Modern Political Thought

-Introduction-

Modernity – the age of individualism, increasing social autonomy, and political self-determination – was an era of enormous progression and novelty in political thinking. In it we find new conceptions of political rationality and affect (how to think and feel about politics), as well as reconceptualizations of such key concepts as equality and liberty, the state and civil society. Such changes held much promise, shaping institutions that seemed destined to improve economic and social conditions for rapidly increasing populations. Yet the politics that ensued from such ‘modern’ thinking sometimes proved 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 political concepts in modern Western thought. We will trace paradigmatic shifts in political ideas as they begin to surface in 17th and 18th century European thought, evidenced in the writings of Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, and Kant, amongst others. And we will compare these ideas with the thinking of some prominent 19th and 20th century critics, including Marx, Nietzsche, Weber, and Schmitt. 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 problems requisite to our own political practices.
**Course Requirements**

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

1. 5-7 page paper on the origins of the idea of the state. Topics will be distributed on February 8th; papers will be due by email (word attachment) at or before 5pm on February 15th – 20%

2. 5-7 page paper on politics and the Enlightenment. Topics will be distributed on March 7th; papers will be due by email at or before 5pm on March 16th – 20%

3. 5-7 page paper on the concept of progress. Topics will be distributed on April 9th; papers will be due by email at or before 5pm on April 16th – 20%

4. 5-7 page final paper on the end(s) of modernity. Topics will be distributed on May 2nd; papers will be due by email at or before 5pm on May 11th – 20%

5. Attendance and participation in the course (measured by weekly reader responses submitted in class, prior to discussion) – 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:

- Hobbes – *Leviathan* (Hackett)
- Carl Schmitt – *The Leviathan in the State Theory of Thomas Hobbes* (Chicago)
- Locke – *Political Writings* (Hackett)
- Spinoza – *Theological-Political Treatise* (Cambridge)
- Kant – *Political Writings* (Cambridge)
- Rousseau – *Basic Political Writings* (Hackett)
- Hegel – *Phenomenology of Spirit* (Oxford)
- Marx – *Selected Political Writings of Karl Marx* (Hackett)
- Nietzsche – *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future* (Vintage)
- Max Weber – *The Vocation Lectures* (Hackett)

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

Introduction

January 23rd – Modernity and Modern Political Thought

Part 1: Origins of the Modern State

January 25th – The Image of the Leviathan
   Readings: Hobbes, Leviathan (Frontispiece, Letter, Introduction)
   The Book of Job (chapters 40 and 41)

January 30th – A New Humanity
   Reading: Hobbes, Leviathan (chapters 1-8)

February 1st – Fear and Politics
   Reading: Hobbes, Leviathan (chapters 13-16)

February 6th – Constituting the State
   Reading: Hobbes, Leviathan (chapters 17-22, 28, and 30)

February 8th – ‘Belief” as a Political Problem
   Reading: Hobbes, Leviathan (chapters 12, 31-32, 36-37, and 42)

February 13th – The Myth of the Leviathan
   Reading: Carl Schmitt, The Leviathan in the State Theory of Thomas Hobbes
   (pp. 5-87)

Part 2: Enlightenment

February 15th – Civil Society
   Reading: Locke, Second Treatise on Government (chapters 1-9)
February 20th – Right of Rebellion
Reading: Locke, Second Treatise on Government (chapters 10-19)

February 22nd – Toleration
Reading: Locke, Letter on Toleration (complete)

February 27th – Faith and Interpretation
Reading: Spinoza, Theological-Political Treatise (selections)

February 29th – Freedom of Thought
Reading: Spinoza, Theological-Political Treatise (selections)

March 5th – Even for a Nation of Devils
Reading: Kant, Perpetual Peace (complete)

March 7th – What is Enlightenment?
Readings: Kant, “An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?”

March 12th – The Feeling of Freedom
Reading: Schiller, Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man (Introduction and Letters 1-11, 16, 24-27)

March 14th – Asking the Question Again: What is Enlightenment?
Reading: Michel Foucault, “What is Enlightenment?”

Part 3: Historical Progress and its Crisis

March 26th – Humanity before History
Reading: Rousseau, Discourse on the Origins of Inequality (part 1)

March 28th – Sociability
Reading: Rousseau, Discourse on the Origins of Inequality (part 2)

April 2nd – Confronting Barbarism
Reading: Diderot, Supplément au Voyage de Bougainville (complete)
April 4th – Desire
Reading: Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit* (Preface; Self-Consciousness)

April 9th – Catastrophe and Progress
Reading: Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit* (Self-Alienated Spirit – Culture)

April 11th – Fragments of History
Reading: Walter Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History”

**Part 4: The End(s) of Modernity**

April 16th – Alienation
Reading: Marx, “Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844” (selections)

April 28th – Class Struggle
Reading: Marx – *The Communist Manifesto* (complete)

April 23rd – Morality Past Enlightenment
Reading: Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil* (selections)

April 25th – Politics Past Enlightenment
Reading: Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil* (selections)

April 30th – Modern Rationality (Part I)
Reading: Max Weber, “Science as a Vocation”

May 2nd – Modern Rationality (Part II)
Reading: Max Weber, “Politics as a Vocation”
Additional Readings on Modern Political Thought:


Hans Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age* (The MIT Press, 1982)


