

The Political Economy of Ideas

Political Science 552A – Communication 597D

Tuesdays 1.30-4.20 ~ Com 322

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Office hours Wednesdays 2-3.20

This course examines key processes that affect the origin, diffusion and influence of new political ideas. How do ideas enter public spheres and policy circles? Which ones gain attention, and which ones remain marginal, and why? Are there local incubators for new ideas, and under what circumstances do those agents and sites enter networks that help ideas spread? What factors increase or limit the scale reached by various ideas? What accounts for state and institutional resistance to progressive ideas about economics, democracy, justice, or nature, even when they gain popularity and seem right for the times? When new ideas are pressed upon those in power by movements or influential groups, how are they filtered and altered on their way to public understanding and policy adoption? What processes legitimate ideas (whether they are workable or dysfunctional) and how do we determine the degree to which ideas work for what groups? What happens when publics reject ideas offered by rulers or representatives as legitimate? What ideas are most compatible with which political arrangements? How do we evaluate the qualities of ideas in terms of whom they serve, how well they work, and how well democratic representation systems serve the adoption of just and useful ideas.

In addressing these and other questions it helps to gain enough distance from ideas that we already believe personally in order to analyze the supporting and countervailing discourses that establish, advance or undermine them. This will help explain how different discourses compete in the ecology of the multiple truths and multiple realities in play in society. The competition among discourses brings us to the role of politics and governance in sorting different schemes out.

In short, the class explores ways of thinking about ideas, truth and power in scientific, societal and global contexts. Some of the analytical skills that will help in thinking about the above questions include: understanding the properties of scientific paradigms; understanding the properties of social discourses; recognizing parallels and differences between paradigms and social discourses; learning to use frameworks for understanding and comparing discourses; applying models of how markets and institutions shape ideas and their entry into social and political processes; knowing how social movements and other mechanisms figure in the publicity and diffusion of ideas; understanding how communication processes make a difference at each step of the way (e.g., journalism, PR, framing); learning how discourses reveal preferred definitions of and solutions to problems; identifying political processes that are best suited to: generating workable discourses, resolving discourse conflicts, and promoting social understanding and adoption.

Many of the examples that provide a substantive focus for the course are drawn from two of the key issues (and related discourses) facing nations and peoples on the planet today: climate change discourses (along with related attacks on science); and ideas about more people-worker-and-environment-friendly economic systems (along with

dominant discourses claiming the necessity of economic growth and related sacrifices of environmental values). We will explore the origins and paths of the prominent growth oriented economic and conservationist environmental discourses and analyze the reasons why these economic and environmental solutions are typically polarized in policy circles, news, and public debate. The challenges of promoting alternative and more compatible economic and environmental discourses are important to understand. We will examine how new ideas are advanced by social movements, think tanks, NGOs, parties, and epistemic networks. The development of analytical frameworks concludes with a series of normative arguments about representational systems and contemporary democratic arrangements. In particular, we consider the growing concern that neoliberal economics is incompatible with core conceptions of democracy and thus presents both discursive and structural political obstacles to the rise of more compatible economic and environmental policy discourses.

Course work:

Please keep up with the readings, and feel free to join with other students in groups to help sort through the main ideas and issues.

**** Participating in class discussions** will count for 20% of grade. This participation includes asking a question each week about the readings. These questions will be posted the night before class so we can all look at them and think about them before our discussions. Please post your questions on the Canvas Chat page. This site should come up through your MYUW page. In case not, the URL is <https://canvas.uw.edu/courses/945883>.

**** Short essays.** Students will write two short (5 pp.) analytical essays supported by class readings and other sources that you may bring in. Each essay counts 15% of class grade.

First essay:

Pose a question or thesis that allows you to develop an argument using core ideas from each week of readings. Use this exercise to become comfortable with the concepts and think about which concepts seem most useful for developing your own work.

Due end of week 4 (Friday)

Second essay:

Pose a question or thesis that allows you to develop an argument using core ideas from week 5-9 readings. Use this exercise to become comfortable with the concepts and think about which concepts seem most useful for developing your own work. This paper may be a continuation of the first paper adding discussions of historical context, institutions (political and media), movements, and theories of democracy and representation to your analytical repertoire. Or you may key in on the core concepts from weeks 5-9 through a new approach.

Due end of week 9 (Friday)

**** Final paper.** A final paper will count 50% of the grade. The aim is to connect various concepts from the course to your research interests and develop a strong theoretical framework to better guide your work. A one-page proposal for the paper will be submitted at the beginning of week 10 and used for class feedback during our week 10 workshop. Think of this paper as aimed at eventual publication draft or as a think piece for an MA or PhD thesis prospectus. 20 pp.

Due Wed March 18.

Readings

(NOTE: All readings are available in e-format and available in the Files section of the canvas site)

Week 1: Conversation Starter

Is one idea system superior to another? How would we know? Are ideas inevitably brokered by power and social network adoption in society?

*Andrew Revkin , “Do Fights Over Climate Communication Reflect the End of Scientism?” *New York Times*, February 23, 2011

* Jay Michaelson, “Extreme Weather? Blame the End Times” *The Daily Beast*, Nov 28, 2014

Week 2: Political Economy of Ideas

Origins of Ideas: Marketplace v. Power v. Political Construction?

(Think of these three perspectives for analyzing the origins and qualities of ideas as loose frameworks that sometimes overlap – as when power perspectives join social constructivist approaches – e.g. Edelman or Gaventa & Cornwall or Schneider & Ingram – and sometimes exist independently –e.g., the marketplace of ideas in legal reasoning.)

* Stanley Ingber, "The Marketplace of Ideas: A Legitimizing Myth" *Duke Law Journal* 1984 1 (1-91)

* John Gaventa and Andrea Cornwall, "Power and Knowledge" in Reason and Bradbury, eds., *Handbook of Action Research*, Sage 2001, pp. 70-80.

* Murray Edelman, "The Political Language of the Helping Professions." *Politics & Society* 1974: 295-310.

(NOTE: The two readings that follow are in the same PDF labeled Edelman-Political Language & Political Reality)

* Murray Edelman, "Political Language and Political Reality." *PS: Political Science & Politics* Winter 1985: 10- 19. *American Political Science Review* (1993) 87(2): 334-346.

* Anne Schneider and Helen Ingram, "Social Construction of Target Populations: Implications for Politics and Policy." *American Political Science Review* 87 (1993): 334-347.

Week 3: Science, Paradigms and Knowledge

* Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 2nd ed. University of Chicago Press, 1970.

Week 4: Discourse Analysis - Competing Environmental Discourses in Complex Political Ecologies

*Campbell, “Intelligent Design, Darwinism, and the Philosophy of Public Education”
Philosophy & Rhetoric 1998 1: 469-502

*John Dryzek “Paradigms and Discourses” in Oxford Handbook of International
Environmental Law” 2007

*Adger, et al., “Advancing a Political Ecology of Global Environmental Discourses”
Development and Change 32 (681-715)

*Arjen Zegwaard, et al “Climate Change and Ontological Politics in the Dutch Delta”
Climate Change 2014

Week 5: Historical Evolution of Economic Discourses

(These readings address economic ideas that have evolved to create various crises and instabilities, along with conflicts with environmental sustainability. Notice the emergence of growth in economics across the spectrum, spreading through different paradigms from Keynesian to neoliberal. The result is that growth is regarded by nearly all economic experts close to power as a natural and compelling policy imperative. One result of this is externalizing the environmental and resource costs of growth. This makes it impossible to reconcile environmental sustainability within the spectrum of state and international institutional policy processes. Also note the mechanisms that propelled neoliberalism to the fore following the economic crisis of the early 1970s.)

Growth and Economics

* Eva Friman, *No Limits: The 20th Century Discourse of Economic Growth*

Abstract, Part 1, II, III (skim), IV, VII

*Susan George, “A Short History of Neoliberalism” Conference on Economic Sovereignty in a Globalizing World, Bangkok 1999.

* David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*. Oxford University Press, 2007. (pp. 5-31; 64-67; 81-86 (note here the grafting of neoconservatism onto neoliberalism to shore up the lack of a social or moral vision in neoliberalism); 165-182; 205-206.

Week 6: Institutions and Discourses

Idea Networks – Bridging Individual Adopters with Organizations

* “Diffusion of Ideas” Wikipedia

Political Institutions and Ideas

* Douglas C. North, “Economic Performance Through Time: Limits to Knowledge” manuscript 1993.

* John L. Campbell, “Ideas, Politics, and Public Policy” *Annual Review of Sociology* 28(2002): 21-38

* Robert C. Lieberman, “ Ideas, Institutions and Political Order: Explaining Political Change” *The American Political Science Review* 96(2002): 697-712

Institutions, Discourse, Power, and The Epistemology of Resistance

* Joseph Rouse, "Power/Knowledge" (2005). Wesleyan University, Division I Faculty

Publications. Paper 34.

<http://wescholar.wesleyan.edu/div1facpubs/34>

Week 7: Communication Institutions and Processes that Shape the Public Sphere

The Role of the Media

* Lance Bennett, "Changing Societies, Changing Media Systems" in Coleman et al., eds., *Can The Media Serve Democracy?* Palgrave forthcoming.

A Different Kind of Bias

* Maxwell Boykoff and Jules Boykoff, "Balance As Bias: Global Warming and the U.S. Prestige Press" *Global Environmental Change* 14 (2004): 125-136.

* Maxwell Boykoff and Jules Boykoff, "Climate Change and Journalistic Norms: A Case of U.S. Mass Media Coverage." *Geoforum* 38 (2007): 1190-1204.

* John Oliver on the Media and Climate Change

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cjuGCJJUGsg>

Communication Choices: Framing

* Matthew C. Nisbett, "Communicating Climate Change: Why Frames Matter for Public Engagement" *Environment Magazine* 51(2009): 12-23.

Week 8: Social Movements, Ideas, and the Politics of Resistance

Direct Construction of Public Spaces to Counter Bias in Institutions

* Alberto Melucci and Leonardo Avritzer, “Complexity, Cultural Pluralism and Democracy: Collective Action in the Public Space” *Social Science Information* 39(2000) 507-527.

* Lance Bennett & Alexandra Segerberg, “The Logic of Connective Action: Digital Media and the Personalization of Contentious Politics.” *Information, Communication & Society*. 15 (2012): 739-768.

* Valerie Fournier, “Escaping from the Economy” *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy* 28: 528-545 2008

* Guobin Yang, “Civic Environmentalism” in *Reclaiming Chinese Society: The New Social Activism*. Hsing and Lee, Eds. Routledge 2009

* Paul Wapner, “Politics Beyond the State: Environmental Activism and World Civic Politics.” *World Politics* 47(1995): 311-340.

Week 9: Normative Perspectives on The Poor Fit Between Ideas and Representative Government Systems

How have neoliberal policies and the globalization of business and economic regimes impacted democracy? Is the idea of democracy still viable? What kinds of politics and representative systems may be necessary to address environmental and economic imbalances?

* Sofia Näsström, Sara Kalm, “A Democratic Critique of Precarity.” Unpublished manuscript, Uppsala University.

* John Dryzek, “Democracy and Earth System Governance” Amsterdam Conference 2009.

* John Robinson, “Squaring the Circle? Some Thoughts on the Idea of Sustainable Development” *Ecological Economics* 48(2004): 369-384.

* John Dryzek and Simon Niemeyer, “Discursive Representation” *American Political Science Review* 102 (4) 2008

* Michael Saward, “The Representative Claim” *Contemporary Political Theory*. 2006: 5 (297-318)

Week 10: Workshop – student projects.