

Left, Right, and Center

Political Science 109
Summer Session II, 2011
Languages 207
Monday, Tuesday, Thursday 12:30-2:35pm

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Course Synopsis

Academics, political commentators, and practicing politicians have filled contemporary political discourse with a vast repertoire of political labels. ‘Liberal,’ ‘conservative,’ ‘progressive,’ ‘family-oriented,’ ‘libertarian,’ ‘anarchist,’ ‘socialist,’ ‘neoconservative,’ ‘paleo-conservative.’ Voters further mix and match these labels to describe their preferred political perspective. ‘I am socially liberal, but fiscally conservative,’ one might say. They are the terms we use to declare our policy commitments. As a result, these terms have become politicized by those who wield them. It is a political liability to be labeled a socialist or a right-wing radical – irrespective of the accuracy of the charge. In this course, we will explore the left, right, and center of the American political spectrum by exploring the seminal texts and thinkers that drove and continue to drive the development of the left, right, and center of western political discourse. As a result, we will also go beyond (to the left and to the right) the relatively narrow confines of American political discourse.

The goal of this course will be the achieving a philosophic understanding of the ideas that animate the various quarters of our political landscape. For example, we take the triad of liberty, equality, and community for granted. Yet, when we come to the ‘nuts and bolts’ of public policy, we find that differing interpretations of these values come into conflict. Thinkers on the left tend to see radical economic freedom as anathema to social equality, while those on the right see it as surest road to prosperity. Thinkers on the right tend to see pursuit of radical equality as undermining the very ties and traditions that hold communities together, while those on the left see the function of community as creating opportunities for all forms of personal and social expression.

We will explore these debates through thorough examination of major texts of modern political philosophy, encountering representatives from the enlightenment (John Locke, J. J. Rousseau, David Hume, Edmund Burke), the industrial revolution (Alexis de Tocqueville, Karl Marx, J.S. Mill), and contemporary periods of political thought (John Rawls, Robert Nozick, Michel Foucault). We will find that many of these thinkers ask similar questions, though confronted with very different political situations. Are morals natural or socially constructed? What is the basis for legitimate governmental intervention in the life of one of its citizens? What does human excellence look like? Is political participation integral to that excellence? Is government an aid or a hindrance to

it? In exploring their answers to those questions we will sketch the outlines of a philosophic 'left,' 'right,' and 'center.'

Course Expectations and Goals

Goals

This course aims to enhance your analytical and intellectual skills while simultaneously allowing you to situate yourself and others in the political-intellectual landscape. The course's goals for each thinker and issue that we encounter are threefold:

- 1) **Analyze:** Each thinker was making a set of political claims. They meant for their positions win out in a field of competing arguments and theories. I invite and encourage you to sharpen your analytic skills by separating each argument into its constituent parts, identifying the assumptions that animate each argument, and tracing the logic of each argument from those assumptions to its conclusions.
- 2) **Themmatize:** Each thinker on the left, right, and center will share continuities and discontinuities, with each other as well as with today's left, right and center. This course aims to aid you in identifying those continuities and discontinuities, both as a tool to navigate contemporary political discourses and to identify your own agreements and disagreements with your intellectual forerunners.
- 3) **Synthesize:** Where are the contemporary left, right, and center headed? What are their respective strengths and weaknesses? Politics always entails an ongoing struggle between progressive and conservative elements, sometimes for the better and sometimes for the worse. The course aims to help you identify the elements most worth keeping in the contemporary left, right, and center, as well as those most worthy of being tossed in the dustbin of history.

Expectations

To achieve the course goals, you will need to approach this course in a certain way. If you do, you will find the texts we read and the thinkers we engage will come to life much more so than if you approach the course passively. Duke is an expensive institution. Get your money's worth!

- 1) **Reading:** The texts we will read are dense and complex. Their difficulty and richness are part of what has made them classics. Effective interpretation only comes with attentive engagement. My job will be to help you in that task by clarifying passages and pointing you to key issues. Your job is to read slowly and carefully. Do not plan on grasping the main points of the argument through skimming key passages. Many of the devils are in the details. Leave at least 1 hour for every 20 pages you plan on reading. If you take your time with these texts, you will learn far more from them than you will from me. You will also more sharply discern the flaws in their arguments and the unasked questions in their explorations. Take notes. Write down questions. Your goal in reading is to

identify the *strengths* and *weaknesses* in their arguments, not just the wikipedia-level summary.

- 2) **Criticism:** The goal here is criticism from all sides. When approaching an issue or an argument, be both critical and charitable. Think about how the writer would respond to your criticisms if he or she were in front of you. What defense would be mounted? How strong is it? Your goal should be to criticize the *strongest possible variant* of an author's argument. Moreover, allow the author to challenge you and your assumptions. Criticism is a two-way street. Our answers to the problems they posed are not necessarily any better than those that have come before. If you disagree with a thinker on a certain issue, ask why that is the case. Explore *your own* assumptions and chain of reasoning in addition to the thinker's. This task is a challenging one. Our political positions are often bound up with the most deeply-rooted parts of our self-conception. But, if you engage in this process honestly and charitably, you will find your political positions challenged for the better. If your political positions (or the justifications behind) them are the same at the outset of this course and at the end, then you did not really participate in this course. (Don't worry, it won't affect your grade ☺.) The same goes for me.
- 3) **Class-Participation:** The goal of each class session is two-fold. We will aim to both *understand* the thinker's arguments and *critically assess* those claims. I plan to lecture for 1/3-1/2 of each session. However, no lecture I can give will be as fruitful as a lively discussion. Come to class with questions and concerns ready. Bring your reading notes. If you've been taking them dutifully, then you'll have no shortage of contributions and we will quickly arrive at a better understanding of what claims were made in the reading. Moreover, just as you ought to interrogate the arguments in front of you as you read, come prepared to do so in class. Each of us will come with a different set of concerns with respect the reading. Together, we can better assess the strengths and weaknesses of the arguments before us. In addition, we can better test our own positions by challenging and being challenged by the positions of others. Be prepared to *respectfully* question the claims being made by me and by your peers while simultaneously being receptive to the questions we pose to you.
- 4) **Electronics Policy:** The devices developed as part of the information revolution have dramatically empowered us in unforeseen ways and vastly improved the educational experience. However, a small percentage of students abuse these devices in class and have prompted a strict policy regarding electronics in the classroom.
 - a. **Laptops/Ipads:** There has been a sea-change in the way students take notes. I, like many of you, prefer to take notes on a laptop, rather than with pen and paper. However, the notational and organizational strengths of laptops come with the hazard of e-mail, Facebook, Gchat/AIM, and any number of other possible distractions. As a result, they significantly hinder some students' participation in class discussion. To that end, I require that all laptops/Ipads be put away during the discussion portion of class. So be

prepared to take notes during the discussion section of class with pen and paper.

- b. **Cell-Phones:** All cell-phone use during class is strictly prohibited. As an instructor, I find students' texting and e-mailing in class extremely distracting. Any students using their cell-phone to text or e-mail in class will be asked to leave for the day and will have an unexcused absence recorded. *Exception:* Naturally, we all forget to turn off our ringers from time to time. If you forgot to turn it off before class, please don't worry about fumbling with it in the middle of class to turn it off. If your cell-phone does happen to go off in class, discreetly silence the phone then.
 - c. **Recording Devices:** Many students like to record lectures and discussions for later reference. I am happy to accommodate recordings provided I am notified beforehand and the student making the recording is present.
- 5) **Writing:** Writing is an essential part of deepening your engagement with the thinkers we read. In analyzing, thematizing, and synthesizing the ideas you read as you develop your own written work, you will discover new dimensions to both their and your ideas about politics. Take your time when writing a draft, and be prepared to write multiple drafts. Writing a paper is more like taking a road-trip than flying from point A to point B. You won't know how much time you need to dedicate to it, and there should be surprises along the way.
- 6) **Honor Code:** By participating in this course, you have agreed to abide by the Duke University Community Standard, both in letter and spirit:
<http://www.integrity.duke.edu/standard.html>
- 7) **Attendance:** Attendance is mandatory. You will each be given one unexcused absence. Each unexcused absence beyond that will result in the loss of 2/3 letter to your participation grade. Excused absences require submission of a STINF (<http://www.aas.duke.edu/cgi-bin/trinity/t-reqs/illness/form.pl>), Notification of Absence Due to Observance of a Religious Holiday form (<http://www.aas.duke.edu/cgi-bin/trinity/t-reqs/rholiday/form.pl>), Notification of Varsity Athletic Participation (<http://www.aas.duke.edu/cgi-bin/trinity/t-reqs/novap/form.pl>), or a notification from your Dean. I will also make excused absences for family emergencies.

Assignments

1) 2 Section Papers (25% each)

This course is divided into three subsections, each corresponding to a different intellectual era and tracking the foundations of today's left, right, and center from within that era. Whether it's religious freedom, social welfare policy, education, taxation, or property rights, each of the three groupings of theorists we'll read will offer a different perspective on the same issue. This panoply of opinion should provide you with excellent material for formulating your own perspective in a paper of **1600-2200 words** engaging that subsection's material with respect to the issue of your choosing. You will be asked to perform this exercise for the first 2

- of the 3 subsections. Selecting 1 or 2 of the subsection's authors, you will summarize/distill the chain of reasoning that would lead the author to articulate a perspective on the issue of your choosing. If the author you are working with does not comment explicitly on the issue of your choosing, then you should envision what he or she would say based on the principles that animate his or her thought. Each essay will be due by e-mail, in MS Word or compatible format. The paper grade will be lowered one grade level for each day that it is late (from an A to an A- minus, for example). Extensions are available with instructor consultation.
- 2) Final Exam (30%)
The last day of class will be dedicated to a traditional, blue book exam. The exam will be made up of one essay question and several short-answer questions. It will be held on Friday, August 12, 7pm-10pm. Room TBD.
 - 3) Attendance/Participation (20%).

Required Texts

John Locke, Two Treatise of Government, Cambridge Edition
J. S. Mill, On Liberty, Hackett Edition.
John Rawls, A Theory of Justice, Harvard Edition
Robert C. Tucker, Marx Engels Reader
Jean-Jacques Rousseau, The Basic Political Writings, Hackett Edition
Foucault Reader, Vintage Edition

Course Schedule

7/5 (Intro)

Subsection 1: The Enlightenment

7/7 – Locke: Politics and the State of Nature

Reading: *Two Treatise of Government*: Book II, Chapters 1-6.
You may skip/skim ¶'s 5, 9, 14, 15, 35, 43, 44, 52, 53, 56, 66-68, 70, 92.

7/11 – Locke: Government by Consent

Reading: *Two Treatise of Government*: Book II, Chapters 7-9, 18-19.
You may skip/skim ¶'s 107, 109-110, 112, 114-118, 203-210 (skim), 213-218, 232-238,
Recommended: The Letter Concerning Toleration.

7/12 – Rousseau: Politics and the Natural Person

Reading: *Discourse on the Origins of Inequality*: Dedicatory Letter (skim), Preface, Part I.

7/14 – Rousseau: The Politics of Corruption

Reading: *Discourse on the Origins of Inequality*: Part II.

7/18 – Rousseau: The Radical Solution

Reading: *The Social Contract*: Bk 1, Chapters 1-8; Bk. II, All; Bk. III, Chapters 2-4, 10-12; Bk IV, Chapter 8.

7/19 – Hume and Burke: The Politics and the Wisdom of Nature

Reading: Burke: *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (Selections), Hume: ‘Of Justice,’ ‘Of the Social Contract.’ **On Blackboard.**

Subsection 2: The Industrial Revolution

7/21 – Tocqueville: Equality and the Promise of Democracy

Reading: *Democracy in America*: Introduction to Volume I
Democracy in America: Volume 1, Part 2, Chapters 1, 4, and 7
Democracy in America: Volume 2, Part 1, Chapter 2

On Blackboard.

7/25 – Tocqueville: Equality and the Danger of Democracy

Reading: *Democracy in America*: Volume 2, Part 2, Chapters 1-4, and 8.
Democracy in America: Volume 2, Part 3, Chapter 19.
Democracy in America: Volume 2, Part 4, Chapter 6.

On Blackboard.

7/26 – Mill: The Harm Principle

Reading: *On Liberty*: Chapters 1-3

7/28 – Marx: Dialectical Materialism & Species Being

Reading: Engels: ‘Socialism: Utopian and Scientific,’ Marx: ‘Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844: Estranged Labor’

****Subsection .. 1 papers due****

8/1 – Marx: The Communist Manifesto

Reading: Marx and Engels: ‘Manifesto of the Communist Party.’ Marx: ‘Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844: The Meaning of Human Requirements.’

Subsection 3: The 20th Century

8/2 – Cancelled

8/4 – Rawls: Justice as Fairness & The Veil of Ignorance

Reading: *A Theory of Justice*: Chapter 1: Sections 1-5, Chapter 2: Sections 11-14, 16-17,
A Theory of Justice: Chapter 3: Sections 20, 22, 24-26, 27, 29

8/8 – Nozick: The State of Nature Revisited

Reading: *Anarchy State and Utopia*: Chapters 1-2, Chapter 7 (Skim/Skip Section 2), Chapter 10.

**** (Subsection 2 papers due) ****

8/9 – Michael Oakeshott: The Hubris of Rationalism

Reading: ‘Rationalism and Politics’ On Blackboard

8/11 – Foucault: Politics and Radical Criticism

Reading: TBA

****8/12 – Final Exam Due: 10pm****