RPOS 310: Contemporary Political Philosophy
Fall 2013: The Prospects of Freedom in the 21st Century
(9871)

Prof. S. McKeever                  Tues/Thurs 1:15-2:35
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Course Description
Thinkers of the Enlightenment promised freedom and progress. However, the brutalities of the 20th century caused many to question whether those promises could ever be fulfilled. The 20th century saw the rise of totalitarian states of the right (e.g., Nazi Germany) and of the left (e.g., the USSR) that threatened to tear the world apart. Amidst this political reality, freedom became one of the dominant concepts of 20th century political theory. The focus of this class will be the examination of a few of the most influential strands of 20th and 21st century political theory to answer two important questions: “What is freedom?” and “How can we be free?” These questions will cause us to ask if our society is a totalitarian society and to question the prospects of freedom in our society. As we will see, the thinkers we read will be divided with regards to the concept of freedom, the prospects of freedom, and the path to achieve freedom. Along the way, we will discover freedom’s relationship to concepts such as truth, time, and art.

Course Objectives
1) To understand various 20th century conceptions of freedom
2) To understand how these conceptions are in conversation with one another
3) To connect these conceptions to the contemporary political scene
4) To better learn how to read complex texts and to comprehend the nuances within and among these difficult texts
5) To better learn how to communicate difficult ideas and how to translate them into political practice

Course Requirements
- Arrive on time to all lectures.
- Complete all readings on time.
- Bring the assigned readings to class.
- Come to class ready to participate. This requires you to not only read the assigned readings but to think about them in advance of the lecture. Be prepared to answer questions about the text and to ask questions of your own. It may help to take notes while you are reading, to underline key passages of the text, or to write down questions that you still have about the text.
- Participate in class. This includes diligently listening to and respectfully responding to the instructor and your classmates as well as introducing your own thoughts.
- Complete two midterm exams and one final exam.
Required Readings
The following books are required for this course and are available at Mary Jane Books or online (please be sure to get the correct edition so we are, literally, all on the same page):

- Michel Foucault, *The Foucault Reader* (Pantheon, 1984)

Additional readings will be made available online. They are marked with * in the “Schedule of Readings and Assignments” section of this syllabus.

Attendance Policy
Political theory is an activity not a formula. The process is at least as important as the result, which is to say it is impossible to understand the theory without understanding how the theory is put together. To understand how the theory works and moves, we will need to pick it up, mull it over, and try it out. This takes both time and conversation, which is the purpose of the class lectures and the resulting class discussions during our twice weekly meetings. If you miss class time, you will not be able to fully make up what you missed. *As such, missing more than 1 class or repeatedly coming late to class will result in a reduction of your overall grade.* (See below for the excused absences policy.)

Office Hours
Along those same lines, the conversations and musings do not need to stop in the classroom. I am always happy to further the discussion in my office hours, and, in fact, I encourage it. The more you can actively engage with the material, the better you will understand it. If your class schedule makes it impossible for you to meet with me during my regularly scheduled office hours, please send me an e-mail so that we can arrange a mutually convenient time to meet.

Excused Absences:
If you must miss more than one class or if you must miss a class with a scheduled exam, you must have documentation from the dean of undergraduate studies (Lecture Center 30 Phone: 518-442-3950) that details the reason for your absence and excuses you from that absence. Absent this proper documentation your grade will be adversely affected.

In addition, if you know that you will miss class time (for an athletic event, a religious holiday, or the like), please bring these to my attention (with proper and official documentation) within the first 3 class meetings or, if that is not possible, as soon as you become aware of them.
Grading
Midterm 1: 25%
Midterm 2: 25%
Final Exam: 30%
Participation: 20%

Exams:
This class will have two midterm exams and one final exam. All three exams will be essay exams. Each exam will consist of one or two questions. Prior to the exam, I will distribute a sheet that includes all possible exam questions. While the exam will not allow you to choose which question you would like to answer, you will have every possible exam question available to you at least one week before the exam is scheduled.

Since the thinkers in this course often self-consciously build on the work of their predecessors, the exams will be explicitly or implicitly cumulative. In other words, the questions will either ask you to talk about earlier thinkers from the course or they will require you to have knowledge of those earlier thinkers’ theories in order to properly contextualize and answer the questions being asked.

As per the “Excused Absence” policy outlined above, make-up examinations, early examinations, or incomplete grades will be given only in the event of serious personal or family illness or other unusual circumstances as they are approved by the dean of undergraduate studies.

Participation:
As I have already tried to make clear, participation is an important element for learning political theory. To emphasize this point, participation is worth 20% of your final grade.

You cannot receive full credit for participation if you do not come to class (see the unexcused and excused absences policies above), but attendance alone is not participation. You must contribute to the class discussion on a regular basis throughout the entirety of the semester. Participation includes asking questions that further the conversation, answering instructor or classmate questions, and offering appropriate comments to advance the classroom discussion. Though participation must be ongoing, I value quality participation over quantity alone.

Disruptive Behavior:
Participation includes not only actively adding to the academic discourse of the classroom, but it also includes not engaging in activity that is disruptive of that discourse. This behavior includes, but is not limited to, making loud or distracting noises, visually distracting students or the instructor, repeatedly leaving and entering the classroom, persisting in speaking without being recognized, or resorting to physical threats or personal insults.
**Laptops and Electronic Devices:**
All cell phones, iPods, and other electronic devices must be silenced and stored out of sight for the duration of class time. Additionally, usage of laptops, iPads, or the like is strongly discouraged. Usage of these devices for any activity other than note taking is prohibited. Please see me after the first class if you anticipate taking notes on a laptop or similar device.

**Grade Appeals:**
In order to appeal an exam grade, you should see me during office hours within 2 weeks of receiving back the exam and submit a 1-2 page typewritten explanation of your reasons for believing that the grade should be changed. A grade appeal may result in the grade being raised, lowered, or left unaltered. After two weeks, grade complaints will not be considered unless there are mitigating circumstances such as a serious illness.

**Cheating and Plagiarism**
Under no circumstances should you submit someone else’s work as your own. This includes, but is not limited to: copying text from another student on tests or papers, copying text from internet sites (e.g. Wikipedia, Sparknotes) or other sources without quotation marks and full citations, or submitting your own work from another course.

Cheating on an exam or plagiarizing written work will result in course failure and referral of the case to a university committee. For more information, please see the undergraduate bulletin: [http://www.albany.edu/undergraduate_bulletin/regulations.html](http://www.albany.edu/undergraduate_bulletin/regulations.html).

**Reasonable Accommodation**
Reasonable accommodations will be provided for students with documented physical, sensory, systemic, cognitive, learning and psychiatric disabilities. If you believe you have a disability requiring accommodation in this class, please notify the Director of Disabled Student Services (Campus Center 137, 518-442-5490). That office will provide the course instructor with verification of your disability, and will recommend appropriate accommodations ([http://www.albany.edu/disability/current.shtml](http://www.albany.edu/disability/current.shtml)).

If you wish to discuss academic accommodations for this course, for the above reasons or other cases including religious holidays, inform the instructor at the beginning of the term. Reasonable accommodations are generally established well in advance and are rarely granted retroactively.

**Writing Center (Humanities 140)**
The writing center provides tutorials on writing essays and improving language skills (ESL). Visit their website at: [http://www.albany.edu/writing/](http://www.albany.edu/writing/).

**Academic Support Services (Library Room 94)**
Academic support services arrange individual and group tutorials as well as study skills workshops on time management, how to improve your concentration, essay exam skills, listening skills, and overcoming procrastination. Visit their website: [http://www.albany.edu/oaae/index.shtml](http://www.albany.edu/oaae/index.shtml).
Schedule of Readings and Assignments
Reading selections not from required books will be made available online.
** This schedule is subject to change. All changes will be announced in class. **

Aug 27 Introduction

I. ** Enlightenment's Promise of Freedom **

Aug 29 Kant “An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?” *

Sep 3 Kant “Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Point of View” *

Sep 5 ** No Class (Rosh Hashanah) **

II. ** Critical Theory: Exposing Enlightenment's Totality **

Sep 10 Adorno *The Culture Industry*, Chapter 3 “The Culture Industry Reconsidered” and Chapter 4 “Culture and Administration”

Sep 12 Adorno *The Culture Industry*, Chapter 4 “Culture and Administration”


Sep 19 Adorno *The Culture Industry*, Chapter 8 “Free Time” and Chapter 9 “Resignation”

III. ** Creative Conservatism: Reimagining Where We Have Been and How We Can Get There **

Sep 24 Eliot “Rhapsody on a Windy Night” and *The Waste Land*

Sep 26 Eliot *Four Quartets* “Burnt Norton”

Oct 1 Eliot *Four Quartets* “East Coker” and “The Dry Salvages”

Oct 3 Eliot *Four Quartets* “Little Gidding”

Oct 8 ** NO CLASS (Use this for time for review) **

Oct 10 Midterm Exam 1

IV. ** Conservatism: Tradition Over Rationalism **

Oct 15 Oakshott “Rationalism in Politics” *

Oct 17 Oakshott “Political Education” *
V. Psychology: Civilization, the Human Psyche, and Freedom

Oct 22  Freud *Civilization and Its Discontents*, Chapters I and II

Oct 24  Freud *Civilization and Its Discontents*, Chapters III and IV

Oct 29  Freud *Civilization and Its Discontents*, Chapters V and VI

Oct 31  Freud *Civilization and Its Discontents*, Chapters VII and VIII

Nov 5   NO CLASS (Use this for time for review)

Nov 7   Midterm Exam 2

VI. Postmodernism: Rethinking Thinking and the Possibility of Freedom?

Nov 12  Lyotard “Appendix: Answering the Question: What is Postmodernism?”

Nov 14  Lyotard *The Postmodern Condition*, Introduction and Chapters 1-6
        (Recommended: Chapter 7)

Nov 19  Lyotard *The Postmodern Condition*, Chapters 10-14
        (Recommended: Chapters 8 and 9)

Nov 21  Foucault “Truth and Power”

Nov 26  Foucault “The Birth of the Asylum”

Nov 28  No Class (Thanksgiving)

Dec 3   Foucault “What is Enlightenment?” and “Power and Strategies” *

Dec 5   What is freedom? How are we free?

Dec 10  Semester Wrap-up and Review

Final Exam: Thursday December 12 10:30am-12:30pm