



Diablo Valley College – San Ramon Valley Campus – Spring 2024  
POLSC 240 – 9082 / Introduction to Political Theory / 3 Units  
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**Instructor:** John Kropf – Office Hours: Mondays, 5:00 – 6:00 pm, Room W-217

**Schedule:** Mondays, Hybrid: 6:00 to 7:25 pm, Room W-217 and online, January 22 – May 13, 2024

**Course Description:** This course will present a survey of selected political theories, concepts, and issues from Plato to the present. Students will explore theoretical approaches used to explain, instruct, and justify the distribution of political power in societies.

**Recommended:** Eligibility for ENGL-122 or equivalent

**Student Learning Objectives:** At the completion of this course, students will be able to...

1. Compare and contrast various political theories and theorists.
2. Recognize fundamental political concepts (i.e. freedom, equality, justice, the individual, nature, citizenship, democracy, exploitation, alienation, violence, revolution) as expressed by major political thinkers.
3. Discern the assumptions and values that underlie selected political ideologies.
4. Relate aspects of political thought of the past to current political ideologies/thought.
5. Apply various theoretical approaches to contemporary political problems and assess their strengths and weaknesses.
6. Recognize concepts and principles of political thought in the routine operations of political systems.
7. Analyze elements of political behavior and the implication of actions taken by leaders and constituents of secular and/or religious movements.
8. Analyze and *critically* evaluate some of the most important contemporary issues we face in the 21<sup>st</sup> century based on 1-7 above.

**Course Text:** John Hoffman and Paul Graham, *Introduction to Political Theory* [provided]. The instructor will also provide other assigned readings on the class website.

**Course Methodology:** Classes will consist primarily of class lectures and discussions, which will amplify and clarify text materials. Students will be expected to read assigned material prior to lectures/discussions.

**Class Evaluation:** Student progress will be evaluated through a research essay exam and discussion questions related to your readings and documentary videos. Late research papers will be accepted on a case-by-case basis but will *definitely* lower your grade. All assignments will be uploaded to Canvas. Attendance is mandatory and will be taken formally at each session. Discussion forms an important component of this course, so class participation is strongly encouraged. Student participation in class is an indicator of student interest and shows that the student is keeping up with the assigned readings. Also, since a significant portion of your grade is based on participation, this means that missing more than two classes will almost certainly lower your overall letter grade. Your final grade will break out as follows:

- Study Questions Journals – 20%
- Video Discussion Board Responses – 20%
- Research Paper (first draft) – 25%
- Research Paper (final draft) – 25%
- Class Participation – 10%

Important Dates:

February 3, 2024 – Last day to drop class *without* a “W” on your transcript.

April 19, 2024 – Last day to drop class *with* a “W” on your transcript.

May 10, 2024 – Last day to request pass/no pass on your transcript.

\*One final note: Dropping this class is YOUR responsibility. *DVC policy mandates that I cannot drop you from this class after April 19<sup>th</sup> through the final grading period.*

## Political Science 240 / Introduction to Political Theory Outline

This schedule is tentative and can be adjusted to accommodate student/instructor interest.

RH = HG = Hoffman and Graham text; WEB = Readings from class website

### Part I: Classical Ideas: What Is Power?

**January 22: LECTURE / DISCUSSION: *The Problem of Power in the Study of Politics.*** Our first lecture will cover the concept of political “theory”; kinds of political systems; empirical/normative dichotomies; methodological categories such as qualitative/quantitative, rational choice; and perspectives on politics, including elitist, pluralist and democratic. Included will be an examination of *power*; what it is, who wields it, and its relationship to *authority*.

Video: *Noam Chomsky: Knowledge and Power (Al Jazeera)*.

Readings for 1/29: HG – Introduction and Chapters 1 and 2.

**January 29: LECTURE / DISCUSSION: *The State and Freedom.*** What is the “state”? Can true freedom be found in this type of political organization? This week we’ll be examining two of the most important ideas in political theory, including various definitions of the state; the link to sovereignty and its necessity. We will also discuss the concept of freedom; a working definition, contributions from thinkers such as Mill and distinctions between action and expression.

Video: *Why Are Finland and Denmark Happier Than the U.S?*

Readings for 2/5: HG – Chapters 3 and 4.

**February 5: LECTURE / DISCUSSION: *Equality and Justice.*** On this night we’ll examine two other important political concepts, equality, and justice. What are the various principles of equality? What is the radical anti-egalitarian perspective? Our focus on the concept of justice will zero in on distributive justice and property rights. We will also discuss the Rawlsian theory of justice, liberal egalitarianism, and its libertarian alternative advanced by Robert Nozick. We will also consider a major challenge to both theories by examining the Marxist perspective as advanced by Gerald Cohen.

Video: *True Justice: Bryan Stevenson’s Fight for Equality.*

Readings for 2/12: HG – Chapters 5, 6, and 7

**February 12: LECTURE / DISCUSSION: *Democracy, Citizenship, and Punishment.*** Why do so many politicians across the spectrum claim adherence to the concept of democracy? What is the relationship between philosophical liberalism and democracy? Is there an inherent tension between the concept of the state and democracy? Closely related to the subject of democracy, the study of citizenship, and the limitations on the Greek concept. A discussion of global citizenship and the barriers faced by minorities and women to meaningful citizenship; and finally, an examination of punishment, its retributivist vs. consequentialist arguments and alternatives to the dominant theory: the communicative theory of punishment and restorative justice.

Video: *The Business of Punishment: How Forced Prison Labor Has Generated Revenue Since the Colonial Era.*

Readings for 2/26: HG – Chapter 8.

**February 19: President’s Day Holiday – No Class**

### Part II: Classical Ideologies: What Is Ideology?

**February 26: LECTURE / DISCUSSION: *Liberalism.*** The period of the Enlightenment saw some of the greatest progress ever in the field of human understanding. Central to this era was the concept of liberalism and the movement of science and reason in the displacing of faith and dogmatism. One of the most important thinkers of the period Immanuel Kant, will be profiled tonight along with a discussion of the social contract, utilitarianism, economic theories of laissez-faire, and contemporary liberal theorists such as Rawls and his theory of justice.

Video: *Death of the Liberal Class with Steve Paikin.*

Readings for 3/4: HG – Chapter 9

**March 4: LECTURE / DISCUSSION: *Conservatism*.** The last of our great traditions will focus on the philosophies of conservatism. We'll examine the different varieties of this tradition, beginning with traditional and laissez-faire through the more contemporary versions as outlined by Kirk. We'll be discussing the work of four key thinkers: David Hume, Edmund Burke, Michael Oakeshott, and Leo Strauss. What are the practical implications of conservative thought? How does one distinguish conservatism from other traditional ideologies?

Video: *Thomas Sowell: Dismantling America*.

Readings for 3/11: HG – Chapter 12.

**March 11: LECTURE / DISCUSSION: *Nationalism*.** Tonight, we'll discuss one of the most powerful forces in modern history – nationalism. The notion arouses strong feelings – for some, nationalism is tantamount to racism, but for others it signifies solidarity and stability. And so, we will outline the debate around the meaning and origins of the 'nation' and 'nationalism'. This will include a discussion of the distinction between civic and ethnic nationalism; the role of nationalism in the work of two nineteenth-century liberal thinkers (Mill and Herder), and the work of Marx and Engels. We will finish with a discussion of contemporary liberal defenses of nationalism.

Video: *Nationalism vs. Globalism: The New Political Divide*.

Readings for 3/25: HG – Chapter 10.

### March 18 – March 22: Spring Break – No Class

**March 25: LECTURE / DISCUSSION: *Socialism*.** The reaction against some of the more egregious aspects of capitalism found their ultimate expression in our next school of thought – Marxism. We will discuss some of the more pertinent points brought up by Karl Marx through various readings ranging from the *Communist Manifesto* to *Capital*. Beginning with the different perspectives of Marx, we'll go through the concepts of the dialectic, the idealism / materialism dichotomy, relations of production, the concept of surplus value, alienation and more. Our video this week we'll allow us to critically analyze both the premise and promise of capitalism.

Video: *No Gods, No Masters: Part One*.

Readings for 4/1: HG – Chapter 13.

**April 1: LECTURE / DISCUSSION: *Fascism*.** As with the term 'anarchism', 'fascism' is often used as a word of abuse. Fascists are seen as people who act in authoritarian ways and seek to impose their views and values on others, but fascism is more complicated than this. Therefore, a working definition is crucial. So, we'll look at whether fascism is a general movement or a particular movement such as in Italy. Additionally, we'll discuss the relationship of fascism to capitalism and class; the relationship of Nazism to fascism; the view taken by fascists toward liberal ideas and the European Enlightenment as a way to gauge the depth and rejection of 'reason', liberty, and equality; the fascist view of the state; and fascism today, the forms that it takes, and the conditions under which it is likely to become increasingly influential.

Video: *No Gods, No Masters: Part Two*.

Readings for 4/8: HG – Chapter 11

**April 8: LECTURE / DISCUSSION: *Anarchism!*** The word 'anarchist' is often used as a term of abuse, and is sometimes misused – but what exactly does it mean? What does it stand for, and why have some argued that anarchism has enjoyed a resurgence in recent years? Tonight, we'll examine anarchism in detail, its overlap with other ideologies; the views of anti-capitalist anarchists such as Proudhon, Bakunin, and Kropotkin; the actual experience of anarchism during the Spanish Civil War; the problem of violence and the role it plays in new social movements. The problem of organization and the difficulties that arise when the distinctions between the state and government and force and constraint are ignored.

Video: *No Gods, No Masters: Part Three*.

Readings for 4/15: RH – Chapters 14 and 16.

\*\*\*\*\***First Draft of Research Paper Due Tonight! (April 15)**\*\*\*\*\*

### **Part III: Contemporary Ideologies: What Is A New Social Movement?**

**April 15: LECTURE / DISCUSSION: *Feminism and Ecologism*.** Feminism as an ideology has always been highly controversial. It asks obvious questions such as: do women have too much or too little power? But it is also controversial in that different feminists mean different things by the term. We'll look first at the immense variety of feminisms, such as liberal, radical, socialist, black, and postmodernist feminism. We'll also examine a social

movement that has only fully emerged as a full-fledged ideology since the 1960s. Here we will distinguish ecologism from environmentalism – the latter based the desire to protect the environment based on concern about the consequences of environmental degradation on human beings – whereas the former, is based on ‘ecology’ or ‘nature’ as a source of intrinsic value. We’ll discuss the ideas of two ecologists, Aldo Leopold and Arne Naess, and one environmentalist, Garrett Hardin.

Video: *Surviving Earth: Climate Change Adaptation Population*.

Readings for 4/22: HG – Chapters 15 and 17.

**April 22: LECTURE / DISCUSSION: *Multiculturalism and Fundamentalism*.** In this lecture we’ll examine the perils and promise of multiculturalism by first disentangling the concepts that often get run together, such as culture, race, ethnicity, and religion; discuss theories of multiculturalism; consider whether multiculturalism is bad for women; and apply these theoretical perspectives to real-life case studies. Next, a discussion of the threat posed by ‘fundamentalism’, an ideology supposedly at odds with liberalism and democracy. But what is fundamentalism? How and why does it arise? Is it solely an Islamic phenomenon, or can other religions also have their fundamentalist proponents as well? We’ll examine religious and secular fundamentalisms; the contradictory relationship to modernity; and Huntington’s ‘class of civilizations.’

Video: *Human, Vol. 1*.

Readings for 4/29: HG – Chapters 19 and 20.

#### **Part IV: Contemporary Ideas: What Do We Mean By A New Idea?**

**April 29: LECTURE / DISCUSSION: *Civil Disobedience and Political Violence*.** Tonight, we’ll discuss the concept of civil disobedience; distinguishing it from legal protest, revolution, and ‘mere criminality’; whether we have a special obligation to obey democratically agreed laws; analyze contributions to these ideas from Rawls and MLK, Jr. Next, we’ll ask the question: What is political violence? Can a practitioner of political violence be coherently distinguished from a guerrilla or freedom fighter? To answer these important questions, we’ll be discussing and debating the liberal tradition; Salmi’s four types of violence; Marx, Lenin, and Mao’s view of political violence; the roots of political violence and the link between political violence and the state.

Video: *The Weather Underground*.

Readings for 5/6: HG – Chapters 18 and 21.

**May 6: LECTURE / DISCUSSION: *Human Rights and Difference*.** Although the concept of ‘human rights’ can be traced back to the 18<sup>th</sup> century Enlightenment – the ‘rights of man’ – it is only in the 20<sup>th</sup> century that a human right became a major concept in political discourse. Tonight, we’ll consider that discourse by reference to the Nuremberg trials; study human rights documents and their philosophical implications; outline the universalism vs. relativism debate; and assess five attempts to defend a set of universal human rights. We’ll also examine the growing interest in the concepts of ‘identity and difference’ as a substitute for class analysis in politics; the definition of difference as a monolithic and static view of a person’s self-awareness in conflict with democratic norms; the link between the concept of difference and the premises of liberal theory; and the implications that difference has for the concepts of democracy and the state.

Video: *Global Gay: The Next Frontier in Human Rights*.

Readings for 5/13: HG – Chapter 22.

**May 13: LECTURE / DISCUSSION: *Global Justice*.** Our final discussion will focus on the term ‘global justice’ a term which encompasses debates over human rights, the justification of military intervention and the international distribution of resources. We’ll investigate the main issues in the global justice community by debating the problem of famine; set out and critically discuss the three main positions: cosmopolitanism, particularism, and the political conception; our last discussion will ask what duties are owed to future generations, or what economists refer to as ‘generational equity’ issues.

Video: *Starved: Our Food Insecurity Crisis*.

Best of luck to everyone. Enjoy your summer and have a great fall semester!

**\*\*\*\*\*All Journals Responses and Final Research Paper Due Tonight (May 13)\*\*\*\*\***