



Yeshiva University  
THE ZAHAVA AND MOSHAEL STRAUS  
CENTER FOR TORAH AND WESTERN THOUGHT

## Modern Political Thought

Yeshiva College  
Fall 2021  
Prof. Neil Rogachevsky  
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### Course Description

What is the nature of liberty? What is the nature of equality? How do economic rights relate to political rights? What relationship should religion have to politics? How should we conceive of the individual's relation to his peers and to the state? What role should ideology play in politics? What is the role of men and women in politics? What is the role of constitutions in contributing to good government?

These questions have been explored in profound and profoundly relevant ways by thinkers in the modern period. This course will examine these questions through a deep reading of important thinkers of the later modern period (i.e. in the wake of the French and American Revolutions—the late eighteenth through the nineteenth centuries). Thinkers to be studied include Edmund Burke, Joseph de Maistre, Benjamin Constant, Alexis de Tocqueville, Karl Marx, and Mary Wollstonecraft. Through an in-depth study of the core texts of these writers students will, in addition to thinking about the questions posed at the outset, learn about the origins of ideologies still relevant in the contemporary world including liberalism, conservatism, and socialism.

### Course Format

Subject to local and university regulations, this course will meet in person. Certain meetings may be conducted via Zoom in line with those regulations or other unanticipated events.

### For Political Science majors

The course counts toward the political theory distribution.

### Expectations

Students will be expected to carefully read between 100 and 150 pages a week. The class is not the venue for “thoughts on politics of the day” that one may develop through reading social media, newspapers, or by listening to podcasts. It rather provides the opportunity to reckon with and think with important political texts in order to deepen our own understanding of politics and the world.

The class will be focused on the issues and arguments of the texts through careful interpretation of the texts themselves. The principal role of the instructor is to help students grapple with the texts by clarifying major issues and themes. Prior to every class, students will be expected to have read and reflected upon the readings of that week, and to participate in class discussions about them. Students will be asked to write two short essays that ask for analysis and interpretation of the texts. A take home final exam will ask for comparisons between thinkers covered and major themes addressed in the course.

### **Attendance**

Active attendance and participation is essential for the functioning of the course and learning experience. All absences are to be cleared in advance with the instructors. More than 2 unexcused absences will result in a docked grade.

### **Grading**

10%: Class Attendance and Participation

50%: Short Papers

40%: Take Home Final Exam

### **Students with Disabilities**

Students with disabilities who are enrolled in this course and who will be requesting documented disability-related accommodations should make an appointment with the Office of Disability Services, (646) 592-4280, [akelsen@yu.edu](mailto:akelsen@yu.edu) during the first week of class. Once you have been approved for accommodations, please submit your accommodation letter to ensure the successful implementation of those accommodations.

### **Course Materials**

All students are required to obtain their own copies of the following works, **in the following noted editions/translations**. Please contact the instructor if you have any difficulties, financial or otherwise, in obtaining these texts.

Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (Oxford World Classics).

Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, (trans. Harvey Mansfield, University of Chicago Press).

Karl Marx, *The Marx-Engels Reader* (Ed. Tucker).

Joseph de Maistre, *Considerations on France* (Cambridge University Press).

Other readings will be distributed or made available online.



## Course Schedule

Week 1 (Aug. 26): Introduction: Studying Modern Political Thought

Week 2 (Aug. 31 – Sept. 1): The Problem of Liberty

Readings: Isaiah Berlin “Two Concepts of Liberty,” Benjamin Constant: “The Liberty of the Ancients Compared with that of the Moderns.”

Week 3 (Sept. 14 via Zoom): Interlude—What is Liberal education?

Readings: Leo Strauss: “What is Liberal Education?” “Liberal Education and Responsibility.”

Week 4 (Sept. 30 via Zoom): Edmund Burke. Reading: Edmund Burke: “Speech to the Electors of Bristol.”

Week 5 (Oct. 5 – 7): Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (Excerpts).

Week 6 (Oct. 12 – 14): Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (Excerpts).

Week 7 (Oct. 19 – 21): Joseph De Maistre, *Considerations on France*

Week 8 (Oct. 26 – 28): Guizot and Madame de Staël. [Guizot, “History of the Origins of Representative Government in Europe,” Lecture 6.](#), Stael: [On the French Revolution, “Considerations on the History of France”](#) (Chapter 2). **Short Paper I Due**

Week 9 (Nov. 2 – 4): Marx: “Introduction to the Critique of Political Economy,” “Theses on Feuerbach,” “The German Ideology,” (& Engels): “The Communist Manifesto”

Week 10 (Nov. 9 – 11): Marx: “On the Jewish Question,” “The Eighteenth Brumaire,” “The Civil War in France,” “Imperialism in India.”

Week 11 (Nov. 16 – 18): Tocqueville: *Democracy in America* I

Week 12 (Nov. 23): *Democracy in America* II

Week 13 (Nov. 30 – Dec. 2): *Democracy in America* III

Week 14 (Dec. 7 –9) *Democracy in America* IV **Short Paper II Due**

Week 15 (Dec. 16): Tocqueville: *The Old Regime and the Revolution*

Week 16 (Dec. 21 – 23): Mary Wollstonecraft, Conclusion. **Final Exam Distributed**