

Manfred Henningsen

Polsc. 610:

Political Theory and Analysis

Fall 2018

I. Description:

In this class we will discuss books that have initiated and sometimes provoked controversial debates in professional social science circles and occasionally also in the general public domain. We will start with the challenge that the political theorist Mark Lilla launched against the self-complacency of American liberals and their support of identity politics with his book *The Once and Future Liberal. After Identity Politics* (2017). The emergence of a populist motivated politics of nativist resentment in the West and especially the US is the focus of Jan-Werner Mueller's book on *What is Populism?* (2016). The radical critique of neo-liberal economics by the sociologist David Kotz in his *The Rise and Fall of Neoliberal Capitalism* (2017) marks the economic parameters of liberal politics in the US and other parts of the world. Amy Chua takes another look at left and right populist positions in her book *Political Tribes* (2017). Steven Pinker attempts to question the notion that violence is undermining in a dramatic way the fabric of modern societies. His *Enlightenment Now* (2017) attempts to make us accept the notion that the enlightenment culture is well and alive and moving forward in a life enhancing way.

The South-Asian scholar Dipesh Chakrabarty took, long before Pinker entered the cultural sphere, a different look at the global impact of the European enlightenment formation in a book with an intriguingly subversive title, namely *Provincializing Europe* (2000). He then wrote: "The phenomenon of 'political

modernity' – namely the rule of modern institutions, of the state, bureaucracy, and capitalist enterprise – is impossible to *think* of anywhere in the world without invoking certain categories and concepts, the genealogies of which go deep into the intellectual and even theological traditions of Europe. Concepts such as citizenship, the state, civil society, public sphere, human rights, equality before the law, the individual, distinctions between public and private, the idea of the subject, democracy, popular sovereignty, social justice, scientific rationality, and so on all bear the burden of European thought and history. One simply cannot think of political modernity without these and other related concepts that found climactic form in the course of the European Enlightenment and the nineteenth century." The South-Asian scholar Chakrabarty is not indulging in Eurocentric nostalgia when he writes: "European thought is at once both indispensable and inadequate in helping us to think through the experiences of political modernity in non-Western nations, and provincializing Europe becomes the task of exploring how this thought – which is now everybody's heritage and which affect us all – may be renewed from and for the margins."

We will finish our semester-long conversation about what matters in achieving a just and equal society for all by sorting through the foundational emotions that Martha Nussbaum has lined up for inspection in her book *Political Emotions. Why Love Matters for Justice* (2013).

II. Required Readings:

All the books mentioned in the above description of the course will be required readings. They will be available in the UH bookstore.

III. Requirements:

Each student has to present orally to the class a critical reading of one of the required books. In addition, each student has to write a research paper on a topic that is related to at least one of the texts we have been reading.

IV. Calendar of Class Sessions:

The Calendar of the Class Sessions will be posted at the beginning of the Fall semester.