

Political Science 130C/330C
History of Political Thought III: Reason, Freedom, and Power
Spring 2006 • TR 11-12:30 • Building 160, Room 318

Course Instructor: Peter Stone
410 W. Encina • 5-2916 • peter.stone@stanford.edu • Office Hours: W 1:30-3:30

“Critical reason is the only alternative to violence so far discovered.”

-Karl Popper

Introduction:

This course serves two purposes. The first is to introduce students to some of the most important political theorists of the past two hundred years. Students may enjoy studying these theorists for their own sake. In particular, graduate students wishing to complete a field in political theory should make sure they understand each of the political theorists covered here. However, this course will do more than simply acquaint students with theorists. It will also use the arguments of these theorists to help students develop their ability to make critical use of political concepts—important terms of political discourse such as freedom, power, legitimacy, authority, democracy, and rights. This is the second purpose of the course, and it is a vitally important one. All too often, citizens in a democratic society are struck dumb by the evocation of some powerful political idea. If someone says that a proposed healthcare plan is a threat to liberty, for example, then even supporters of the plan might be left groping feebly for a response. If meaningful political discussion is to be a possibility, people must be prepared to deal with such concepts intelligently and without fear. This course will hopefully help to prepare students for such discussion in their roles as citizens of a democratic society.

The political theorists covered by the course were chosen with this purpose in mind. The course will examine three concepts that are central to contemporary political discourse—reason, freedom, and power. It will do so by relating these concepts to five leading political theorists of the modern era—Immanuel Kant, G.W.F. Hegel, Karl Marx, Friedrich Nietzsche, and John Dewey. Students will examine and discuss the arguments made by each theorist regarding these concepts. They will then bring the same skills employed in these examinations to bear on questions of contemporary relevance that involve these same concepts.

The course does not presume any previous knowledge of political theory, just an interest in both reading the classics of political theory and making intelligent and informed use of central political concepts.

Course Activity:

Most classes will feature discussions of the various political theorists covered in the course. These discussions will involve some lecturing by the instructor as well as more

seminar-style conversation. The exact balance between the two will depend on the number of students enrolled in the course. Please note that these classroom discussions are intended as a supplement to the assigned readings, not a substitute for them.

In addition, I shall attempt to set aside some time—possibly a full class period—for advice and assistance on student paper assignments (see “Grading” below). The exact amount of time devoted to this activity will depend on the extent to which the course remains on schedule.

Grading:

Should society...

- ...permit gay couples to marry?
- ...prevent employers from firing employees without good cause?
- ...allow newspapers to publish cartoons offensive to one or more religions?
- ...provide health insurance to all citizens?
- ...abolish private ownership of automobiles?

Students enrolled in 130C must complete a number of short (4-6 pages—about 1000-1500 words) papers. Each paper must offer an answer to one of these five questions. The answer must make some use of the concepts of reason, freedom, and/or power. In other words, I don’t want to see an argument whose primary thrust is, “Our society should provide health insurance to all citizens in order to control spending on health care.” What I want to see is an argument that begins, “A truly free society would insure all of its citizens, because...” Papers should follow the usual guidelines for academic papers (including complete citations for sources used—but please avoid using sources exclusively available on the web).

Students are required to turn in **at least two papers, each answering one of the five questions given above**. Students may turn in any two, though each must be on a different question. Each student is also required to **rewrite at least one of these writing assignments**. The rewrite can be turned in at any time. Each of the writing assignments will count for one-third of the course grade, and the rewrite will count for one-third of the course grade as well.

Students may if they wish turn in more than two of the five writing assignments, and may rewrite more than one of the writing assignments (though they may not rewrite the same assignment twice). If a student does this, I shall count the best two papers and the best rewrite towards the student’s grade. **No student can pass the course without submitting at least two papers and at least one rewrite.**

Papers (including rewrites) may be submitted at any time, but no more than one paper can be submitted in a given week, and all paper submissions must be made by the last week of the course. Because of the high degree of flexibility this schedule allows, there will be

no exceptions to these paper submission rules without proof of an emergency in writing. Also, please note that no electronic copies of papers will be accepted.

Students enrolled in 330C must also write three papers, but each paper must be longer (roughly 10 pages), may be on any topic relating to reason, freedom, and/or power the student likes, and can be turned in at any time. Alternatively, a student may skip the three papers and write a full-fledged research paper (20-25 pages) on a topic relating to the course. Students interested in the latter option should speak to the instructor as soon as possible so that he may approve their proposals.

Finally, class participation will be used both to adjudicate any borderline final grades and to reward exceptional participation. A few examples will illustrate what I mean. A student who never shows up to class and receives a B, B, and B- on her papers can expect the final grade to be rounded down to a B-. That same student would receive a B if she regularly appeared in class and made some effort at participation. At the other extreme, a student who received an A- on all three papers, but participated in an exceptional manner, will have her grade increased to an A. Please note that only truly exceptional class participation will be rewarded in this manner.

Course Readings:

I have assigned the following texts for the course. They are listed in the order in which they will be discussed in class.

Kant, Immanuel. *Ethical Philosophy*. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1995.
Assigned section: "Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals."

Kant, Immanuel. *Perpetual Peace and Other Essays*. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1983.
Assigned section: "To Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch" (optional: "Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Intent").

Hegel, G.W.F. *Introduction to the Philosophy of History*. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1988.
Assigned section: entire work.

Marx, Karl and Engels, Frederick. *The Communist Manifesto*. Peterborough, ON: Broadview Press, 2004. Assigned section: "The Communist Manifesto."

Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Beyond Good and Evil*. New York: Random House, 1966. Assigned section: entire work.

Dewey, John. *Reconstruction in Philosophy*. Enlarged ed. Boston: Beacon Press, 1971.
Assigned section: entire work.

All of these books should be available for sale at the campus bookstore. These books will also be on reserve at Green Library. Please note that all six books are available in multiple editions by different publishers. (The Kant volume is a collection of shorter

works, but the works contained therein are available in many collections.) I have no objections to students relying on other editions. However, students should be aware that all but one of the authors to be studied did not write in English, and so if they rely on other editions the translations involved will likely differ.

Tentative Class Schedule:

T 4/4 Introduction
R 4/6 Kant 1

T 4/11 Kant 2
R 4/13 Kant 3

T 4/18 Kant 4
R 4/20 Kant 5

T 4/25 Hegel 1
R 4/27 Hegel 2

T 5/2 Marx 1
R 5/4 Marx 2

T 5/9 Marx 3
R 5/11 Nietzsche 1

T 5/16 Nietzsche 2
R 5/18 Nietzsche 3

T 5/23 Nietzsche 4
R 5/25 Dewey 1

T 5/30 Dewey 2
R 6/1 Dewey 3

T 6/6 Wrap-Up