

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO
Department of Political Science
Fall 2017

POL 484F/2026F: TOPICS IN POLITICAL THOUGHT: NIETZSCHE'S HEIRS

Instructor: Prof. Ronald Beiner

Class time: Fridays 10am-noon

Office: Sid Smith 3031

Class room: LA 340

Office Hours: Fridays 1-2 pm or by appointment.

E-mail: rbeiner@chass.utoronto.ca

In 1989, Francis Fukuyama famously declared that the Hegelian notion of the “end of history” had finally been realized: Western-style market-based liberal democracy had definitively prevailed over the alternatives, and whether Friedrich Nietzsche was right or wrong in considering this epoch of hegemonic liberalism and individualism as a triumph of “the last man,” that was our fate. Such a pronouncement looks, today, very foolish indeed. To be sure, it can be perilous to make grand historical judgments from up close. We probably need a vantage-point of decades or longer to really know whether Western liberal democracy is truly in crisis. But since 2016 it has certainly looked as if a crisis (or inter-connected series of crises) of fairly large proportions has begun, or is at least on the horizon: Brexit in England; Putinism in Russia and Trumpism in the U.S.; a real crisis of identity and purpose with respect to the whole E.U. project; the rise of a hyper-nationalist far right in various parts of Europe; a huge migrant crisis as a result of the chaos in the Middle East; a broad revolt against globalization; the challenge of militant Islamism, including a relentless stream of terrorist episodes, with escalating effects on all the other crises or perceived crises; and so on. No “end of history” in any of this! How are political philosophers to respond? The task of political philosophy, in my understanding of it, is to put oneself in dialogue with the most ambitious thinkers as a means of getting distance from the immediate political and cultural situation, and striving for the bigger picture. That is what this seminar hopes to address. David Brooks, the New York Times columnist, wrote in an op-ed not

long ago: “Over the past few years, economic and social anxiety has metastasized into something spiritual and existential.” I think that’s right. (Brooks was talking about the U.S. specifically, but I think his point can be generalized to liberal societies more broadly.) Can political philosophy rise to the challenge of reflecting on “spiritual and existential” anxiety that seems widespread and that seems to be feeding into multiple crises in our political world? That’s what concerns the four thinkers I’ll be highlighting in my opening lectures. Focusing on those thinkers will therefore at least clarify the ambition and purpose of political philosophy as a mode of social and cultural reflection. Nietzsche, Heidegger, Weber, and Freud almost certainly can’t solve for us the problems we need to solve; but they can at least clarify the space within which we’ll have to reflect in order to address our social and cultural dilemmas in their full dimensions.

My plan is to lecture for the first six weeks or so, including the introductory class. The lectures will be mainly devoted to Nietzsche and Heidegger, though I also plan briefly to address Freud and Weber. The remainder of the term will be devoted to seminar presentations. We’ll be flexible about how many seminar presentations to devote to each of our four thinkers, though the hope is to cover all four. Students should, in the first two or three weeks, select a text to which they’d like to devote a 20-minute seminar presentation. It can be one of the texts that I’ll be talking about, but doesn’t have to be, provided that it relates to the themes set out in this syllabus and elaborated in my lectures. **No later than Sept. 29th, send me an e-mail letting me know your preferred topic for your seminar, so I can plan the schedule for seminar presentations.**

Lecture #1: The Challenge of Nietzsche

One of the truly great mysteries of 20th- (and now 21st-) century intellectual life is how a thinker as forthrightly and bluntly anti-egalitarian and anti-liberal as Friedrich Nietzsche could become pretty much the most influential philosopher of the 20th century (a phenomenon then replicated by a philosophical successor no less anti-egalitarian and anti-liberal, namely Martin Heidegger). The intellectual influence of Nietzsche is of staggering breadth – not least within the precincts of the intellectual and cultural left. Solution of this puzzle will probably be left to sociologists of knowledge fifty or a hundred years from now. In the meantime, however, we must do our best to weigh the intellectual power of Nietzsche, while at the same time fully appreciating the dangerousness or possible perils of that intellectual power.

Lecture #2: Salient texts

An essential aspect of how I do political theory is to privilege the reading of primary texts.

Naturally, I don't discourage the reading of introductions to these thinkers, if that turns out to be helpful. But if we're to have proper seminars on the themes of Nietzsche and his intellectual successors, we'll need to attend to the actual primary texts (or at least some of them).

These are the texts that I'll be highlighting:

1. Untimely Mediations, ed. Breazeale [Cambridge University Press], pp. 63, 67, 95, 120-121.
2. Untimely Mediations, ed. Breazeale, pp. 148-149.
3. Beyond Good and Evil, § 188.
4. Twilight of the Idols, "Skirmishes," § 39.

I'll read out these texts during my lecture, but if students can also read them in advance on their own, even better. What we find in these texts is Nietzsche's ultra-illiberal account of "institutions that last." This is Nietzsche's normative standard! In order to live up to this ideal, one would have to annihilate the existing world of liberal modernity that we take for granted, and replace it with something far closer to (say) ancient Hindu civilization, or ancient paganism, or ancient Hebraic civilization, or the Islam of the 7th century. Heidegger, in his own way, wants an annulment of liberal modernity no less radical than the cancellation of modernity desired by Nietzsche.

Lecture #3: Nietzsche's Preoccupation (Obsession) with Nobility

The relevant text here is Beyond Good and Evil, Part Nine (though the themes located there can also be found throughout Nietzsche's oeuvre). In the late 19th century, Nietzsche highlighted more powerfully than any other thinker the conception of late modernity as a *post-Christian* epoch. This was intended both as a cultural *description* and as a normative cultural *project* (to *move* to something deliberately post-Christian). What are the implications of highlighting this particular understanding of late modernity, and how was Nietzsche's project received by leading thinkers of the 20th century? My suggestion is that for Nietzsche, *repudiation of Christianity constitutes the necessary condition of a return to an aristocracy-centred culture*. What Tocqueville worries about with respect to living in a pervasively democratic/egalitarian

civilization is ramped up by Nietzsche into pure rhetorical hysteria. The idea, one assumes, is that rhetoric of that kind is needed to convince people that the crisis of European culture really is a crisis. So one has to ask: What sort of project is one buying into when one buys into Nietzsche?

Because there's so little content to Nietzsche's conception of nobility, he leaves it open to Nietzschean disciples or self-conceived disciples to deposit utterly base matter in the empty box sketched in his works (especially his late works). This is what the various fascists did. And (despite what we might believe or hope) those fascists are still around and – arguably – growing in force in contemporary politics. (I don't in any way assume that fascism has been safely consigned to the rubbish-bin of history, however much one may wish it were so.)

Lecture #4: Freud and Weber as Heirs of Nietzsche

In his 3rd Untimely Meditation, Nietzsche referred to “Schopenhauer's heirs”. It's important to think about this notion: Nietzsche clearly conceived himself to be one of these heirs. He also clearly intended to have his own heirs in the same sense in which he was one of Schopenhauer's. This is at the core of the guiding theme of this seminar.

Freud and Weber are very pessimistic liberals. Nietzsche and Heidegger are very pessimistic (about the existing dispensation), but also very hopeful/hubristic anti-liberals. It's their hope/hubris that's dangerous! Freud and Weber aren't Nietzscheans, but they're shadowed by Nietzsche, and especially by Nietzsche's critique of modern culture.

Lecture #5: The Being-towards-Death chapter of *Being and Time* as a Nietzschean Text

It would be hard to dispute the idea that the most important and most powerful among Nietzsche's intellectual successors in the 20th century was Martin Heidegger. Whatever philosophical energies were released by Nietzsche's writings were reinforced by the works of Heidegger. I examine one key text of early Heidegger in order to sketch fundamental themes of his philosophy.

Lecture #6: “The Letter on Humanism” as a Nietzschean Text

Heidegger continued. I examine a key text of “middle Heidegger.” Read closely, it discloses a disturbing political philosophy (or so I suggest).

In the first class I will circulate two very short texts by epic figures in 20th-century intellectual life: Max Weber, “Between Two Laws,” in Political Writings, ed. Lassman & Speirs, pp. 75-79; and Karl Jaspers, Tragedy is Not Enough, pp. 36-40. The former is an extremely compact encapsulation of themes in Weber’s Vocation Lectures. The latter is an interesting sketch of the notion that Christianity per se represents a fundamentally anti-tragic approach to life. I don’t think it should be hard to see why both texts bear on what concerns us in this seminar. Also attached: one page from my Political Philosophy book: note 11 in particular should be helpful in terms of flagging the Nietzschean texts that define the intellectual space in which we’re moving in this seminar.

Course Requirements

Undergrads:

Proposal for final essay 10 % (3 pages; due Oct. 27th)

Seminar presentation: 25 %

Class participation: 20%

Final essay: 45 % (12 pages double-spaced; due Dec. 1st; late penalty: 1% per day)

Grads:

Seminar presentation: 30 %

Class participation: 20%

Final essay: 50 % (15 pages double-spaced; due Dec. 1st)

Topics for seminar presentations & topics for final essays are not mutually exclusive. If giving a seminar helps you (as it should do) to write a final essay on a particular topic (by, for instance, getting feedback both from me & from fellow students on what is in effect a draft essay), so much the better! In fact, I’d urge you to coordinate the seminar & the final research essay in a way that allows for the latter to build on the former.

Don't do anything that has the remotest chance of appearing to fall under the University's definition of plagiarism. If you do that, you will come to bitterly regret it later. The norms are spelled out very clearly at the end of this syllabus. If you have any doubts or questions about what is or isn't plagiarism, consult me. In particular, don't claim later that you did something that looked like plagiarism through sloppy note-taking, etc. That kind of lame story will not help you in the slightest. It's your job as a responsible student not to be sloppy about something that could cause you to get accused of something as deadly serious as plagiarism!

TEXTS

1. Friedrich Nietzsche, Untimely Meditations, ed. Daniel Breazeale (Cambridge University Press).
2. Sigmund Freud, Civilization and Its Discontents, trans. David McLintock (Penguin).
3. Max Weber, The Vocation Lectures, ed. David Owen & Tracy B. Strong (Hackett).
4. Martin Heidegger, Basic Writings, ed. David Farrell Krell (Harper).

These have all been ordered for purchase at the U of T Bookstore (though I have to warn you: the Nietzsche and Heidegger volumes look like they'll be fairly pricey).

The secondary literature on each of these thinkers is vast. What follows are a few suggested commentaries that relate in various ways to the themes that define the course, and that give you a taste (but no more than a taste) of what's out there with respect to relevant secondary literature. But please be clear: the main emphasis in this course is on primary texts, and use of commentaries is always merely ancillary to engagement with primary texts.

Leo Strauss, "German Nihilism," ed. David Janssens & Daniel Tanguay, Interpretation, Spring, 1999, Vol. 26, No. 3: pp. 353-378.

Karl Löwith, "Nietzsche's Revival of the Doctrine of Eternal Recurrence," in Löwith, Meaning in History (University of Chicago Press), pp. 214-222.

Hans Jonas, "Heidegger and Theology," in Jonas, The Phenomenon of Life (University of Chicago Press), pp. 235-261.

Tracy B. Strong, "Nietzsche's Political Misappropriation," in The Cambridge Companion to Nietzsche, ed. Bernd Magnus & Kathleen M. Higgins (Cambridge U.P.), pp. 119-147.

Gregory Fried, "The King is Dead," L.A. Review of Books; here is an electronic version:
<https://lareviewofbooks.org/review/king-dead-heideggers-black-notebooks/>

Dana Villa, "The Legacy of Max Weber in Weimar Political and Social Theory," in Weimar Thought: A Contested Legacy, ed. J.P. McCormick & P.E. Gordon (Princeton U.P.), pp. 73-98.

Georg Simmel, Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, trans. H. Loiskandl, D. Weinstein, & M. Weinstein (U of Massachusetts Press), Chapters 7 & 8.

A WARNING ABOUT PLAGIARISM

Plagiarism is an academic offence with a severe penalty.

It is essential that you understand what plagiarism is and that you do not commit it. In essence, it is the theft of the thoughts or words of others, without giving proper credit. You must put others' words in quotation marks and cite your source(s). You must give citations when using others' ideas, even if those ideas are paraphrased in your own words. Plagiarism is unacceptable in a university. What the university calls "plagiarism", non-university institutions might call "fraud".

The University of Toronto provides a process that faculty members must initiate when they suspect a case of plagiarism. In the Department of Political Science, suspected evidence of plagiarism must be reported to the Chair; in most cases, the Chair passes the case on to the Dean.

A faculty member may not mark an assignment or assess a penalty if he or she finds evidence of plagiarism – the matter must be reported. Penalties are assigned by the Chair, by the Dean or by the University of Toronto Tribunal.

The following are some examples of plagiarism:

1. Submitting as your own an assignment written by someone else.
2. Quoting an author without indicating the source of the words.
3. Using words, sentences, or paragraphs written by someone else and failing to place quotation marks around the material and reference the source and author. **Using either quotation marks or reference alone is not sufficient. Both must be used!**
4. Adapting an author's ideas or theme and using it as your own without referencing the original source.
5. Seeking assistance from a friend or family member in respect to work you claim as your own.

Ignorance of the rules against plagiarism is not a defence; students are presumed to know what plagiarism is and how to avoid it.

Students are especially reminded that material taken from the web **must** be quoted and cited in the same manner as if it came from a book or printed article.

If you are not sure whether you have committed plagiarism, it is better to ask a faculty member or teaching assistant than risk discovery and be forced to accept an academic penalty.

Plagiarism is **cheating**. It is considered a **serious offence** against intellectual honesty and intellectual property. Penalties can be **severe**, ranging from a mark of "0" for the assignment or test in question, **up to and including expulsion from the university**.

Some website listed below on avoiding plagiarism:

'How to Use Sources and Avoid Plagiarism' - available at:

<http://www.writing.utoronto.ca/advice/using-sources/how-not-to-plagiarize>

Other Advisory Material available at: <http://www.writing.utoronto.ca/home>