

Professor Andrew Poe
MW 12:30-1:50 in OCT 201
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Political Science 35

Modern Political Thought

-Introduction-

Modernity – the age of individualism, increasing social autonomy, and political self-determination – has been an era of enormous progression and novelty in political thinking. In it, we find new conceptions of political rationality and affect (how we think and feel about our politics), as well as reconceptualizations of such key concepts as equality and liberty, the state and civil society. Yet in a world of rapidly changing economic conditions and social mobility, the politics that have ensued from such ‘modern’ thinking have sometimes been disastrous. (The 20th Century – once thought to fulfill the promise of modernity – has been the most violent in history.) This course surveys the development of key political concepts in modern Western thought. The course begins with recent and contrasting views (Hannah Arendt, Leo Strauss) on what constitutes the basis for political action in the modern world: whether tradition is the only legitimate measure of political action, or if there are other more progressive standards by which to justify politics. Then, as a means to explain this problematic, the course will examine critical philosophical engagements on the historical appearance of modern political concepts. We will trace these paradigmatic shifts as they begin to surface in late 18th and 19th century European thought (evidenced in the writings of Kant, Hegel, Marx, and Nietzsche amongst others), on through to the consequent political outcomes of such transformations in 20th century politics. Through close textual readings and contextual analysis we will engage in a systematic comparison of our assumptions about politics with those expressed in these philosophical debates. And, in so doing, we will attempt to further our understanding of contemporary politics and the political problems requisite to our own political practices.

-Course Requirements-

There are **three** requirements for this course:

1. 8-10 page Mid-Term Paper: Topics will be distributed on February 28th and will cover the first half of the course; papers will be due in class on March 9th - 35%
2. 10-12 page Final Paper: Topics will be distributed on April 25th and will cover the second half of the course; papers will be due to my departmental mailbox by noon on May 9th - 45%
3. Attendance and participation in the course - 20%

Late Papers: Except in documented cases of serious emergency, late papers will receive a 1/3 grade penalty for each calendar day the paper is late.

-Texts-

The following books are available for purchase at Amherst Books:

Kant – *Political Writings*
Schiller – *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*
Hegel – *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*
Marx – *Early Political Writings*
Kierkegaard – *Fear and Trembling*
Nietzsche – *Genealogy of Morals*
Freud – *Civilization and its Discontents*
Weber – *The Vocation Lectures*
Adorno – *Dialectic of Enlightenment*
Schmitt – *The Concept of the Political*

The remainder of the readings will be available on course e-reserve.

-Schedule and Readings-

Introduction

January 24th – Modernity and Modern Politics

What is the Basis for Political Action?

January 26th – Past and Future

Readings: Hannah Arendt, “Tradition and the Modern Age”

Leo Strauss, “Three Waves of Modernity”

Situating the Self in Modernity

January 31st – ‘Enlightenment’ as a Political Category

Reading: Kant, “An Answer to the Question ‘What is Enlightenment?’”

Recommended: Michel Foucault, “What is Enlightenment?”

February 2nd – Between Faith and Reason

Reading: Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* (selections)

February 7th – Categories of Understanding

Reading: Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* (selections)

February 9th – A New Politics for a New Age

Reading: Kant, *Perpetual Peace*

Recommended: Kant, “An old question raised again: Is the Human Race Constantly Progressing?”

February 14th – Aesthetics as the Basis for this New Politics

Reading: Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*

Conditions of Society and the Modern State

February 16th – Consciousness and Self-Consciousness

Reading: Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit* (selections)

February 21st – Ethical Life

Reading: Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* (sections 142-181)

February 23rd – Civil Society

Reading: Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* (sections 182-256)

February 28th – The State

Reading: Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* (sections, 257-360)

March 2nd – Historical Consciousness

Reading: Marx, *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right* (selections)

Recommended: Feuerbach, "Towards a Critique of Hegel's Philosophy"

March 7th – Of Tragedy and Farce

Reading: Marx, *The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*

March 9th – Economy, Society, and the Universal

Reading: Marx, "On the Jewish Question"

A New Psychology

March 21st – The Modern Abyss

Reading: Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*

March 23rd – Transvaluation of Values

Reading: Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals* (selections)

March 28th – The Sick and the Healthy

Reading: Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals* (selections)

March 30th – *Our* Plasticity

Reading: Nietzsche, "On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life"

Nietzsche, "How the 'Real' World at Last Became Myth"

April 4th – Death, Love, and the 'New' Self

Reading: Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*

Modernity and its Crisis

April 6th – Modern Rationality (I)

Reading: Weber, "Science as a Vocation"

April 11th – Modern Rationality (II)

Reading: Weber, "Politics as a Vocation"

April 13th – Myth and Politics

Reading: Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (pp. 1-62)

April 18th – Mass Society

Reading: Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (pp. 94-136)

April 20th – The Second Self

Reading: Lukacs, "Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat"

April 25th – Is there a Politics for the Modern Self?

Reading: Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*

April 27th – Technology and the Mechanization of Life

Reading: Benjamin, "Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction"

Recommended: Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology"

May 2nd – Locating the Crisis

Reading: Heidegger, "Letter on Humanism"

Recommended: Sartre, "Existentialism as a Humanism"

So What is a Modern Politics?

May 4th – The New Paradoxes

Reading: Habermas, "The Normative Content of Modernity"