Modern Political Thought (c. 1789-c. 1970)
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Spring 2021

This course introduces some key moments in the political history of the modern world through the writings of some of its most stimulating and influential—although not invariably frequently studied—political thinkers and actors. The material is presented chronologically in the form of seven themed “chapters”: (1) the French Revolution; (2) the division of labour and representation; (3) responses to capitalism and slavery; (4) Kultur and its discontents; (5) the Russian Revolution; (6) interwar and postwar politics; and (7) critiques of modernity. While the list of authors we’ll read is long and varied (including geographically), excerpts will usually be short, and the instructor will provide all necessary context. There are no prerequisites, and in the hope of providing some fascinating mental fodder for anyone interested in politics today, newcomers to the world of political theory are very welcome.

Course objectives: a basic grasp of some key moments in the political history of the modern world; familiarity with a wide variety of short texts, their respective contexts, and the relations among them; ability to analyze some of these texts closely and to discuss how they fit into the bigger global and historical picture.

Requirements: 7 one-page reading responses (to be graded “check,” “check plus,” and “check minus”); one 6-8 page midterm paper; one 8-10 page final paper; and at least 2 office hour visits with either the instructor or your GSI.

Logistical details: assuming zoom tuition, lectures will be produced as podcasts, each one featuring 8 members of the class as a “studio audience” (rotating through volunteers). The instructor takes full responsibility for delivering the necessary material, but enjoys a bit of interaction while lecturing. No one in the audience need worry about fully mastering the day’s material in advance; a first read-through of the texts will be fine, and any and all questions are welcome. At the completion of each hour-long lecture/conversation, the audio recording and chat transcript will be posted to bCourses, as will the instructor’s notes (usually a single page of points not to miss, dates etc; often a bit different from the live lecture).

Readings to include:


2) The division of labour and representation – Smith, Constant, Wollstonecraft, Stanton, Chartist petitions, Hegel, Toqueville, Bentham, Mill.

3) Responses to capitalism and slavery – Marx, Engels, Jacobs, du Bois, Washington, FitzHugh, Carlyle, Mill.

5) *The Russian Revolution* – Herzen, Marx, Zasulich, Bernstein, Lenin, Luxemburg, Trotsky.

6) *Interwar and postwar politics* – Schmitt, Pareto, Schumpeter, Hayek, de Beauvoir, Gandhi, Nehru, Ho Chi Minh, Mao, Fanon, Guevara.

7) *Critiques of modernity* – Adorno, Horkheimer, Marcuse, Benjamin, Habermas, Rawls, Arendt, Foucault.

Each set of readings will be prepared as a mini-coursepack annotated by the instructor and posted to bCourses.