [library plagiarism website](#).

Audio or video recordings of lectures or class discussions are not allowed without the instructor's permission. Distribution of recorded course lectures to anyone not enrolled in the course is not allowed without the instructor's permission.

Course Drops

Students can drop the course online during the first two weeks. The last day to drop with approval of both the instructor and department chair is the census date of September 26. Further information on drops and withdrawals is [available here](#).

Student Advising

To meet with a faculty or peer advisor, see the [political science department's advising page](#). To review political science major requirements, see the [Political Science Major Advising Form](#). For GE advising and any questions that go beyond the political science major, see the [SSIS Student Success Center](#).

Student Health & Support Services

[Services to Students with Disability \(SSWD\)](#): Sacramento State is committed to ensuring an accessible learning environment where course or instructional content are usable by all students and faculty. If you believe that you require disability-related academic adjustments for this class, please immediately contact Services for Students with Disabilities (SSWD) to discuss eligibility. A current accommodation letter from SSWD is required before any modifications, above and beyond what is otherwise available for all other students in this class will be provided.

[Student Health and Counseling Services](#): Your physical and mental health are important to your success as a college student. Student Health and Counseling Services (SHCS) in The WELL offers medical, counseling, and wellness services to help you get and stay healthy during your time at Sac State. SHCS offers: Primary Care medical services, including sexual and reproductive healthcare, transgender care, and immunizations; urgent care for acute illness, injuries, and urgent counseling needs; pharmacy for prescriptions and over-the-counter products; mental health counseling, including individual sessions, group counseling, support groups, mindfulness training, and peer counseling; athletic training for sports injury rehabilitation; wellness services, including nutrition counseling, peer-led health education and wellness workshops, and free safer sex supplies; violence and sexual assault support services. Most services are covered by the Health Services fee and available at no additional cost.

[Crisis Assistance & Resource Education Support \(CARES\)](#): If you are experiencing challenges with food, housing, financial or other unique circumstances that are impacting your education, help is just a phone call or email away. The CARES office provides case management support for any enrolled student.

[Title IX](#): The University requires faculty and staff to report any personal disclosures of sexual misconduct including rape, dating/domestic violence and stalking to the Title IX Coordinator. Students who do not wish to report their experience to me or the Title IX Coordinator may speak to someone confidentially by contacting Student Health and Counseling Services.

University Information and Policies

- [Drop and Withdrawal Policy](#)
- [Grading Policy](#)
- [Sacramento State Academic calendar](#)
- [Hornet Honor Code](#)
- [Student Rights and Responsibilities](#)

Campus Resources

- [Odyssey Mentoring Program](#)
- [Peer and Academic Resource Center](#)
- [Academic Advising](#)

- [Support Centers and Programs](#)
- [Reading & Writing Center](#)
- [University Library](#)

Technical Assistance

- [Information Resources and Technology \(IRT\)](#)
- [Laptop Checkout](#)
- [Zoom for Students](#)
- [Canvas for Students](#)
- [Schedule a Consultation](#) for assistance with Canvas and other academic technologies
- [Submit a Ticket](#) to report a problem to Information Resources and Technology Support

Reading Schedule

1 Aug. 30 Sept. 1	Introduction: Power, Politics, and the State Max Weber, "Politics as a Vocation," in <i>From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology</i> ed. H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (New York: Routledge, 2009), pp. 3-5, 36-48.
2 Sept. 6 Sept. 8	Hannah Arendt, <i>The Human Condition</i> (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), pp. 50-58, 199-207. Masha Gessen, "The Political Consequences of Loneliness and Isolation During the Pandemic," <i>The New Yorker</i> , May 5, 2020. https://www.newyorker.com/news/our-columnists/the-political-consequences-of-loneliness-and-isolation-during-the-pandemic
3 Sept. 13 Sept. 15	Michel Foucault, "Panopticism," in <i>Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison</i> (New York: Vintage, 1979), pp. 195-209. Michel Foucault, "We Other Victorians," in <i>The Foucault Reader</i> , ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), pp. 292-300.
4 Sept. 20 Sept. 22	Structural Injustice and Group Identity Simone de Beauvoir, "Introduction," <i>The Second Sex</i> , trans. and ed. H. M. Parshley (London: Jonathan Cape, 1949/1953), pp. 13-28. Combahee River Collective, "A Black Feminist Statement" (1977), <i>Monthly Review</i> 70:8 (2019): 29-36. https://monthlyreview.org/2019/01/01/a-black-feminist-statement
5 Sept. 27 Sept. 29	James Baldwin, "Stranger in the Village," "My Dungeon Shook," "The American Dream and the American Negro" and "The White Man's Guilt," in <i>Collected Essays</i> . ed. Toni Morrison (New York: Modern Library), pp. 117-129, 291-295, 714-719, 722-727.

6 Oct. 4 Oct. 6	<p>Martin Luther King, Jr, “Letter from Birmingham Jail,” “Beyond Vietnam,” and “The Other America,” <i>The Radical King: Martin Luther King, Jr.</i>, ed. Cornel West (Boston: Beacon Press, 2015), pp. 127-145, 201-217, 235-244.</p> <p>bell hooks, “Overcoming White Supremacy: A Comment” and “Beloved Community: A World Without Racism,” in <i>Killing Rage: Ending Racism</i> (New York: Henry Holt, 1995), pp. 184-195, 263-272.</p> <p><u>Take-home Midterm Exam available on Friday, October 7, 8:00 a.m., due on Canvas by Sunday, October 9, 11:59 p.m.</u></p>
7 Oct. 11 Oct. 13	<p>Liberalism</p> <p>Isaiah Berlin, “Two Concepts of Liberty,” in <i>Isaiah Berlin: Liberty</i>, ed. Henry Hardy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1958/2002), pp. 166-187, 212-217.</p> <p>Anneline de Dijn, “Why lockdowns don’t necessarily infringe on freedom,” <i>The Conversation</i>, November 13, 2020. https://theconversation.com/why-lockdowns-dont-necessarily-infringe-on-freedom-149205</p>
8 Oct. 18 Oct. 20	<p>John Rawls, <i>A Theory of Justice</i>, Revised Ed. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971/1999), pp. 3-19, 52-56.</p> <p>Ben Rogers, "John Rawls," <i>The Guardian</i>, November 27, 2002. https://www.theguardian.com/news/2002/nov/27/guardianobituaries.obituaries</p> <p>Micah Johnson, "The Philosophical Roots of Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez’s 70 Percent Tax Plan," <i>Slate</i>, January 16, 2019. https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2019/01/alexandria-ocasio-cortez-70-percent-tax-plan-john-rawls.html</p>
9 Oct. 25 Oct. 27	<p>Conservatism</p> <p>Russell Kirk, “The Idea of Conservatism,” in <i>The Conservative Mind</i> (Chicago: Henry Regnery Co., 1953), pp. 3-11.</p> <p>Russell Kirk, “Why I Am a Conservative,” “The Errors of Ideology,” and “Libertarians: Chirping Sectaries,” in <i>The Essential Russell Kirk: Selected Essays</i>, ed. George A. Panichas (Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2006), pp. 42-45, 365-382.</p>
10 Nov. 1 Nov. 3	<p>Friedrich A. Hayek, “Why I am Not a Conservative,” in <i>The Constitution of Liberty</i> (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), 397-411, 529-521.</p> <p>William F. Buckley, Jr., Publisher’s Statement on Founding <i>National Review</i>; Editorial, “Why the South Must Prevail,” <i>National Review</i> (1957), Barry Goldwater, <i>The Conscience of a Conservative</i> (1960), Young Americans for Freedom, <i>The Sharon Statement</i>, in <i>The Rise of Conservatism in America, 1945-200</i>, ed. Ronald Story and Bruce Laurie (New York: Bedford/St. Martins, 2008), pp. 49-65.</p>
11 Nov. 8	<p>Socialism</p>

Nov. 10	<p>V. I. Lenin, selections in <i>Lenin and the Making of the Soviet State</i>, ed. Jeffrey Brooks and Georgiy Chernyavskiy (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), pp. 37-48.</p> <p>Rosa Luxemburg, "The Russian Revolution," in <i>Socialism or Barbarism: Selected Writings of Rosa Luxemburg</i>, ed. Paul Le Blanc and Helen C. Scott (New York: Pluto Press, 2010), pp. 223-237.</p>
12 Nov. 15 Nov. 17	<p>Michael Walzer, "Which Socialism?" <i>Dissent</i>, Summer 2010, pp. 37-43. https://www.dissentmagazine.org/article/which-socialism</p> <p>Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, "What about Racism?" <i>Jacobin</i>, March 16, 2016. https://www.jacobinmag.com/2016/03/black-lives-matter-slavery-discrimination-socialism</p> <p>John B. Judis, "The Socialism America Needs Now," <i>The New Republic</i>, August 24, 2017.</p> <p>Joseph M. Schwartz and Bhaskar Sunkara, "Social Democracy Is Good. But Not Good Enough," <i>Jacobin</i>, August 29, 2017. https://jacobinmag.com/2017/08/democratic-socialism-judis-new-republic-social-democracy-capitalism</p> <p>Meagan Day, "Bernie Has Opened the Door for Democratic Socialism," <i>Jacobin</i>, June 12, 2019. https://www.jacobinmag.com/2019/06/bernie-sanders-democratic-socialism-speech-fdr</p>
13 Nov. 22	<p>Anarchism</p> <p>Emma Goldman, "Anarchism: What It Really Stands For," in <i>Anarchism & Other Essays</i> (New York: Mother Earth Publishing Association., 1910), pp. 53-73</p> <p>Dean Spade, "Solidarity Not Charity: Mutual Aid for Mobilization and Survival," <i>Social Text</i> 142, Vol. 38, No. 1 (March 2020): 131-151.</p>
14 Nov. 29 Dec. 1	<p>Fascism</p> <p>Giovanni Gentile, "The Philosophical Basis of Fascism," <i>Foreign Affairs</i> 6:2 (1928): 290-291, 298-304.</p> <p>Jason Stanley, "Fascism and the University," <i>Chronicle of Higher Education</i>, September 2, 2018.</p> <p>Dylan Matthews, "The F Word," <i>Vox</i>, January 14, 2021, https://www.vox.com/22225472/fascism-definition-trump-fascist-examples</p>
15 Dec. 6 Dec. 8	<p>Reading TBA</p>
	<p><u>Take-home Final Exam available on Monday, Dec. 12, 8:00 a.m., due on Canvas by Wednesday, Dec. 14, 11:59 p.m.</u></p>