

**Contemporary Political Thought
(Government 308)**

Skidmore College

Fall 2008

WF 12:20-2:10 p.m.

Timothy Burns

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Office Hours: Mon. and Fri., 10-11
a.m., or by appointment

This course is an introduction to contemporary political thought. We will read works written by some of the most influential and representative political thinkers of our time. The course focuses on liberalism, both in its original or classical form and in its contemporary form, and on the serious challenges that liberalism now faces.

After examining two major sources of that challenge (Nietzsche and Freud) we will turn to an extended look at the fruitful debate between thoughtful defenders of liberalism and critics of liberalism. Among the critics we will study representatives of postmodernism, socialism, and communitarianism. The course will conclude with a study of these same currents of contemporary thought as they manifest themselves in and are informed by contemporary feminism.

I. Required Texts, Available at *The Skidmore Shop*

Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents* (Norton)

A. Melzer, J. Weinberger, M. R. Zinman, eds., *Multiculturalism and American Democracy* (Kansas)

Friedrich Nietzsche, *On The Genealogy of Morals* (Vintage)

Thomas Pangle, *The Ennobling of Democracy* (Johns Hopkins)

Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, Solidarity* (Cambridge)

Rosemarie Tong, *Feminist Thought: A More Comprehensive Introduction* (Westview)

II. Course Requirements

Attendance requirements: all absences must be excused by a doctor's note or an obituary.

Two short essays (4 typed pages), due September 24, November 7.

One longer essay (5 typed pages), due December 3.

Final comprehensive (essay) exam, December 17. (Exam study questions will be distributed on December 5.)

The term mark will be computed as follows: short essays 15% each; longer essay 25%; class attendance and participation 10%; final exam 35%.

III. Class Schedule

Wednesday, September 3	Introduction to Course
Nietzsche	
Friday, September 5	<i>The Genealogy of Morals</i> , First Essay 24-56
Wednesday, September 10	<i>The Genealogy of Morals</i> , Second Essay 57-96
Friday, September 12	<i>The Genealogy of Morals</i> , Second Essay 57-96
Wednesday, September 15	<i>The Genealogy of Morals</i> , Third Essay 97-163
Friday, September 19	<i>The Genealogy of Morals</i> , conclusion
Freud	
Wednesday, September 24	<i>Civilization and Its Discontents</i> I&II: pp 10-36 First paper due
Friday, September 26	<i>Civilization and Its Discontents</i> III,
Wednesday, October 1	<i>Civilization and Its Discontents</i> IV, V,
Friday, October 3	<i>Civilization and Its Discontents</i> VI,
Wednesday, October 8	<i>Civilization and Its Discontents</i> VII, VIII
Richard Rorty	
Friday, October 10	Preface, Introduction, and “The contingency of language” <i>Contingency, Irony, Solidarity</i> , pp. xi-22.
Wednesday, October 15	“The contingency of selfhood” <i>Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity</i> , pp. 23-43.
Friday, October 17	Study Day; no classes
Wednesday, October 22	“The contingency of a liberal community” <i>Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity</i> , 44-69 “Solidarity”
Friday, October 24	<i>Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity</i> , 189-198
Thomas Pangle	
Wednesday, October 29	“The Postmodern Predicament”

“Postmodernism and the Avant-Garde”
The Ennobling of Democracy, 1-33

Friday, October 31

“The Heideggerian Roots of Postmodernism”
“Weak Thinking”
“American Postmodernism”
The Ennobling of Democracy, 34-68

Wednesday, November 5

“Revitalizing the Intellectual Roots of Civic Culture”
The Ennobling of Democracy, 105-159

Friday, November 7

“Against Canons and Canonicity: Dialectic as the Heart of Higher Education,” *The Ennobling of Democracy*, 183-218. **Second paper due**

Multiculturalism, Democracy, and Liberalism

Wednesday, November 12

Stanley Fish “Boutique Multiculturalism,”
in Melzer, et al, *Multiculturalism and American Democracy*, pp. 69-88

Friday, November 14

K. Anthony Appiah, “The Limits of Pluralism,”
James Ceasar, “Multiculturalism and American Liberal Democracy,” *Multiculturalism and American Democracy*, 37-54 and 139-156;

Wednesday, November 19

Marc F. Plattner, “Liberal Democracy,
Universalism, and Multiculturalism,”
Multiculturalism and American Democracy

Friday, November 21

Wilson Carey McWilliams, “Democratic Multiculturalism,” *Multiculturalism and American Democracy*, 120-129

Wednesday, November 26

Thanksgiving Break

Friday November 30

Thanksgiving Break

Feminisms

Wednesday, December 3

Rosmarie Tong, “The Diversity of Feminist Thinking,” *Feminist Thought*, 1-9
“Liberal Feminism,” *Feminist Thought*, 10-44
Third paper due

Friday, December 5

“Psychoanalytic and Gender Feminism”

Feminist Thought, 130-172

Final Exam Study Questions Distributed

Wednesday, December 10

“Postmodern Feminism”

Feminist Thought, 193-211

Wednesday, December 17

9:00-12:00, **Final exam**