

## Dissident Political Thought

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GO 323, Spring 2009  
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### Course Description:

We will examine the writings of some of the key figures in twentieth century political thought. Our attention will be primarily directed to their reflections on the nature of “ideological tyranny” or “totalitarianism” and its effects on the human personality and human relations. This theme will provide an avenue into more general themes that resonate throughout a broad tradition in political philosophy: the questions of justice, tyranny, and political responsibility.

### Required Texts:

*The Passing of an Illusion*, François Furet (Chicago)  
*The Communist Manifesto*, Karl Marx & Friedrich Engels (Signet Classics)  
*The Captive Mind*, Czeslaw Milosz (Vintage)  
*Life and Fate*, Vasily Grossman (NYRB)  
*The Solzhenitsyn Reader*, Edward Ericson & Daniel Mahoney eds. (ISI Books)  
*Open Letters: Selected Writings, 1965-1990*, Václav Havel (Vintage)  
*The Garden Party and Other Plays*, Václav Havel (Grove Press)  
*Nineteen Eighty Four*, George Orwell (Signet Classics)  
Note: All other required readings will be hand-outs.

### Course Outline:

Introduction: The continuing relevance of dissident political thought **(1/21)**

### I. Foundations of Ideological Tyranny

#### A. The Revolutionary Passion and Marxism

- Furet, ch. 1 **(1/26)**
- *The Communist Manifesto* (pts. I & II); Intro. by M. Malia **(1/28)**

#### B. Leninism and the Spell of October

- Furet, ch. 3 (pp. 62-77), ch. 4 (pp. 93-99) **(2/2)**
- Lenin, “Fright at the Fall...” and “How to Organize Competition” (packet) **(2/2)**
- Leszek Kolakowski, “The Fortunes of Leninism” from *Main Currents of Marxism* (packet: I have included the whole chapter, but sections 4, 5, 6, and 8 are required, the rest is optional) **(2/2)**

#### C. From Marx to Stalin

- Furet, ch. 5 (pp. 125-150) **(2/4)**
- Kolakowski, “The Marxist Roots of Stalinism” (packet) **(2/4)**

## II. The Seduction

- A. Arthur Koestler, *Anti-Fascism, and World War II*
- Koestler, “The God that Failed” (packet) **(2/9)**
  - Furet, ch. 7 (pp. 216-225), ch. 8 (pp. 233-238) **(2/9)**
  - Furet, chs. 9 & 10 (entire) **(2/11)**
- B. Czeslaw Milosz, *The Captive Mind* (chs. 1-3) **(2/16)**
- *TCM* (chs.4-7) **(2/18)**
  - *TCM* (chs 8-9) **(2/23)**
  - Selected poems: “Dedication”; “Mid-Twentieth Century Portrait”; “Child of Europe” **(2/23)**

## III. Humanity on Trial

- A. Furet, ch. 12 (pp. 451-477), **(2/25)**
- B. Vasily Grossman, *Life and Fate*, Pt. I, chs. 15-19, 63-64; Pt. II, chs. 6-9 **(2/25)**
- *LF*, Pt. II, chs. 24-27, 51-56; Pt. III, chs. 20-21 **(3/2)**
  - *LF*, Pt. III, chs. 24-27, 39-41, 52-55 **(3/4)**

## SPRING BREAK March 8-16

- C. Furet, ch. 13 (pp. 479-487) **(3/16)**
- D. Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, selections from *The Gulag Archipelago*, in *TSR*, pp. 216-253 **(3/16)**
- *The Gulag Archipelago*, in *TSR*, pp. 253-307 **(3/18)**
  - *Matryona's Home & Live not by Lies!*, in *TSR* **(3/23)**

## IV. Living in Truth

- A. Charter 77 and the Meaning of Dissent
- Charter 77 Declaration (packet) **(3/25)**
  - Jan Patočka, “What Charter 77 is and what it is not” (packet) **(3/25)**
  - Václav Havel, “Dear Dr. Husák” **(3/25)**
  - Havel, “The Power of the Powerless” (parts I-XV) **(3/25)**
- B. Crisis of Human Identity
- Havel, *The Vanek Plays*: “Audience”, “The Unveiling”, and “Protest” **(3/30, 4/1)**
  - *The Lives of Others*, a film by Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck **(4/6)**
  - Furet, ch. 13 (pp. 487-end) **(4/6)**

## V. Civilizational Crisis

- A. Havel
- “Politics and Conscience” **(4/8)**
  - selected *Letters to Olga* **(4/8)**
- B. Solzhenitsyn
- Harvard Address **(4/13)**
  - We have ceased to see the Purpose **(4/13)**
- C. Aurel Kolnai
- “Three Riders of the Apocalypse” **(4/15)**
  - “The Utopian Mind” **(4/15)**

## VI. Totalitarianism and The Lie

### A. Nature

- George Orwell, *1984*, pts. I-II (4/20)
- *1984*, pt. III (4/22) Leszek Kolakowski, “Totalitarianism and the Virtue of the Lie”

### B. Legacy

- Alain Besançon, “Moral Destruction” (4/28)
- Chantal Delsol, “Traces of a Wounded Animal” & “The Ubiquity of Evil” (4/29)

## Final Exam: TBA

### Course Requirements:

Reflection Papers & Class Participation, 5%

Essay #1 (5-6 pages), 30%

Essay #2 (5-6 pages), 35%

Final Exam, 30%

#### *Reflection Papers:*

In an attentive reader, the act of reading evokes a response. A response can take many different forms. Some readers underline key passages. Some write comments in the margins. Some take notes on a separate sheet of paper. All of these are ways of carrying forward your inquiries. In this course I will be asking you to pursue yet another method: reflection papers. These short papers (two pages) are an extension and heightening of the more casual and distracted responses which you may now give to the things you read.

In preparation for class, you should commit to paper your thoughts about the text (or a portion of the text) and the questions that arise from it. This should be more than some scratchy, abbreviated notes intelligible only to you; however, this is not a polished essay. You have the leisure to explore, inquire, question, and wander. By wandering, I do not mean aimless wandering. Since our discussions in class will be guided always by two questions, your reflection papers should be so guided: what is the author saying? Is it true? Sometimes it will take all of your effort to figure out what the author means. Other times you will want to take a step back and evaluate the claims made in the text. These are distinct questions, but in pursuing one, the other should always be kept silently in mind.

#### *Essays:*

These are formal essays where you are expected to have an identifiable thesis with arguments to support it. They should demonstrate a command of the text at hand, and a thoughtfulness about the claims made therein. I will hand out topics approximately two weeks before the essays are due. These are not research papers and you are not required to read any secondary literature. I want you to engage these authors directly.

#### *Final Exam:*

This will be a comprehensive, essay exam taken during the exam period.

#### *General Expectations:*

You are expected to read the assignments carefully and reflectively, remaining open to the possibility that what you are reading is right. Your first duty as an attentive reader is to understand the what is

being said. This means grasping the argument of the author—identifying central claims and seeing how these claims are supported. When you encounter something you strongly disagree with, make sure you first understand the argument. You are expected to give reasons for your opinions.

You will be attentive in class and always display the demeanor of one who is interested in the material and respectful of others. You will take your share of responsibility for the quality of class time, coming prepared to discuss the assignments thoughtfully.

*Attendance:*

Attendance is mandatory. There is no such thing as an unexcused absence. All absences must therefore be cleared ahead of time. If you must miss class, you remain responsible for all the material covered that day. After one unexcused absence, each subsequent absence will bring your final grade down by one half of a letter grade. After four absences, I will require you to withdraw from the course.