This is a course in social and political theory. It starts from two premises. First, it presumes that culture and politics are related in complex, seemingly ubiquitous, but very poorly understood ways. Second, it presumes that the primary deficiencies in our understanding are in the first instance theoretical rather than empirical. The readings for the course reflect these premises and are intended to clarify the explanatory and normative issues at stake in how we understand the relations between culture and politics. However, given the lamentable state of our understanding of the relevant issues we will be directly engaged in the act of theorizing. By that I mean that we will not simply be concerned with what this or that author has to say, but with the more constructive task of elaborating a plausible theory to aid in exploring the explanatory and normative issues that arise at the intersection of culture and politics.

The course will be run as a seminar. That means that I expect students to read assigned materials in advance, to read the readings critically, to come to class prepared with questions, thoughts, objections, etcetera, and to be willing to voice those questions, thoughts, objections and so on in class discussions. Please note that there is a lot of reading and that that reading is both unfamiliar and sometimes quite difficult.

Your grade for the course will depend heavily on class participation. It also will depend on two written assignments. The first (due at the end of week 10) will address questions of explanation, the second (due May 10) will take up normative issues. These papers will be roughly ten typed pages. I will give more precise instructions as the deadlines draw near. The precise topics are negotiable - that means you will need to discuss them with me in advance! So start thinking.

Readings

Books, marked *, are on order at the UofR Bookstore. They also are available via Amazon - all are in print and readily accessible.

Items marked # can be obtained on JSTOR via the UofR Library web page. Go to that page - http://groucho.lib.rochester.edu/ - click “Electronic Journals,” scroll down to “Major Collections,” click JSTOR then follow the search directions.

I will set up a process by which you can obtain and copy the remaining readings. Some will be available in the PSC department, some will be on reserve in the Library.

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Week 1 - Introduction - The Current Impasse and a Road Map.


Week 2 - Raising Issues


Week 3 - Classical Views

Karl Marx. “Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy”
Alexis de Tocqueville. Democracy in America -- 1.II.9
Max Weber The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism -- Introduction, Chs. 2,4
Emil Durkheim Selected Writings pp. 219-250.

Week 4 - On the Wrong Track - Contemporary Approaches to “Political Culture”


Week 5-6 - Interpretation

* Clifford Geertz. 1972. The Interpretation of Cultures. Basic
Week 7 - Down to Cases? Or Theoretical Disagreements About Mechanisms?  
The Symbolic Aftermath of Communism, East & West


Week 8 - Interpretation and Rationality


Week 9 - Strategic Interaction in a Culturally Austere World


Week 10 - Strategy - Some Wrong Turns


Week 11 -The Poverty of Primordialism

James Johnson. 1999. “Inventing Constitutional Traditions” (Ms.)

**Week 12 - Communitarians & Liberals on The Value of Cultural Membership**


**Week 13 - Women**


**Week 14 - Skeptics**