

**Government 304 H**  
**Modern Political Thought**

Skidmore College  
Spring 2009  
Tu Th 9:10-11:00  
Ladd 106

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or by appointment

The world that we inhabit has been substantially transformed over the past 400 years. It is a “modern” world. The transformation has been the result of a self-conscious project led by political philosophers and their followers, a project that is now under attack from thinkers who call themselves postmodern. In its origin, and in the hearts of those who continue to put their faith in it, modernity stood for what we call “progress,” i.e., movement to a commercial society that is not rural, poor, stagnant, superstitious, inhumane, etc., but urban, wealthy, dynamic, secular, and humane. It included a new understanding of nature (as something to be conquered), of justice (as individual rights), of science (as a means to conquest of nature and comfortable self-preservation), of government (as an entity that secures for its citizens a freedom to pursue their goals in a private life rather than an entity that promotes virtue).

This course closely examines key primary texts in the development of modern political philosophy in order to uncover and understand the origins, development, and crises of modernity. The texts we will examine have had a direct impact on the Western World, and now, with globalization, on the whole world. We will read them in three thematic sections of the course. In the first, we will examine the origins of modernity in works by Machiavelli, Bacon, and Hobbes. In the second, we will explore the rise of the left, or egalitarian modernity, in works by Rousseau and Marx. Finally, we will attempt to grasp the origins of the present crisis of modernity in works by Tocqueville, Nietzsche, and Strauss.

**I. Required Texts** (in the order that we will read them), available at the Skidmore Shop:

Niccolo Machiavelli, *The Prince*, Harvey C. Mansfield, translator  
Francis Bacon, *The New Atlantis* (Harlan Davidson), Jerry Weinberger, ed.  
Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (Hackett), Edwin Curley, ed.  
Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The First and Second Discourses*, Roger Masters, ed. (St. Martins Press)  
Karl Marx, *The Marx-Engels Reader*  
Alexis deTocqueville, *Democracy In America*  
Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Portable Nietzsche*

**II. Course Requirements:**

Attendance requirements: no unexcused absences. Excused absences require a doctor’s note or a relative’s obituary.

Three short essays (3-5 typed pages), due Feb. 21, March 28, April 25.

Final comprehensive (essay) exam, May 9. (Study questions for this exam will be distributed on the final day of class).

The term grade will be computed as follows: first essay, 10%, second essay, 15%; third essay 25%; class attendance and participation 15%; final exam 35%.

### III. Class Schedule:

Tuesday, January 20 Introduction to the course;  
Machiavelli, *The Prince*, Epistle Dedicatory

#### A. The Origins of Modernity

Thursday, January 22 Machiavelli, *The Prince*, chs. 1-6

Tuesday, January 27 Machiavelli, *The Prince*, chs. 7-14

Thursday, January 29 Machiavelli, *The Prince*, chs. 15-18

Tuesday, February 3 Machiavelli, *The Prince*, chs. 19-26

Thursday, February 5 Bacon, *New Atlantis*, 35-60

Tuesday, February 10 Bacon, *New Atlantis*, 60-83

Thursday, February 12 Hobbes, *Leviathan*, chs. 1-6

Tuesday, February 17 Hobbes, *Leviathan*, chs. 7-12  
**First paper due**

Thursday, February 19 Hobbes, *Leviathan*, chs. 13-17

Tuesday, February 24 Hobbes, *Leviathan*, chs. 18-21

#### B. The Rise of the Left

Thursday, February 26 Rousseau, *The First Discourse*

Tuesday, March 3 Rousseau, *The Second Discourse*, 76-104

Thursday, March 5 Rousseau, *The Second Discourse*, 104-141

Tuesday, March 10 Spring Break; no classes

Thursday, March 12 Spring Break; no classes

Tuesday, March 17 Rousseau, *The Second Discourse*, 141-151

Thursday, March 19 Rousseau, *The Second Discourse*, 151-181

Tuesday, March 24 Marx, *The Communist Manifesto* (MER, 472-500)

**Second paper due**

Thursday, March 26 Marx, *On the Jewish Question* (MER, 26-52)

### **C. The Life and Crisis of Liberal Democracy**

Tuesday, March 31 Marx, *1844 Econ. and Philosophic. Manuscripts* (70-101)

Thursday, April 2 Marx, *The German Ideology* (143-200)

Tuesday, April 7 DeTocqueville, *Democracy In America* 3-15, 45-53, 220-235.

Thursday, April 9 DeTocqueville, *Democracy In America* 235-302

Tuesday, April 14 DeTocqueville, *Democ In Amer*, 399-400, 403-476

Thursday, April 16 No class

Tuesday, April 21 DeTocqueville, *Democ In Amer*, 479-505, 558-576. 587-604, 661-676  
**Third paper due**

Thursday, April 23 Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, “Prologue” (PN 121-137); Pangle, “The Roots of Contemporary Nihilism and Its Political Consequences According To Nietzsche” (handout)

Tuesday, April 29 Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, “On the Three Metamorphoses”(PN 137-140)

Monday, May 4 Final Exam, 1:30-4:30