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| Mark Brown, Ph.D.  Department of Political Science  California State University, Sacramento  Email: [mark.brown@csus.edu](mailto:mark.brown@csus.edu) | Student Hours: **Tues. 10-11:30 a.m. (office), Thurs. 10-11:30 a.m. (Zoom),** and by appt.  Office: Tahoe Hall 3124  Zoom link: <https://csus.zoom.us/j/6923582692> |

**POLS 112 Current Political Thought**

Section 1: Tues./Thurs. 1:30 - 2:45 p.m., Alpine Hall 122, IN PERSON

Section 2: Tues. 5:30 - 8:20 p.m., ONLINE

Fall 2021

“To see what is in front of one’s nose needs a constant struggle.”

-- George Orwell (1946)

# 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 different conceptions of power, politics, and the state. The second part of the course focuses on some of the main ideologies that shape contemporary politics: liberalism, conservatism, socialism, anarchism, and fascism. The third part of the course focuses on two important issues for politics today: questions of race, gender, and identity; and the politics of nature and climate change. We will also read several short essays on the politics of the coronavirus pandemic. 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. You do not need to purchase any books for this course. All the assigned readings will be available on Canvas. However, I strongly encourage you to order the Course Reader. It's really convenient to have all the readings in one place, and some of the readings are printed in two columns per page, which may be difficult to read in digital format.

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](https://philosophybites.com/) and [The Political Theory Review](https://www.podomatic.com/podcasts/thepoliticaltheoryreview), as well as the [School of Life](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLwxNMb28XmpeuwUhM0OT338_T5XTtJJok) political theory videos on YouTube.

# Course modalities, attendance, and grading policy

Section 1 of this course is a traditional in-person course. Section 2 is a synchronous online course. The two sections have the same requirements and assignments, and they share a site on the course management system Canvas. To access Canvas, go to your [My Sac State](https://my.csus.edu/) page and click on the link for Canvas. In Canvas, you will have access to the assigned readings, study questions, videos, quizzes, exams, and other materials.

Regardless of whether you’re taking this course online or in person, I strongly encourage you to attend every class meeting, because it will give you a chance to ask questions, engage with other students, and prepare for the quizzes and exams. Moreover, neither the in-person nor online course meetings will be recorded. However, I will not take attendance, and if you miss a class you do not need to inform me or provide an excuse.

If you cannot meet the deadline for one of the exams, or for a significant number of small assignments (quizzes, discussion board), please let me know. Late submissions will usually receive a grade penalty, but it’s better to submit work late than not at all. And if there are serious factors beyond your control (illness, quarantine, family emergency, military duty, jury duty, religious holiday, etc.), I will be glad to arrange alternative deadlines for you. Any missing exams or assignments not submitted by the end of finals week will receive a score of zero.

# How to contact me

The best way to contact me is with email, using the Canvas messaging system. During the week, I will usually reply within a few hours, but generally not before 9:00 AM or after 6:00 PM. I may not reply during the weekend.

I'm also glad to meet with you during my online student hours, listed at the top of the syllabus. At the appropriate time, just click the [Zoom link.](https://csus.zoom.us/j/6923582692) If you would like to meet but can't make it at those times, please send me an email with a few time slots (day and time) that would fit your schedule.

One of the Canvas discussion boards is a Community Forum for you to ask random questions about the course readings and themes that may not fit the designated discussion topic for a particular week. You can also ask questions about assignments, due dates, Canvas functions, or anything else about the course. Posting your questions here will benefit other students, since many probably have the same questions as you.

Most importantly: If you are 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!

# Non-Graded Activities

**Weekly study questions:** Study questions for each week will be posted 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 while you read.

**Reading, lecture, and discussion.** This course requires your active engagement. It involves a lot of reading, some of it quite difficult, so be sure to set aside sufficient time to complete it. While you’re reading, write down specific questions, including basic questions of understanding, and then ask your questions during class. You may also post your questions in the Community Forum or ask me during student hours. Your questions might be about a difficult passage in the reading, a key idea from the study guide, or how the reading relates to current events. Active participation will help you to understand the course material, and it will help to prepare you for the other assignments. And with your engagement, I’m sure we’ll have some lively and enjoyable discussions.

# Graded Assignments

**10 discussion board posts with replies (15 percent):** The discussion board will stimulate your thinking about the course reading and how it relates to current political issues and events, and it will help prepare you for the quizzes and exams. **First posts are due on Tuesdays at 12:00 noon, so that you will be prepared to discuss the assigned material in class on that day.** Late first posts will receive a 10 percent grade penalty per day. **The deadline for replies and late first posts is Friday at 11:59 p.m.** Because the purpose is to engage with others, discussions posts and replies will not be accepted after the Friday deadline. If you post on more than 10 weeks, I will count your highest scores. There will be a new discussion prompt each week, based on the weekly study questions. Post a response to the prompt of 80-100 words, and then reply to at least one of your classmates. You must post a response to the prompt before you can see other students’ posts. Posts will be graded on the extent to which you thoughtfully respond to the prompt and make direct reference to the course materials. When responding to others, feel free to express differences of opinion, but remember to be kind and respectful. Please also see the Guidelines for Online Discussion Forums on Canvas.

**12 online quizzes (20 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 reading questions for that week. **Quizzes will open on Canvas each week on Thursday at 5:00 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.

**Two Midterm Exams (20 percent each) and a Final Exam (25 percent)**. The exams will ask you to demonstrate a clear understanding of the main ideas from the course readings and lectures. The midterm exams will each cover one third of the course; the final exam will cover the entire course. Each exam will consist of 5 short-answer questions (80-100 words each) and 2 essay questions (400-500 words each). The questions will be adapted from the quizzes and study questions. The midterms will be available on Canvas on Friday morning of Week 5 and Week 11. The final will be available on Monday morning of finals week. You will have three days to complete each exam. Late exams will be docked 10 percent per day, up to a maximum of twenty percent. No exams will be accepted after the last day of finals week.

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. Each review will give you up to 5 bonus points on the next exam. (If you review a film in Week 3, for example, it will increase your score on the midterm exam in Week 5 by up to 5 percent). You can submit up to three reviews during the semester. Reviews should be about 300 words, and they should include one paragraph summary and one paragraph evaluation. Be sure to carefully proofread your review to ensure proper grammar, spelling, punctuation, etc. Reviews are due on Canvas each Sunday at 11:59 p.m., after the material appears in the weekly module on Canvas. (For example, if you're reviewing a film in the module for the week of September 21, your review is due by Sunday, September 26, 11:59 p.m.)

# 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](https://www.csus.edu/umanual/student/stu-100.htm). 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.](http://csus.libguides.com/plagiarism)

Audio or video recordings of lectures or class discussions are not allowed without the instructor’s permission. Distribution of the 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 27. Further information on drops and withdrawals is [available here.](https://catalog.csus.edu/financial-registration-information/registration/#text)

# Student Health & Support Services

[Services to Students with Disability (SSWD)](https://www.csus.edu/student-affairs/centers-programs/services-students-disabilities/): 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](https://www.csus.edu/student-life/health-counseling/): 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)](https://www.csus.edu/student-affairs/crisis-assistance-resource-education-support/): 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](https://www.csus.edu/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](https://www.csus.edu/academic-affairs/internal/_internal/_documents/drop-and-withdrawal-policy.pdf)
* [Grading Policy](https://www.csus.edu/umanual/acad/umg05150.htm)
* [Sacramento State Academic calendar](https://catalog.csus.edu/academic-calendar/#fall2021text)
* [Hornet Honor Code](https://www.csus.edu/student-affairs/_internal/_documents/hornet-honor-code.pdf)
* [Student Rights and Responsibilities](https://www.csus.edu/umanual/student/stu-0119.htm)

**Campus Resources**

* [Odyssey Mentoring Program](https://www.csus.edu/college/social-sciences-interdisciplinary-studies/spotlights/odyssey-mentorship.html)
* [Peer and Academic Resource Center](http://www.csus.edu/parc/index.html)
* [Academic Advising](https://www.csus.edu/student-life/academic-advising/)
* [Support Centers and Programs](https://www.csus.edu/student-affairs/centers-programs/)
* [Reading & Writing Center](https://www.csus.edu/undergraduate-studies/writing-program/reading-writing-center.html)
* [University Library](http://library.csus.edu/)

# Technical Assistance

* [Information Resources and Technology](https://www.csus.edu/information-resources-technology/)
* [Zoom for Students (Sac State)](https://www.csus.edu/information-resources-technology/zoom/student-resources.html#zoom)
* [Canvas for Students (Sac State)](https://www.csus.edu/information-resources-technology/canvas/canvas-for-students.html)
* Canvas Support line at Sac State: M-F 8:00 a.m.– 5:00 p.m. (916) 278-2450
* [Schedule a Consultation](https://www.csus.edu/information-resources-technology/get-support-consultation/consultation.html) to get assistance with Canvas and other academic technologies
* [Submit a Ticket](https://csus.service-now.com/service/?id=help) to report a problem to Information Resources and Technology Support
* [Canvas Video Guides](https://community.canvaslms.com/community/answers/guides/video-guide#jive_content_id_Students)
* [Canvas Student Web Tutorials](https://community.canvaslms.com/docs/DOC-10701)

# Reading Schedule

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| Week 1  Aug. 31  Sept. 2 | **Introduction: Power, Politics, and the State**  Max Weber, “Politics as a Vocation,” in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* ed. H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (New York: Routledge, 2009), excerpt. |
| Week 2  Sept. 7  Sept. 9 | Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), pp. 50-58, 199-207.  [Masha Gessen, “The Political Consequences of Loneliness and Isolation During the Pandemic,” *The New Yorker,* May 5, 2020.](https://www.newyorker.com/news/our-columnists/the-political-consequences-of-loneliness-and-isolation-during-the-pandemic) |
| Week 3  Sept. 14  Sept. 16 | Michel Foucault, “Panopticism,” in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage, 1979), pp. 195-217.  [Danielle L. Couch, Priscilla Robinson, and Paul A. Komesaroff, “COVID-19—Extending Surveillance and the Panopticon,” *Journal of Bioethical Inquiry* 17 (2020): 809-814](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7445799). |
| Week 4  Sept. 21  Sept. 23 | **Liberalism**  Isaiah Berlin, “Two Concepts of Liberty,” in *Isaiah Berlin: Liberty*, ed. Henry Hardy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1958/2002), pp. 166-187, 200-217.  [Anneline de Dijn, “Why lockdowns don’t necessarily infringe on freedom,” *The Conversation*, November 13, 2020.](https://theconversation.com/why-lockdowns-dont-necessarily-infringe-on-freedom-149205) |
| Week 5  Sept. 28  Sept. 30 | [Ben Rogers, "John Rawls," The Guardian, November 27, 2002.](https://www.theguardian.com/news/2002/nov/27/guardianobituaries.obituaries)  John Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), Lecture I, pp. 3-46.  [Micah Johnson, "The Philosophical Roots of Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez’s 70 Percent Tax Plan," Slate, January 16, 2019.](https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2019/01/alexandria-ocasio-cortez-70-percent-tax-plan-john-rawls.html)  Take-home Midterm Exam # 1 available on Friday, October 1, 8:00 a.m.. Due on Sunday, October 3, 11:59 p.m. |
| Week 6  Oct. 5  Oct. 7 | **Conservatism**  Russell Kirk, “The Idea of Conservatism,” in *The Conservative Mind* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Co., 1953), pp. 3-11.  Russell Kirk, “Why I Am a Conservative,” “The Errors of Ideology,” and “Libertarians: Chirping Sectaries,” in *The Essential Russell Kirk: Selected Essays,* ed. George A. Panichas (Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2006), pp. 42-45, 365-382. |
| Week 7  Oct. 12  Oct. 14 | Friedrich A. Hayek, “Why I am Not a Conservative,” in *The Constitution of Liberty* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), 397-411, 529-521.  William F. Buckley, Jr., Publisher’s Statement on Founding *National Review*; Editorial, “Why the South Must Prevail,” *National Review* (1957), Barry Goldwater, *The Conscience of a Conservative* (1960), Young Americans for Freedom, *The Sharon Statement*, in *The Rise of Conservatism in America, 1945-200,* ed. Ronald Story and Bruce Laurie (New York: Bedford/St. Martins, 2008), pp. 49-65. |
| Week 8  Oct. 19  Oct. 21 | **Socialism**  V. I. Lenin, selections in *Lenin and the Making of the Soviet State,* ed. Jeffrey Brooks and Georgiy Chernyavskiy (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), pp. 37-48.  Rosa Luxemburg, “The Russian Revolution,” in *Socialism or Barbarism: Selected Writings of Rosa Luxemburg,* ed. Paul Le Blanc and Helen C. Scott (New York: Pluto Press, 2010), pp. 223-237. |
| Week 9  Oct. 26  Oct. 28 | Michael Walzer, “Which Socialism?” *Dissent,* Summer 2010, pp. 37-43. <https://www.dissentmagazine.org/article/which-socialism>  Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, “What about Racism?” *Jacobin*, March 16, 2016. <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2016/03/black-lives-matter-slavery-discrimination-socialism>  John B. Judis, “The Socialism America Needs Now,” *The New Republic,* August 24, 2017.  Joseph M. Schwartz and Bhaskar Sunkara, “Social Democracy Is Good. But Not Good Enough,” *Jacobin*, August 29, 2017. <https://jacobinmag.com/2017/08/democratic-socialism-judis-new-republic-social-democracy-capitalism>  Meagan Day, “Bernie Has Opened the Door for Democratic Socialism,” *Jacobin*, June 12, 2019. <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2019/06/bernie-sanders-democratic-socialism-speech-fdr> |
| Week 10  Nov. 2  Nov. 4 | **Anarchism**  Emma Goldman, “Anarchism: What It Really Stands For,” in *Anarchism & Other Essays* (New York: Mother Earth Publishing Association., 1910), pp. 53-73. [Available online here](https://csus-primo.hosted.exlibrisgroup.com/permalink/f/tu2a5d/01CALS_ALMA51492754470002901).  [Rebecca Solnit, “‘The Way to Get Through this is Together’: The Rise of Mutual Aid under Coronavirus,” *The Guardian,* May 14, 2020.](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/may/14/mutual-aid-coronavirus-pandemic-rebecca-solnit) |
| Week 11  Nov. 9 | **Fascism**  Giovanni Gentile, “The Philosophical Basis of Fascism,” *Foreign Affairs* 6:2 (1928): 290-291, 298-304.  Jason Stanley, “Fascism and the University,” *Chronicle of Higher Education*, September 2, 2018.  [Dylan Matthews, “The F Word,” *Vox*, January 14, 2021.](https://www.vox.com/22225472/fascism-definition-trump-fascist-examples)  Take-home Midterm Exam #2 available on Friday, November 12, 8:00 a.m., due Sunday, November 14, 11:59 p.m. |
| Week 12  Nov. 16  Nov. 18 | **Gender, Race, Group Identity**  Simone de Beauvoir, “Introduction,” *The Second Sex*, trans. and ed. H. M. Parshley(London: Jonathan Cape, 1949/1953), pp. 13-28.  [Combahee River Collective, “A Black Feminist Statement” (1977), *Monthly Review* 70:8 (2019): 29-36.](https://monthlyreview.org/2019/01/01/a-black-feminist-statement) |
| Week 13  Nov. 23 | James Baldwin, “Stranger in the Village,” “My Dungeon Shook,” “The American Dream and the American Negro” and “The White Man’s Guilt,” in *Collected Essays*. ed. Toni Morrison (New York: Modern Library), pp. 117-129, 291-295, 714-719, 722-727. |
| Week 14  Nov. 30  Dec. 2 | **Politics of Climate Change**  [Rachel Riederer, “The Other Kind of Climate Denialism,” The New Yorker,March 6, 2019.](https://www.newyorker.com/science/elements/the-other-kind-of-climate-denialism)  [Elle Hunt, "BirthStrikers: meet the women who refuse to have children until climate change ends," The Guardian, March 12, 2019.](https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2019/mar/12/birthstrikers-meet-the-women-who-refuse-to-have-children-until-climate-change-ends)  [Sigal Samuel, "Having fewer kids will not save the climate," *Vox*, February 13, 2020.](https://www.vox.com/future-perfect/2020/2/13/21132013/climate-change-children-kids-anti-natalism) |
| Week 15  Dec. 7  Dec. 9 | [Eva Rothenberg and Drew Kann, "'In the end, everything is about equity': How experts say the pandemic could invigorate climate change action," CNN, April 13, 2021.](https://www.cnn.com/2021/04/13/world/climate-change-covid-19-lessons-equity/index.html" \t "_blank) [Mark Kaufman, "The carbon footprint sham," Mashable.](https://mashable.com/feature/carbon-footprint-pr-campaign-sham/)  [Andreas Malm, Interview, “To Halt Climate Change, We Need an Ecological Leninism,” Jacobin, June 15, 2020.](https://jacobinmag.com/2020/06/andreas-malm-coronavirus-covid-climate-change) |
|  | Take-home Final Exam available on Monday, Dec. 13, 8:00 a.m., due on Canvas by Thursday, Dec. 16, 12:00 p.m. |