PT112 Ideology: A thing of the Past?

Module: History of Political Thought
Seminar Leader: Dr. Jan Völker
Course Times: Mon 17:00- 18:30, Thu 15:15 - 16:45
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Course Description
The word “ideology” seems most often to be invoked to refer to monolithic political doctrines, such as the Communism of the Soviet Union. After the collapse of the latter, it was said that we had reached “the end of history”—that liberal democracy had triumphed, and there would be no other alternative, all-encompassing political belief systems. This view coexisted with a general distrust of any belief system or “metanarrative” asserting universal validity. The term “ideology” is sometimes used to denounce what are seen as oppressive universalizing claims. In fact, however, the history of the category “ideology” is more complex. Marx and Engels suggested that “ideology” first appears when a class of people emerge who are engaged exclusively in “mental labour,” or the production of ideas. An “ideology” is the set of beliefs that are necessary for the perpetuation of the way a society provides for its material needs. This raises the question of how far, and in what ways, we experience “ideology” today. What forces influence and reproduce belief? What is the role played by educational and other institutions, or by art and culture? What ideas remain “unthinkable” in our society? The course will introduce the key theories and historical struggles over the concept of ideology, and ask about its usefulness for analysing contemporary political commitments (or the lack thereof).

Requirements
Attendance at every class is essential, as is full advance preparation of the course readings for each session of the seminar. There will be two essays, the first of 1800-2500 words or 5-7 pages, and the second of 8-10 pages, or 2800-3500 words, as well as in-class presentations which form part of the participation grade.

Attendance
Attendance at ALL classes is expected. More than two absences (that is absences from two sessions of 90 minutes) in a semester will significantly affect the grade for the course.

Essay Deadlines
Mid-term essay: deadline Monday, 9 March.
Final essay: deadline Wednesday, 13 May.

Writing Assignments
Mid-Term Paper 1800-2500 words, 5-7 pages.
Final paper 2800-3500 words, 8-10 pages.

Policy on Late Submission of Papers
Essays that are up to 24 hours late will be downgraded one full grade (from B+ to C+, for example). Instructors are not obliged to accept essays that are more than 24 hours late. Where an instructor agrees
to accept a late essay, it must be submitted within four weeks of the deadline and cannot receive a grade of higher than C. Thereafter, the student will receive a failing grade for the assignment.

Grade Breakdown
Mid-term essay: 20%
Final essay: 30%
Seminar grade: 50% (20% presentation, 30% participation)

Syllabus

Monday, 26 January
• Introduction

Thursday, 29 January

Monday, 2 February

Thursday, 5 February

Monday, 9 February

Thursday, 12 February

Tuesday, 16 February

Monday, 19 February

Thursday, 23 February

Monday, 26 February

Tuesday, 2 March

Thursday, 5 March

Monday, 9 March

Thursday, 12 March

Spring Break: 16 March – 20 March

Monday, 23 March

Thursday, 26 March

Monday, 30 March

Thursday, 2 April

Monday, 6 April
• Federal Holiday.

Thursday, 9 April
Monday, 13 April

Thursday, 16 April

Monday, 20 April

Thursday, 23 April

Monday, 27 April

Thursday, 30 April

Monday, 4 May

Thursday, 7 May
- No Class – Bard Annual Conference

Monday, 11 May
- 15.15 – 16.45

Completion Week 13 May – 20 May