

CGCL 6320: Modern American Political Thought

DRAFT:

Note: syllabus is subject to change until course start date.

Instructor: Andrew Bibby

Email: abibby@uvu.edu

Office: CB 203J

Course Description

Prerequisite(s): Admission to M.A. in Constitutional Government, Civics, and Law program. Surveys the major figures and ideas in the development of American political thought. Begins with the ideas that divided the Union during the Civil War, studies the political thought of the Gilded Age, continues through the Progressive Era and the New Deal, examines the influential political ideas of the postwar period, and finishes up at the present-day. Focuses on the ideas of major political actors and thinkers: both the historical context in which they wrote and the texts that they produced.

Overview

This course examines modern American political thought through the lens of science and technology, exploring those developments from the New Deal and World War II through to the present age of artificial intelligence and digital governance. It focuses on how American thinkers, politicians, public intellectuals, and ordinary citizens have grappled with the promises and perils of scientific progress, technological management, and the centralization of expertise and bureaucratic authority.

From Franklin Roosevelt's deployment of technocratic governance during the New Deal and wartime mobilization, to Cold War debates about the "military-industrial complex," to contemporary anxieties about surveillance capitalism and algorithmic control, American political discourse has increasingly revolve around the capacity of science and technology to shape social order and individual freedom. According to Victor Ferkiss, technology can be considered the "hidden variable" of Modern American Political Thought. Technology increasingly determines not only the means but the ends of political life. For us today, this means that a choice among technologies is a choice among desired future states of society. The future relevance of American Political Thought now therefore depends on how it deals with the intellectual problems posed by technology, modern science, and AI.

Required Texts

1. Neil Postman, *Technopoly* (Vintage Books, 1993)
2. Canvas Readings
3. YouTube Video Selections (to be uploaded to Canvas)

Readings

This class is reading intensive. Program [guidelines](#) set an expectation of a minimum of 2 hours of reading and assignments for every 1 hour spent in class.

Class Assessment

Presentations (10%)

Students will present *once per week*. Presentations should be carefully prepared, akin to a guest lecture. Presentations should be clear, concise, and focused on helping other students in the class understand the material.

Participation (20%)

A number of factors affect participation . Your grade is usually an “estimate” or trajectory, based on recent activity in class. Important note: all students participation grades start at zero. This is not a penalty, just the default. Your participation score will rise throughout the course, if you come prepared, ask thoughtful questions, and/or help to create a positive (online) learning environment for others. Below are some general guidelines for participation.

9-10 (Excellent): Consistently engaged, contributes thoughtfully to discussions, demonstrates preparation by referencing readings or materials, respects classmates’ viewpoints, and encourages deeper exploration of topics.

7-8 (Good): Participates regularly, provides relevant input, shows understanding of course content, respects others’ contributions, and mostly prepared for discussions.

5-6 (Satisfactory): Occasionally participates, but input may lack depth or connection to the material, shows basic understanding, sometimes prepared, but could engage more.

3-4 (Needs Improvement): Rarely participates or contributions are minimal and off-topic, often unprepared, and does not show understanding of the material.

1-2 (Unsatisfactory): Almost no participation, unprepared, and may show little respect for the discussion, the class lectures, or classmates’ perspectives.

0 (Unsatisfactory): No participation discernable, unprepared, exhibits behavior that actively disrupts class or is disrespectful

Attendance (20%)

Because this is an intense (condensed) course, attendance is not optional. Cameras are expected to be on for the entire course with no exceptions (a camera “off” is similar to a student leaving class, in a regular class session. This should be rare. Not leaving class in a regular class session also shows respect for others).

Attendance minimum: students who miss more than 2 full days or 8 sessions will receive an automatic E (fail) for the course.

Session 1: Daily Reading Quiz (15%)

Daily reading quizzes are taken on Canvas and are due before the first session each day. These are low-stakes and usually involve 7-20 questions, based on a specific assigned reading (see syllabus dates). Students are encouraged to bring questions from the reading quiz to class for discussion or debate. Due each morning by 10:00am.

Late penalty: 25% per day

Session 2: Daily Response “3-2-1” (10%)

Daily Responses are required (i.e. submitted) on Canvas before the second session each day. Daily responses are designed to stimulate discussion and engagement. Instructions: write down 3 things you learned from the assigned reading (focusing on what was useful to you, relevant to you, or important in some basic way); 2 questions you have in regard to the reading (focusing on *specific words, phrases, or ideas found in the text*); 1 item that confused you, or that bothered you in some distinctive way (usually focusing on items that genuinely confused or troubled you). Daily responses are “pass/fail.” Responses that show lack of preparation and effort or that fail to identify specific ideas or sentences in the text (with page numbers) will be handed back for resubmission.

No late penalty (these are pass/fail and must be submitted on time, no exceptions)

Final Exam (25%)

Final Exam will consist of a mix of multiple choice questions, short answers, and an essay. *Students will receive a study guide near the beginning of the course with more details on the final exam.

Late penalty: 25% per day. There are no makeups, unless under extreme circumstances (and accompanied by documentation of the emergency).

Grading Scale

Grading Scale

93-100= A 90-93 = A -	"A" grades reflect the "wow" factor. These grades reward work that achieves the highest level of excellence.
87-89 = B+ 83-86 = B 80-82 = B -	"B" grades reflect the "very good" factor. This shows effort exceeding average and work that is of high quality, but short of excellence.
77.5-79 = C+ 73-76 = C 72-70 = C -	"C" grades reflect average work and satisfactory results. This is the AVERAGE grade for the course.
69-67 = D+ 66-63 = D 62-60 = D -	"D" grades reflect less than sufficient effort and less than adequate results.
59.5 and below= F / E.	"F" or "E" grades reflect far less than sufficient effort and results, or may be given in response to violation of academic integrity.

Generative AI

This course requires you to complete assignments that assess your understanding and application of the material. You are expected to do your own work, and the use of artificial intelligence (AI) tools, such as chatbots, text generators, paraphrasers, summarizers, or solvers, is discouraged. Use of AI on the Final Exam, reading quizzes, or presentations is considered cheating, and will result in a zero for the assignment. If you have questions about acceptable use of AI tools, please consult the instructor before submitting your work.

Accommodations

Students needing accommodations due to a permanent or temporary disability, pregnancy or pregnancy-related conditions may contact UVU Accessibility Services at accessibilityservices@uvu.edu or 801-863-8747.

Accessibility Services is located on the Orem Campus in BA 110.

Deaf/Hard of Hearing students requesting ASL interpreters or transcribers can contact Accessibility Services to set up accommodations. Deaf/Hard of Hearing services can be contacted at DHHservices@uvu.edu

DHH is located on the Orem Campus in BA 112.

Academic Integrity

At Utah Valley University, faculty and students operate in an atmosphere of mutual trust. Maintaining an atmosphere of academic integrity allows for free exchange of ideas and enables all members of the community to achieve their highest potential. Our goal is to foster an intellectual

atmosphere that produces scholars of integrity and imaginative thought. In all academic work, the ideas and contributions of others must be appropriately acknowledged and UVU students are expected to produce their own original academic work.

Faculty and students share the responsibility of ensuring the honesty and fairness of the intellectual environment at UVU. Students have a responsibility to promote academic integrity at the university by not participating in or facilitating others' participation in any act of academic dishonesty. As members of the academic community, students must become familiar with their rights and responsibilities. In each course, they are responsible for knowing the requirements and restrictions regarding research and writing, assessments, collaborative work, the use of study aids, the appropriateness of assistance, and other issues. Likewise, instructors are responsible to clearly state expectations and model best practices.

Further information on what constitutes academic dishonesty is detailed in UVU Policy 541: Student Code of Conduct.

Title IX

Utah Valley University does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, age (40 and over), disability, veteran status, pregnancy, childbirth, or pregnancy-related conditions, citizenship, genetic information, or other basis protected by applicable law, including Title IX and 34 C.F.R. Part 106, in employment, treatment, admission, access to educational programs and activities, or other University benefits or services. Inquiries about nondiscrimination at UVU may be directed to the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights or UVU's Title IX Coordinator at 801-863-7999 – TitleIX@uvu.edu – 800 W University Pkwy, Orem, 84058, Suite BA 203.

Religious Accommodation

UVU values and acknowledges the array of worldviews, faiths, and religions represented in our student body, and as such provides supportive accommodations for students. Religious belief or conscience broadly includes religious, non-religious, theistic, or non-theistic moral or ethical beliefs as well as participation in religious holidays, observances, or activities. Accommodations may include scheduling or due-date modifications or make-up assignments for missed class work.

To seek a religious accommodation, a student must provide written notice to the instructor and the Director of Accessibility Services at accessibilityservices@uvu.edu. If the accommodation relates to a scheduling conflict, the notice should include the date, time, and brief description of the difficulty posed by the conflict. Such requests should be made as soon as the student is aware of the prospective scheduling conflict.

While religious expression is welcome throughout campus, UVU also has a specially dedicated space for meditation, prayer, reflection, or other forms of religious expression.

Course Schedule

Monday: Modern American Political Thought

Session 1: American Political Thought

- Whittington, "Introduction to American Political Thought"
- Zuckert, *American Political Thought*, First Edition
- Ferkiss, "Technology and American Political Thought" (TAPT)

Session 2: Technology as Friend and Enemy

- Postman, *Technopoly* (Introduction and Chapter 1)

Session 3: the Technocratic Age

- Postman, *Technopoly* (Chapter 2)

Session 4: Technology and American Politics Thought

- Case Study: "How Digital Technology Shapes Us"
-

Tuesday: Conquest of Nature

Session 1: Modern Science

- Bacon, *New Organon* (pps. 1-12 on Canvas)

Session 2: The Ancient Pursuit of Understanding

- Aristotle (Selections on Canvas TBD)

Session 3: Student Presentations: The Modern Turn

- Bacon, *New Organon* (review "Idols")
- Hobbes, *Leviathan* (Selections on Canvas TBD)
- Descartes, *Discourses on Method* (Part Six, selections on Canvas TBD)

Session 4: The Conquest of Nature in the American Mind

- Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History"
 - Marx, Leo *The Machine in the Garden* (Chapter 1)
-

Wednesday: Industrialization

Session 1: Industrialization in the United States

- Abbott, "Industrialization" (pps. 171-174)

Session 2: Social Darwinism

- Abbot, "The Promise of Social Darwinism" (pps. 174-176)
- Spencer (Selections on Canvas TBD)
- Abbot, "The Americanization of Spencerism" (pps. 176-178)
- Abbot, "Applied Social Darwinism" (pps. 179-180)

Session 3: Student Presentations: Three Challenges

- Abbot, "Populism," "Progressivism," and "Socialism" (pps. 181-207)

Session 4: Industrialization vs. AI Revolution

- Case Study: the AI Revolution Compared: How do the economic benefits of the AI revolution compare to those of industrialization in America?. Who stands to gain or lose in each?
-

Thursday: the "American Way"

Session 1: Is there an "American Way"?

- Hartz, "The Liberal Tradition in America"

Session 2: Lockean Liberalism

- Locke, *Second Treatise* (Selections on Canvas)

Session 3: Student Presentations: Modern Natural Right

- Kloppenborg, "A Critique of Hartz"
- Strauss, *Natural Right and History* (pps. 248-251 on Canvas)

Session 4: Beyond the Liberal Tradition

- Case Study: Postliberalism
- Patterson, "What is Postliberalism?"
- Deneen, "Technology and the Loss of Liberty" in *Why Liberalism Failed* (pps. 91-109)

Friday: Technology and the Republican Ideal

Session 1: Commerce and Luxury

- Bibby, "Puritan Self-Denial and Political Freedom"
- Plutarch, "Lycurgus"
- Veblen, "Conspicuous Consumption"

Session 2: Jefferson's *"Elusive Republic"*

- Jefferson, "Query XIX" in *Notes on the State of Virginia*
- Hamilton, "Report on Manufactures" (Selections TBD on Canvas)

Session 3: Student Presentations

- Jefferson, "Query XVII"
- Jefferson, "Query XI"
- Jefferson, "Query XVIII"

Session 4: the Digital Divide

- Case Study: the Digital Divide
 - Zuboff, "Surveillance Capitalism" (selections on Canvas TBD)
-

Monday: Technology and Class

Session 1: America, Aristotle, and the Middle Class Ideal

- Bibby, "Aristotle and the Middle Class Constitution"
- Franck, "Aristotelian America and American Aristotelianism: On the Middle-Class Virtues and the Maintenance of Republican Government"

Session 2: The Power Elite

- C. Wright Mills, "White Collar"

Session 3: Student Presentations

- Marcuse, "One Dimensional Man"

Session 4: Case Study: AI and Labor

- Automation and Economic Displacement (Readings on Canvas TBD)
-

Tuesday: Conservatism and Modern Technological Society

Session 1: "Organic" Conservatives

- Kirk, "Ten Conservative Principles"
- Weaver, "Ideas Have Consequences"

Session 2: Leo Strauss

- Strauss (Reading on Canvas TBD)
- Burns, "Leo Strauss on Democracy, Technology, and Liberal Education"

Session 3: Student Presentations

- Ferkiss, TAPT on "The Conservative Bind" (pps. 375-376)

Session 4: Case Study: What About China?

- Elliott, "The West is Already Losing the AI Arms Race"
 - Readings on Canvas TBD
-

Wednesday: Technopoly

Session 1: From Technocracy to Technopoly

- Postman, *Technopoly* (Chapter 3)

Session 2: Scientism

- Postman, *Technopoly* (Chapter 9: "Scientism")
- Hayek, "Scientism and the Study of Society" (selection on Canvas TBD)

Session 3: Student Presentations

- O'Neil, *Weapons of Math Destruction* (selection on Canvas TBD)

Session 4: Case Study

- Topic and Readings TBA

Thursday: The AI Future

Session 1: Understanding AI: Core Terms and Concepts

- Turing, “Computing Machinery and its Intelligence” (selections on Canvas TBD)
- Anglen, “[Artificial Intelligence: the Key Concepts of AI](#)”

Session 2: Ethics of AI

- Core Challenges (Readings on Canvas TBD)

Session 3: Student Presentations

- Topic: What is Existential Risk?
- Bibby, “What is Existential Risk” (Readings on Canvas TBD)

Session 4: Case Study: Existential Risk

- Bostrom, *Superintelligence* (selections)
 - Tegmark, *Life 3.0* (selections)
 - Christian, *The Alignment Problem* (selections)
 - Lecun, Skepticism (selections)
-

Friday: Keeping Our Humanity: A Purpose for Education

Session 1: Mitigation

- Center for AI Safety, “An Overview of Catastrophic AI Risks”
- Isik, “Four Types of GEN AI Risk and How to Mitigate Them”

Session 2: Banning v. Regulation

- Yudkowski & Soares, *If Anyone Builds It, Everyone Dies: Why Superhuman AI Would Kill us All* (book is forthcoming; selection on Canvas TBD)
- Current Approaches to Regulation (readings on Canvas TBD)

Session 3: Student Presentations: Educating for Technology

- Postman, *Technopoly* “The Great Symbol Drain” (Chapter 10)

Session 4: A Purpose for Education

- Postman, *Technopoly* “A Loving Resistance Fighter” (Chapter 11)