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PSC 354.01: Contemporary Political Thought

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**University of Montana
Political Science Department**

**Fall 1998
POLS 354
MWF 4:10-5**

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Contemporary Political Thought

Course Description:

In an otherwise sympathetic review of George Orwell's work, Bertrand Russell complained:

The men of our day who resemble Goethe, Shelley or Wells. . . have mostly gone through, either personally or through imaginative sympathy, experiences more or less resembling imprisonment in Buchenwald. Orwell was one of these men. He preserved an impeccable love of truth, and allowed himself to learn even the most painful lessons. But he lost hope. Perhaps it is impossible, in the world as it is, to combine hope with truth; if so, all prophets must be false prophets. For my own part, I lived too long in a happier world to be able to accept so glowering a doctrine. I find in men like Orwell the half, but only the half, of what the world needs; the other half is still to seek.

This course will examine the origin(s), scope and significance of this "modern despair" in contemporary political thought. As we will discover, many social thinkers of Orwell's day and ours seem to find it hard to keep their skepticism from leading to disillusion. At issue, this semester in POLS 354, is whether it is still possible— in spite of "the world as it is"— to combine hope with truth.

Required Readings:

**John Dewey, *Liberalism & Social Action* (packet)
Walter Lippmann, *The Public Philosophy*
Joseph W. Krutch, *The Measure of Man*
B.F. Skinner, *Beyond Freedom & Dignity*
Erich Fromm, *The Sane Society*
William Henry III, *In Defense of Elitism*
Susan M. Okin, *Justice, Gender, and the Family***

You may be asked to read a few shorter articles either by or critical of the above authors, or that deal with matters which these authors haven't dealt with.

Course Objectives: upon successfully completing the course work, the student should be able to:

1. Describe the main elements of modernism and pragmatism.
2. Identify and assess the various tests or criteria (such as relevance, significance, or ethical standards) that can be used to establish the value of one theoretical position or theorist over another.
3. Present and orally defend (and if necessary revise) a series of interpretive, analytical essays which examine a thinker's ideas about human nature, justice, social obligation, and political legitimacy. The purpose of these essays is to show that ideas can be appreciated for their validity as well a genealogy. And when evaluating ideas for the problems they address, we will use one author to interrogate another so that their ideas speak to our condition as well as theirs.
4. Orally critique an essay in terms of its analytical clarity, accuracy in its interpretation of the readings, and logic of its conclusion(s).

To achieve these objectives: Course Grading:

POLS 354 will be taught as a seminar with a few lectures. This means that, as Dewey advises, the teacher "steers the boat, but the energy that propels it must come from those who are learning." Therefore each student will present & defend in class four critical essays (40% of course grade.) The essays must not exceed 4 double-spaced, typed pages and will be assigned to individuals on a weekly basis. Each essay will be due no later than the class period before you are scheduled to present it. If you are absent the day we are scheduled to discuss your essay, you will not get credit for it.

Each student will complete on time *a comprehensive final* (worth 45% of course grade.) The final will be take-home, and must be typed, double-spaced. {There will be no midterm.}

Class participation and attendance will be worth 15% of your grade. *So a cautionary note:* if you are absent more than 2xs, attendance points {3 per absence} will be deducted. Or if you are unprepared for class discussion of readings or essays, points will also be deducted. Excused absences require a medical note for illness, injury, family emergency, or letter from instructor for field trips, ASUM service, music/drama performances, intercollegiate athletics, military service. Instructor will also excuse absences for reasons of mandatory public service.

Schedule:

- 8/31 ***Introduction to the Course***
- 9/2- ***Liberalism, Modernism & the Crisis of Authority***
9/4 **Read: Dewey, *Liberalism & Social Action*, Chaps. 1-2**
- 9/7 **Labor Day Holiday: No class**
- 9/9- ***American Pragmatism or Instrumentalism***
9/11 **Read: Dewey, *Liberalism & Social Action*, Chap. 3**
- 9/11 ***Dewey's Response to Modernism***
9/14 **Read: Lippmann, *The Public Philosophy*, Chaps. 1-2**
 Essays (due 9/11): What links does Dewey find among science, democracy, and the "method of intelligence?" Is his view of social progress valid?
- 9/16 ***Individualism vs. Community?***
 Read: Lippmann, *The Public Philosophy*, Chaps 3-4
 Essays (due 9/14) "In Dewey's conflicting preferences for individuality as freedom of mind, and society as the seed of the great community, lies a paradox that can be posed as a question: Can one be both social and individual?" (Diggins) Discuss
- 9/18- ***Limits of Pragmatism?***
9/21 **Read: Lippmann, *The Public Philosophy*, Chaps 5-7**
 Essays (due 9/16) Dewey's pragmatism is politically liberating, but philosophically provides no solution to modern despair. Pragmatism, say its critics, provides no signposts in the search for moral values. Discuss
- 9/23 ***Lippmann & "The Acids of Modernity": Introduction***
 Read: Lippmann, *The Public Philosophy*, Chaps 8-9
 Essay (Due 9/23): Who or what for Lippmann is responsible for "the decline of the west?"

- 9/25-
9/28 ***Lippmann verses Dewey***
Read: Lippmann, *The Public Philosophy*, Chaps 10-11
 Essays (Due 9/25): Lippmann sees modern skepticism as the enemy of legitimate political authority; Dewey sees it as the friend of the democratic society. After explaining their respective positions, what side do you favor and why?
- 9/30-
10/2 ***Lippmann & The Public Good***
Read: Skinner, *Walden II* "Introduction," Chaps. 1-6
 Essays (Due 9/28): Clearly, the "pubic interest" and the "people's will" are not the same for Lippmann. Why not? Is this a valid distinction? Why, why not?
- 10/5 ***Lippmann conclusion***
Read: Skinner, *Beyond Freedom . . .* Chaps. 7-12
 Essays (Due 10/2): According to Lippmann, our "first" nature makes democracy possible, but undesirable; our "second" nature makes democracy desirable, but unnecessary. Discuss
- 10/7 ***Behaviorism: Skinner & Social Engineering***
Read: Skinner, Chaps. 13-18
 Essay (Due 10/5): Is Skinner a political theorist, and if he is, what makes him so?
- 10/9 ***Science & Political Science***
Read: Skinner, Chaps. 19-24
 Essays (Due 10/7): "In designing a culture," says Skinner, "the critical issue is whether is will work." What, if anything, would Dewey find agreeable and/or objectionable about Skinner's brand of pragmatism and the latter's application of science to human society?
- 10/12 ***Skinner: Science & Society***
Read: Skinner, Chaps. 25-28
 Essay (Due 10/9): According to Skinner, what is wrong with lecturing people that if they wish to save their world they must first save themselves? Do you agree with him?

- 10/14 **Science cont.**
Read: Skinner, Chaps. 29-32
 Essay (Due 10/12): What makes a science "scientific"?
 What claims (findings/hypothesis/laws)
 does Skinner make that may be called scientific, but
 are anything but?
- 10/16 **Science & Democracy**
Read: Skinner, Chaps. 33-end
 Essays (Due 10/14): If Skinner had his way, we would have no
 alternative but to choose between science and
 democracy. Is this a valid choice? Why, why not?
- 10/19-
10/21 **Social Science & Science**
Read: finish Skinner's *Walden II*, or start Krutch, *Measure...*
 Essays (Due 10/16): In the end, how well does Skinner's utopia
 dispense with traditional notions of morality? How
 'radical' is his utopia?
- 10/21 **Skinner cont.**
Read: Krutch, *The Measure of Man*, Chaps 1-3
 Essays (Due 10/19): Politically speaking, how would you label
 Skinner: a conservative, a liberal, a radical? Why?
- 10/23 **Joseph Wood Krutch & "The Modern Temper"**
Read: Krutch, Chaps. 4-6
- 10/26-
10/28 **Krutch v. Skinner**
Read: Krutch, Chaps. 7-9
 Essays (Due 10/23): What does Krutch find wrong or missing
 in Skinner's "science" of man?
- 10/30-
11/2 **Krutch & Modern Science**
Read: Krutch, 10-11; *The Sane Society*, "Foreword," Chaps. 1-
 2.
 Essays (Due 10/28):What must Krutch ignore or distort, if
 anything, to make his indictment of science appear
 absolute?

- 11/4 ***Democratic Socialism: Toward A Marxist Humanism***
Read: Fromm, *The Sane Society*, "Foreword," Chaps. 1-2;
- 11/6 ***Revisionist Marxism & Modern Capitalism***
Read: Fromm, Chaps. 3-4
 Essay (Due 11/4) "Can a society be sick?" Discuss
- 11/9 ***The Indictment of Modern Capitalism & Society cont.***
Read: Fromm, Chap. 5, pp. 78-151
 Essays (Due 11/6): "Without revolutionary theory, there can be no revolutionary movement." (Lenin) If Lenin is correct, then what problems does this pose for the neo-Marxist.
- 11/ 11 Veterans' Day Holiday
- 11/13 ***Fromm cont.***
Read: Fromm, *The Sane Society*, Chap. 5, pp.152-208
 Essays (Due 11/9): There is always a villain in every political philosophy. Who (or what), for Fromm, is the villain(s)?
- 11/16 ***Fromm cont.***
Read: Fromm, *The Sane Society*, Chap. 7.
 Essays (Due 11/13): Does Fromm's concept of alienation make sense to you? Why, why not? Is there any comparable concept in liberal thought?
- 11/18 ***Fromm v. Skinner***
Read: Fromm, Chap. 8-9
 Essays (Due 11/16): What criticisms would Fromm level against Skinner and what criticisms would Skinner level against Fromm?

- 11/20 **Fromm conclusion**
Read: Henry, *In Defense of Elitism*, Chaps. 1-2
 Essays (Due 11/18): Is there a scale of values on which reasonable people can be expected to agree, and, if there is not, what are the political consequences of them being unable to agree.
- 11/23 **Slack Day:** If we are on schedule, there will be no class. Use time to read or consult with me on the final.
- 11/25-29 **Thanksgiving Break**
- 11/30 **Contemporary American Thought: Henry's Elitism**
Read: Henry, Chaps. 3-4
 Essays (Due 11/23): In Henry's eyes, what makes the "vital lie" vital?
- 12/2 **Elitism cont.**
Read: Henry, Chaps. 5-6
 Essays (Due 11/30): How does Henry reconcile elitism with liberalism, not to mention democracy? (Or what kind of "liberal" is he?)
- 12/4 **Rights**
Read: Henry, Chaps. 7-8
 Essays (Due 12/2): "Rights do not pertain to results, but only chances. They pertain to the conditions of the struggle for existence, not to any of the results of it; the pursuit of happiness, not to the possession of happiness." (Sumner) Would Henry agree with part or all of this statement? What consequences follow from this view of rights?
- 12/7 **Contemporary Feminism**
Read: Susan Moller Okin, *Justice, Gender . . .*, Chaps. 1-2
 Essays (Due 12/4): Must feminism, by definition, be radical? Why, why not? What would Okin say?

12/9

Feminism cont.

Read: Okin, Chaps. 4-5

Essays (Due 12/7): Is there a "male" and a "female" notion of justice? What benefits and/or problems does this pose for feminists?

12/11

Feminism: A Hybrid Political Theory?

Read: Okin, Chaps. 6-8

Essays (Due 12/9): Okin's feminism appears to draw upon conservatism, liberalism and radicalism. Is feminism merely a "hybrid" theory?

*******Final Due by 5pm December 16th*******