

Humboldt State University
PSCI 323 CRN 23994
Founders Hall 177
Tues, Thurs, 3:30-4:50
Spring Semester 2001

Prof: John Meyer
Office: 138 Founders Hall
Hours: Tues, 2-3, Thurs 11-12,
or by appointment

Phone: 826-4497
jmm7001@humboldt.edu
www.humboldt.edu/~jmm7001

Topics in Political Theory: CONTEMPORARY POLITICAL THEORY

We will read a variety of contemporary theoretical arguments that address major political dilemmas. These include the relationship between the state and the market on both a national and global scale, the accommodation of cultural and racial diversity within political societies, the impact of gender roles, and the growing concern for the environment.

Our primary goal will be to better understand the relationship between these concerns and the dominant political ideology of our age, *liberalism*. To do this, we'll study and debate the meaning and value of liberal ideas today. What does liberalism mean? It's used to justify economic globalization and 'free trade,' but has also inspired defenders of freedom against oppression. We'll read a variety of contemporary writings to see how this might be so. We'll also focus on multicultural, feminist, communitarian, and environmentalist writings that pose hard questions about liberal ideas. This will allow us to discuss whether liberal ideas can or should address contemporary political dilemmas -- and if so, how. Conversely, we will explore what alternative ideas might be available if liberalism is not adequate or desirable.

This class will be run largely as a seminar. That means that it is especially important to remain current in your reading and come to class prepared to ask questions, discuss, and debate. While we will usually begin with my comments, the quality of the class will be largely dependent upon your preparation and participation. The readings will require close attention and real effort, but should repay the work you put into them. If I've done my job well, there will be at least some that you will find persuasive and some that will make your blood boil. Since it probably won't be the same ones for each of us, it is important to be respectful even -- or especially -- when we express strongly held opinions.

Required Books and Course Readings:

The following four required books are available at the HSU Bookstore:

- Avineri and de-Shalit, eds. *Communitarianism and Individualism*, Oxford 1992
(readings from this book are noted as '**C&I**' below)
- Holmes and Sunstein, *The Cost of Rights*, Norton, 1999
- Mills, *The Racial Contract*, Cornell, 1997
- Okin, with respondents, *Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women?* Princeton, 1999

There will also be several readings, marked with an asterisk (*), available on reserve in the department office (FH 180). Two other readings will be available via **ONCORES**.

Course Requirements

There are **two papers** required for this course; each 6-8 pages long (normal fonts, spacing and margins). I will distribute some possible paper topics in advance; you may choose to write on one of these or to propose your own topic (with my approval *in advance*). Papers should be based upon careful analysis and reflection upon the readings assigned in the course. Each paper will be worth **30%** of your course grade.

There will also be a **comprehensive final exam** for the course. This will be an essay exam and will expect you to draw upon your understanding of the readings and ideas we considered throughout the semester. It will be worth **30%** of your course grade.

You must also turn in **8 reading reaction papers** throughout the semester. These papers should be *two paragraphs* in length (no longer!) and should be word-processed. The first paragraph should concisely *explain* -- in your own words -- one specific argument made by the author that you found important, interesting or provocative. The second paragraph should present your own *analysis* supporting, extending, or criticizing this argument. I will read these and record them on a '✓' or '-' basis. Reaction papers must discuss a reading assigned for the current week and be turned in by our Thursday class time. These will be worth **10%** of your course grade.

Plagiarism: Presenting the words or ideas of someone else as though they are your own is plagiarism. It is the most serious academic offense. **You must *always* provide citations (including page number) for direct references to ideas or information provided by others.** Copying distinctive phrases, sentences, paragraphs, whole pages, or more from the work of another (whether a classmate, newspaper, book, website, etc.) without proper citation will result in the harshest penalties. Changing a few words, while still copying the rest, is actually worse, *even if you cite it!* JUST DON'T DO IT. If you are at all unsure about this matter, please see me in advance of turning in a paper.

I. Introduction (Jan 23)

II. Contemporary liberalisms

A. 'Classical' Liberalism [JMM1]

- **Jan 25:** Isaiah Berlin, *Two Concepts of Liberty*(*)

- **Jan. 30-Feb. 1:** Friedrich Hayek, excerpt from *The Constitution of Liberty*(*), Robert Nozick, (Ch. 8 in **C&I**)

B. 'Revised' Liberalism [JMM2]

- **Feb. 6-8:** John Rawls (Ch. 11 in **C&I**); Stephen Holmes and Cass Sunstein, *The Cost of Rights*, Introduction and Part I

- **Feb. 13-15:** Holmes and Sunstein, *The Cost of Rights*, Part II and III
- **Feb. 20-22:** Holmes and Sunstein, *The Cost of Rights*, Part IV and Conclusion; Rogers Smith, "The Unfinished Tasks of Liberalism."(*)

Paper Due: Tuesday Feb. 27

- III. Communitarian Critics of liberalism [JMM3]
 - **Mar. 1:** Michael Sandel (Ch. 1 in **C&I**)
 - **Mar. 6-8:** Charles Taylor, Alasdair MacIntyre, Michael Walzer (Ch. 2-4 in **C&I**)
 - **Mar. 13**[JMM4]: David Miller (Ch.5 in **C&I**)
 - **Mar. 20-22:** SPRING BREAK
- IV. Democracy and Liberalism in a Globalizing Age [JMM5]
 - **Mar. 27-29:** Charles Lindblom, "The Market As Prison,"(**ONCORES**); John Dryzek, *Democracy in Capitalist Times*, chapter 4(*);
 - **April 3:** Mario Sznajder, "Hayek in Chile"(*)

Paper Due: Thursday April 5

- V. The Challenge of Groups for Liberalism
 - A. Race and Culture [JMM6]
 - **April 10-12:** Charles W. Mills, *The Racial Contract*, Introduction, Parts 1 & 2
 - **April 17-19:** Charles W. Mills, *The Racial Contract*, Part 3; Chandran Kukathas, "Liberalism and Multiculturalism"(**ONCORES**)
 - B. Feminism and Multiculturalism [JMM7]
 - **April 24-26:** Susan Okin, *Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women?*, Part 1 and selections from Part 2 (to be assigned in class)
 - **May 1:** Okin, *Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women?*, Part 3
- VI. Environment and Liberalism
 - **May 3-8:** Avner de-Shalit, "Is Liberalism Environment-Friendly?"(*)

Course Review and Conclusion: May 10

Comprehensive Final Exam: **Thursday, May 17, 3pm**