

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

Skidmore College  
Spring 2012  
Tu Th 9:10-11:00  
Library 213

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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 Discourses*, 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* (Chicago) Harvey C. Mansfield and Nathan Tarcov, translators  
Friedrich Nietzsche, *Friedrich Nietzsche, Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (Penguin), Walter Kaufmann translator

## II. Course Requirements:

Attendance requirements: no unexcused absences. Excused absences require a doctor's note or a relative's obituary. Tardiness is not permitted.

No electronic devices permitted in class. If your cell phone goes off, you are required to purchase pastries at Mrs. London's for the whole class.

Three short essays (3-5 typed pages), due Feb. 21, March 27, April 24.

Final comprehensive (essay) exam, May x. (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 24	Introduction to the course; Machiavelli, <i>The Discourses</i> , Dedicatory Letter, Preface and Book I, chs. 1-6. (3-23)
<b>A. The Origins of Modernity</b>	
Thursday, January 26	Machiavelli, <i>The Discourses</i> , I.7-I.53 (23-108)
Tuesday, January 31	Machiavelli, <i>The Discourses</i> , I.54-II.1 (108-128)
Thursday, February 2	Machiavelli, <i>The Discourses</i> , II.2-II.33 (128-207)
Tuesday, February 7	Machiavelli, <i>The Discourses</i> , III.1-III.49 (209-310)
Thursday, February 9	Bacon, <i>New Atlantis</i> , 35-60
Tuesday, February 14	Bacon, <i>New Atlantis</i> , 60-83
Thursday, February 16	Hobbes, <i>Leviathan</i> , chs. 1-6
Tuesday, February 21	Hobbes, <i>Leviathan</i> , chs. 7-12 <b>First paper due</b>
Thursday, February 23	Hobbes, <i>Leviathan</i> , chs. 13-17
Tuesday, February 28	Hobbes, <i>Leviathan</i> , chs. 18-21
<b>B. The Rise of the Left</b>	
Thursday, March 1	Rousseau, <i>The First Discourse</i>
Tuesday, March 6	Rousseau, <i>The Second Discourse</i> , 76-104

Thursday, March 8	Rousseau, <i>The Second Discourse</i> , 104-141
Tuesday, March 13	Spring Break; no classes
Thursday, March 15	Spring Break; no classes
Tuesday, March 20	Rousseau, <i>The Second Discourse</i> , 141-151
Thursday, March 22	Rousseau, <i>The Second Discourse</i> , 151-181
Tuesday, March 27	Marx, <i>The Communist Manifesto</i> (MER, 472-500) <b>Second paper due</b>
Thursday, March 29	Marx, <i>On the Jewish Question</i> (MER, 26-52)

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

Tuesday, April 3	Marx, <i>1844 Econ. and Philosophic. Manuscripts</i> (70-101)
Thursday, April 5	Marx, <i>The German Ideology</i> (143-200)
Tuesday, April 10	DeTocqueville, <i>Democracy In America</i> 3-15, 45-53, 220-235.
Thursday, April 12	No class
Tuesday, April 17	DeTocqueville, <i>Democracy In America</i> 235-302
Thursday, April 19	DeTocqueville, <i>Democ In Amer</i> , 399-400, 403-476
Tuesday, April 24	DeTocqueville, <i>Democ In Amer</i> , 479-505, 558-576. 587-604, 661-676 <b>Third paper due</b>
Thursday, April 26	Nietzsche, <i>Thus Spoke Zarathustra</i> , “Prologue” (PN 121-137); Pangle, “The Roots of Contemporary Nihilism and Its Political Consequences According To Nietzsche” (handout)
Tuesday, May 1	Nietzsche, <i>Thus Spoke Zarathustra</i> , “On the Three Metamorphoses”(PN 137-140) <b>Final Exam Study Questions Distributed</b>
May 7-11	Final Exam