POLITICAL CONCEPTS AND IDEOLOGIES

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QS A424
Office hours: TBD

Winter, AY 2021-2022
B.A. level course
Credit value: 2 credits (4 ECTS credits)
Mandatory course for PPE students
Module: Introduction to Politics
Prerequisites: None

BRIEF COURSE INTRODUCTION:
Concepts are the building blocks of thoughts, and political concepts are the building blocks of political science. Some of these concepts have, historically, been organized in the form of political ideologies. A critical understanding of these concepts is necessary first, to be able to understand complex political theories and phenomena and, also, to address ideological changes over time.

LEARNING OUTCOMES:
At the end of the course students shall be able to grasp key political concepts and be familiar with the main features of dominant political ideologies. Moreover, they should be able to understand the complexity and contestability of these concepts within political ideologies.

LEARNING ACTIVITIES AND TEACHING METHODS
We meet twice a week for an hour each. On Mondays, there will be a 10 minutes warm up exercise where we will briefly discuss some pre-theoretical ideas. Afterwards, the instructor will give an introductory lecture. On Thursdays, we will have seminar discussion in two parts. In the first part, students will discuss some questions in groups for 20 minutes. The rest of the class is a general discussion.

ASSESSMENT:
The final grade is based on:
- final exam (40%);
- mid-term exam 20%
- two short reaction papers (15% each);
- class participation (10%).
Reaction papers should include a brief summary of the main points of a reading, and some critical engagement. They should be no longer than a page (ca. 400-450 words). They shold also include 2 questions. Imagine that the authors of the chapters we read were in class. What would you ask them? The questions can be clarificatory/or can challenge a posotion. The papers must be submitted to the moodle site by Wednesday 5:00 pm.

There will be a mid-term exam in week 6. The exam will be a take home exam and students will have 24 hours to compete it.

If possible, the the final exam will be onsite. If this is not possible, then it will be a take home exam.

All students are expected to actively contribute to class discussion in a polite and constructive manner.

Classes

WEEK 1: Introduction: Concepts, Ideologies, Discourses

How do we define political concept, ideology and discourse and how can we differentiate them from science, religion, belief and other expressed forms of thought?


WEEK 2: Authority

In many ways, the concept of authority is a defining feature of political relations. Having authority distinguishes legitimate power from the mere use of force. There are different understandings of this concept. In this session, we revise the most prominent in the literature.

Reading: Talisse, R., Engaging Political Philosophy, (New York: Routledge, 2016), Ch. 4; pp. 63-92

WEEK 3: Liberty and Equality

The concepts of liberty and equality has played an important role in the past two centuries. In this seminar we discuss major conceptions of liberty, and we distinguish the concept of equality from other concepts and different ways in which equality is politically salient.

Reading: Swift, A. Political Philosophy, (Cambridge: Polity, 2019), part 4; pp. 139-173

WEEK 4: Rights and Justice

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Famously, John Rawls wrote that justice is the main virtue of social institutions. However, the concept of justice is used in various ways and is hotly disputed among different political camps. In this session we revise some of these debates.


**WEEK 5: Democracy**

Democracy is a form of collective decision making based on some form of equality (typically, one person, one vote). There are important disputes about the best way to understand this concept, the reasons to value it, and its scope of application.


**WEEK 6: Anarchism and Libertarianism**

Anarchy means a society without ruler, without domination. It supposes that people can organize their own life themselves without oppressive institutions, like the state. Anarchism is a political ideology and movement which aims to liberate people to achieve spontaneous order. Libertarianism identifies unregulated market as the best form of social coordination


**WEEK 7: Conservatism**

As a political ideology conservatism came about as a reaction to the French Revolution. Conservatism tends to be associated with respect for historical practices and reluctance to implement drastic or rapid social changes. Despite being a very serious political force, it is unclear whether there is a conservative ideology as opposed to many forms of conservatisms.


**WEEK 8: Nationalism**

Some people believe that belonging to a nation provides the social glue and justification that is needed to leave establish terms of cooperation that foster affluence, peace and social progress. However, it also seems that in a globalized world like ours there is not much room for national identification. This session discusses different ways to understand nationalism and its relation to other contemporary ideologies.
**Reading:** Heywood, A. *Political Ideologies: An Introduction*, (London: Macmillan, 2017), ch. 6; 163-193

**WEEK 9: Socialism,**

A political force in the left, socialism has played a fundamental role in shaping politics in the 20c. Although Marxism was the dominant form of socialism for large 21st century part of the last 120 years the socialism is a much broader family. In this session we explore some of the main commitments of socialism and some of its historical variations.


**WEEK 10: Liberalism**

Liberalism in one form or another seems to be the dominant ideology of the late 20c and early 21c. As we the other ideologies there is disagreement about what is the core of liberalism, but some form of individualism, support for a market economy, and limits to the power of the State are common to all liberals.


**WEEK 11: Feminism**

It might be surprising that, until recently, most political theories and ideologies ignored gender differences. In this class, we discuss various forms of patriarchy and the way feminists have objected to it.


**WEEK 12: Concluding discussion**

Environmental concerns, globalization, global warming, global inequality, and related phenomena contributed to the rise of environmentalist and green movements and ideologies. The major challenges of the 21st century will be discussed in the last class.

**Grading criteria**

A an exceptional answer, showing a real understanding of the issue and evidence of real clarity of thought.

A- an excellent answer, showing a very good understanding of the question being asked
B+ a very good answer, which gets the main point of the question and the issue behind it, even if it contains some small errors

B a good answer in parts, which shows some understanding of the question but contains some errors or irrelevant material

B- an answer which contains some correct material as well as material which is incorrect or confused, but is trying to answer the question seriously

C+ an answer which contains a lot of confusion or error but nonetheless shows some attempt to answer the question

F an inadequate answer which reveals no serious attempt to engage with the topic or to answer the question, and no real knowledge of the subject