

## Political Science 12: Modern Political Theory

Dr. J.S. Murer

M/W 11:30-12:45

Trotter Hall Rm 319

Office Phone: 610-690-6866

Office Hours: MW 1:30 – 3:30 TR 4:10 – 5:10

### **The Construction of Modernity**

This course will be concerned with the nature of modernity as it is constructed through theory and politics. We will examine the transitions to modernity through the Reformation and the foundational constructions of Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau, and explore the culmination of modernity in the Enlightenment projects of rationality in the works of Kant, Marx and Weber. We will then examine the breakdowns of the Enlightenment as asserted by Freud and Nietzsche, and the critiques of modernist rationality by Marcuse, Habermas and Foucault. In this way the course will explore the creation of the individual, the concept of the universal and the political consequences of these projects.

This course requires participation. Throughout the semester students will be expected to keep up with the assigned readings (noted for each week on the syllabus) and be prepared for discussion in class. This is very important, as this will be a discussion-intensive course. Students will also be required to write two “thought” papers during the course of the semester. These pieces, two to three pages in length, will be based on the previous weeks’ readings, and will form the basis of debate and discussion in class. There will be two major papers due during the course of the semester. The first, due after spring break, will be 10-15 pages; the second, due at the end of the semester, will be 15-20 pages. There are two Writing Associates assigned to course, and students will be required to meet with them during the planning and execution of their papers.

#### ***Required Readings from the Book Store:***

The Second Treatise on Civil Government, John Locke

Discourse on Method and Related Writings, Rene Descartes

The Social Contract and Discourses, Jean-Jacques Rousseau,

Behemoth: Or the Long Parliament, Thomas Hobbes

On the Genealogy of Morals/Ecce Homo, Friedrich Nietzsche

Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future, Friedrich Nietzsche

Civilization and Its Discontents, Sigmund Freud

Eros and Civilization, Herbert Marcuse

One Dimensional Man, Herbert Marcuse

The Marx-Engels Reader, Robert Tucker, Editor

Critique and Power: Recasting the Foucault / Habermas Debate, Michael Kelly, Editor

Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977, Michel Foucault

The Discourse of Domination: From the Frankfurt School to Postmodernism, Ben Agger

Against Post Modernism: A Marxist Critique, Alex Callinicos

## **PART ONE: Establishing Modernity**

### **Week One: *What is Modernity?***

January 20

Reading: "The Self as God in German Philosophy" Robert Tucker (handout)

This week will focus on the introductory question "what is modernity." We will discuss the conception of subjectivity and its role in modern thought. We will also discuss the position of "man" within the universe, and discuss why we should care about such things in political science.

Supplemental Readings:

Bauman, Zygmunt, Liquid Modernity.

Dupre, Louis, Passage to Modernity

Habermas, Jurgen, "Modernity's Consciousness of Time and Its Need for Self-Reassurance" in The Philosophical Discourse on Modernity

### **Week Two: *Establishing Certitude and Science***

January 27

**Readings:** *Discourse on Method and Related Writings*, Rene Descartes  
Introduction, 1-55, 113-195

What makes modernity so special? Descartes starts us with a treatise on methodologies for establishing knowledge. This question of epistemology, within which Descartes explores the notion of God, suggests a new form of practice and a new form of thinking: rationality.

Supplemental Readings:

Lampert, Laurence, Nietzsche and Modern Times, Part II

### **Week Three: *Contracts Between Man, God and the State***

February 3

Readings: *The Second Treatise on Civil Government*, John Locke  
Entire

*Behemoth: Or the Long Parliament*, Thomas Hobbes  
Entire

Possessing rationality, men (and I do mean men) question their relations among themselves, with their rulers, and with their God. The assertion that rationality is a human quality among many traits provides the basis to question the structures of rule. Issues such as consent and obligation, rights, revolution, autonomy, and property emerge from these debates.

Supplemental Reading:

Dienstag, Joshua, Dancing in Chains, Part I: John Locke

Dunn, John, The Political Thought of John Locke.

Gough, J.W., John Locke's Political Philosophy.

Strauss, Leo, The Political Philosophy of Hobbes.

**Week Four: *Contracts Between Men***

February 10

Readings: *The Social Contract and Discourses*, Jean-Jacques Rousseau,  
Entire

If rational subjects can be free, should they be free? What is the relationship between the newly defined individual and the community? What obligations do they owe one another? The readings this week will focus on the establishment of civil society, and the role of the individual in that society.

Project: Thought Piece on First Section of Course

**PART TWO: Creating Critique**

**Week Five: *Flawed Contracts, Broken Promises and Attempts at Liberation***

February 17

Readings: *The Marx-Engels Reader*, Robert Tucker, Editor  
For a Ruthless Criticism of Everything Existing (pp. 12-15)  
Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's *Philosophy of the Right* (pp. 53-65)  
The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts (pp. 66-125)  
Alienation and the Social Classes (pp.133-135)  
The Grundrisse (pp.221-293)

If there is a universalism of rationality, does it follow that this rationality promotes equality? What should individuals do if they believe that they are not in a position of equality, but in one of subordination? This week's readings deal with Marx's writing on questions of human equality, emancipation, expression, and material realizations of philosophical conceptions. Does an abstract concept of equality require a material realization?

Supplemental Readings:

Tucker, Robert, Philosophy and Myth in Karl Marx, Part II  
Lukes, Steven, Marxism and Morality  
Balbus, Isaac, Marxism and Domination

Project: Meet with WA to select topic and discuss organization of first paper

**Week Six: *The Will to Power and the Position of Subordination***

February 24

Readings: *On the Genealogy of Morals/Ecce Homo*, Friedrich Nietzsche  
Introduction, 1-97 (97-167 optional)

*Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*, F. Nietzsche  
Entire

Perhaps rationality is the source of alienation and oppression; this week's readings deal with the undoing of reason. Nietzsche even suggests that civilization itself is a myth. This week will examine questions of morality, power, relativism and the possibilities of transcending modern rationality.

Supplemental Readings:

Lampert, Laurence, Nietzsche and Modern Times, Part III  
Jaspers, Karl, Nietzsche

**Week Seven: *A Meditation on the Modern Malaise***

March 3

Readings: *Civilization and Its Discontents*, Sigmund Freud  
Entire

If many are disappointed or troubled by the constructs and the rationality of modernity, perhaps the problem is not external. Just as Cartesian thought -- the division of subject and object, self and other -- helped create modernity, perhaps liberation can come from understanding thought. This week's readings focus on the mental construction of the self. Are psychopathologies linked to modernity? Do such mental expressions and troubles find their source in our mental constructions of reality, and our figuring of our place within it?

Supplemental Readings:

Cuddihy, John Murray, The Ordeal of Civility: Freud, Marx, Lévi-Strauss and the Jewish Struggle with Modernity

Thompson, M. Guy, "Deception, Mystification, Trauma: Laing and Freud" in *The Psychoanalytic Review*, Vol. 83, No. 6 December 1996

Castoriadis, Cornelius, "The Construction of the World in Psychosis" in *The Psychoanalytic Review*, Vol. 83, No. 6 December 1996

Kristeva, Julia, Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia

**Week Eight: *A Well Deserved Break***

March 10

Readings: None

**PART THREE: Expanding Critique – Seeking Alternatives**

**Week Nine: *Testing Reality***

March 17 **Projects Due: Paper Number One**

Readings: *Eros and Civilization*, Herbert Marcuse  
Political Preface, Introduction, and Part I (p1- 128) + Chpts 9-11 (pp.172 – 274).

*One Dimensional Man*, Herbert Marcuse  
Part I

Marcuse bridges Freud's critique with one focused on the problems of rationality. Building on psychoanalytic concepts Marcuse examines modernity and a totalitarian life world dominated by technological and instrumental rationality. The questions he raises focus on humanity's ability to liberate itself: to escape the modes of thought and technologies of modernity, something not easily done considering the material success of these technologies.

Supplemental Readings:

One Dimensional Politics Section in *Soundings: A Journal of Politics and Culture*, No. 14 Spring 2000

**Week Ten: Critiquing Modernity – Transcending Ideology**  
March 24

Readings: ***The Discourse of Domination***, Ben Agger  
Parts I and II

Ben Agger explores Marcuse's propositions, the critiques of modernity since Marx, and whether it is premature to declare an era of post-modernity. What is the difference between post-modernism and post-modernity? Does Marcuse create a Freudian-Marxism which remains relevant in the twenty-first century?

Supplemental Readings:

Agger, Ben, Fast Capitalism

Agger, Ben, Cultural Studies as Critical Theory

**Week Eleven: Power and Critique – Understanding as Liberation**  
March 31

**Readings:** ***Power/Knowledge***, Michel Foucault  
Chapters 2& 3 (pp. 37-62) "Prison Talk" and "Body /Power"  
Chapters 5 & 6 (pp. 78-133) "Two Lectures" and "Truth and Power"  
Chapter 8 (pp. 146-165) "The Eye of Power"

If modernity is a system of domination, as many have thought since Marx, how do domination and oppression reproduce themselves? Michel Foucault explores the construction of knowledge(s) and the role of such genealogies in the exercise of power. Through Foucault we will also explore how modernity dominates the body outside of wage production.

Supplemental Readings:

McWhorter, Ladelle, "Self-Overcoming in Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*" in Transitions in Continental Philosophy

**Week Twelve: Is Modernity Worth Saving? – Habermas Responds to Foucault**  
April 7

Readings: ***Critique and Power: Recasting the Foucault / Habermas Debate***, M. Kelly,  
Introduction (pp. 1-16)  
Chapter 4 "Some Questions Concerning the Theory of Power" (pp. 79-108)  
Chapter 7 "Taking Aim at the Heart of the Present" (pp. 149 – 156)  
Chapter 10 "Foucault: Critique as Philosophic Ethos" (pp. 211-242)

Just as Marx wrote that capitalism is both oppressive and liberating when compared to previous modes of production, Habermas asks whether Foucault is tossing out too much with his critique. Are there aspects of modernity worth saving? Can rationality be saved from instrumentalism? Can universalism really constitute an egalitarian human universal which does not subordinate or transform into subaltern diversity? This week's readings explore what is worth saving from modernity.

Project: Meet with WA to discuss topic and Organization of Paper Number Two  
Thought Piece Due

Supplemental Readings:

Habermas, Jürgen, “The Normative Content of Modernity” in The Philosophical Discourse on Modernity

Barnett, Stuart, “Resisting Subjects: Habermas on the Subject of Foucault” in Transitions in Continental Philosophy

**Week Thirteen:** *Critiquing Critique – Interpretations of Foucault and Habermas*

April 14

Readings: *Critique and Power: Recasting the Foucault / Habermas Debate*, M. Kelly, Chapters 11 – 15 (pp. 243 – 400)

What happens when the political struggle for liberation is disconnected from the philosophical critique of modernity and domination? This week’s readings examine the implications of pure critique for contemporary political struggles around gender and sexuality, worker’s revolution, and aesthetic/ cultural re-invigoration. How can the critique of modernity be rejoined with the political struggles of liberation, emancipation, and the rejection of alienation?

**Week Fourteen:** *Renewing Struggle – Altering Critique*

April 21

*Against Post Modernism: A Marxist Critique*, Alex Callinicos  
entire

Alex Callinicos asks if it is necessary to discuss post-modernism? Like Dorothy in the “Wizard of Oz,” did we have the power along? Are there the means to overcome the forms of domination within the structures of modernity? If these forms are overcome, does that constitute post-modernism, and it is foolish to speak of post-modernism until such liberation is at hand? Callinicos challenges us to ask why we discuss post-modernism, and does the use of such terminology obfuscate power in a typically modernist fashion?

Supplemental Readings:

Foucault, Michel, “Introduction” to Anti-Oedipus: Schizophrenia and Capitalism  
by Deleuze and Guattari

Harvey, David, The Condition of Post-Modernity

Jameson, Fredric, Postmodernism of the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism

**Week Fifteen:** Review and Discussion

April 28

Final Papers Due