

POSC 476 – Contemporary Political Thought
(Fall 2017 Course Description)

Contemporary political thought is an ambiguous category. The designation itself tells us little of its definite historical parameters or its particular thematic substance. Ironically, one of its characteristics is precisely this ambiguity; are we modern? Post-modern? Do we live in an age of reason? Religious Dogma? Does multiculturalism prevail, or are we dealing with new expressions of nationalistic fervor that do not play by the old rules? Is there any room for talk of morality and ethics in political life today, or is that merely an imposition of some socially dominant or oppressed group?

We will examine these dilemmas, and some others, through the writings of a few of the most insightful minds of the contemporary period. Although this reading list is by no means exhaustive, what it does offer is a broad and deep image of the contemporary world. As you can see, included are short pieces of literature, essays, polemics, and political theory. The intension of this varied approach is two-fold: first, it is to demonstrate to you that political thought is expressed through more than just academic papers or the writings of professional theorists, and, second, it is my attempt to have you 'think politically' about things that you typically may not. Each of the readings and assignments has been selected to assist you in constructing a complex of ideas, events, and intuitions that can suggest possible insights and solutions to the dilemmas of our contemporary epoch.