

Course Syllabus Alicante, Spain Spring 2012



Contemporary Western Political Thought

Course Information

3 credits | 300-level Political Science | 45 contact hours

Professor: Dr. Joel Olson, instructor

Class room: _____ joel.olson@nau.edu

Class time: _____ Office: _____

Office Hours: _____

Description of the course

This course examines major problems and theories in Western political thought in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. It focuses on four key global events and their impact on political thinking: colonialism and decolonization, totalitarianism, globalization, and terrorism. All four struggles raise central issues of power, identity (race, gender, class, sexuality), equality, freedom, and the role of the West in world affairs. They also raise the question of what it means to be “postmodern.”

Books

The following books are required for the course:

Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (Penguin Classics 2006)

Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (Grove Press 2004)

Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (Vintage 1995)

Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera* 3rd ed. (Aunt Lute 2007)

There are also a few articles assigned. They are available as PDF files.

Attendance policy

Political theory is a participatory subject. It is learned not only by reading and writing but also through discussion and debate. Further, some of these texts are difficult. Your understanding of them will be helped a lot by lectures and discussions. For this reason, class attendance is important. As you would with any other missed appointment, call or email me if you will be absent for a class. You are responsible for all material missed due to absences.

Course objectives

By the end of the course you will be able to:

Explain the basic ideals of modernity and the postmodern critique of these ideals

Explain colonialism and its relation to the events and ideas of the contemporary era

Explain totalitarianism and its relation to the events and ideas of the contemporary era

Demonstrate how these events gave rise to the politics of “difference” (race, gender, sexuality)
 Explain terrorism’s relation to the events and ideas of the contemporary era
 Compare and contrast the theories of the authors and texts assigned
 Evaluate the influence of modern ideals on the contemporary era
 Evaluate the influence of postmodern critiques of modernity on the contemporary era
 Think critically and communicate your own ideas on political theory and the events and ideas of the contemporary era

Assignments

1. Two take-home exams, due Week 9 and Week 18 (100 points each)
2. Weekly response papers (100 points)
 - Total points possible for the course: 300. Final grades will be determined according to the following: 270-300 points = A, 240-269 = B, 210-239 = C, 180-209 = D, 179 or below = F.
 - Late exams: Late exams will be marked down one grade.
 - Response papers: Except weeks when exams are due, every week you will turn in a 500-word (about 1 page single-spaced or 2 pages double-spaced) response paper to a question I have posed to you about the reading. The purpose of the response papers is to help you understand the main argument of the text and develop your critique of it. Each response is worth 10 points. I will count your best 10 out of a possible 13 response papers for the whole semester, for a total of 100 points. *No late response papers accepted.*
 - Plagiarism: If you plagiarize any part of your exams or response papers you will fail the course. Plagiarism means the deliberate use of someone else’s language, ideas, or other original material (i.e. material that is not common knowledge) without acknowledging the source.
 - Course content may vary from this outline to meet the needs of this particular group.
 - Please turn off all cell phones and other electronic devices when in class. Laptops are permitted for note taking and other classroom uses, but not for surfing the web or “multitasking.” If you use your laptop for purposes outside of this course, I will ask you to stop bringing it to class.

COURSE OUTLINE AND SCHEDULE OF READINGS

Please have the day’s assignment read *before* class. Your ability to participate and do well in the class depends on staying caught up on the readings.

(P) = PDF file.

| Date | Topic | Reading |
|-------------------|--------------------|---|
| | I. Totalitarianism | |
| Week 1 Jan. 18 | | |
| Week 2 Jan. 23 | | Emmanuel Kant, “What is Enlightenment”? (P) (read <i>twice</i>) Arendt, <i>Eichmann in Jerusalem</i> chaps. 1-5 |
| Week 3 Jan. 30 | | Arendt, chaps. 6-10 |
| Week 4 | | Arendt, chaps. 13-15, Epilogue, |

| Date | Topic | Reading |
|----------------------------|--|--|
| Feb. 6 | | Postscript |
| | II. Colonialism and decolonization | |
| Week 5 Feb. 13 | | Fanon, <i>Wretched of the Earth</i> , chap. 1 |
| Week 6 Feb. 20 | | Fanon, chaps. 2-3 |
| Week 7 Feb. 27 | | Fanon, chap. 5, Conclusion |
| | III. Power, difference, and the postmodern condition | |
| Week 8 March 5 | | Foucault, <i>Discipline & Punish</i> , pp. 3-31, 73-103 (read 22-31 <i>twice</i>) |
| Week 9 March 12 | | Foucault, pp. 135-149, 162-223 (read 218-223 <i>twice</i>) EXAM #1 DUE |
| Week 10 March 19 | | Foucault, pp. 231-233, 249-256, 257-285, 293-308 |
| Week 11 March 26 | | Anzaldúa, <i>Borderlands/La Frontera</i> , Preface to 1 st edition, chaps. 1-4, poems (pp. 138-169) |
| Week 12 April 2 | | Anzaldúa, chaps. 5-7, interview (pp. 227-246), poems (186-195, 198-217) |
| Week 13-14 April 9 & 16 | SPRING BREAK | |
| | IV. Terror, ecology, and revolt in the 21st century | |
| Week 15 April 23 | | Samuel Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations?" (1993) (P) Mahmood Mamdani, <i>Good Muslim, Bad Muslim</i> (2004) Intro, chap. 1 (P) |
| Week 16 April 30 | | Ecology readings TBD |
| Week 17 May 7 | | McNally, <i>Global Slump</i> (2011) Introduction, chap. 1 (P) Readings TBD |
| Week 18 May 14 | | EXAM #2 DUE |