Such is the aim of the work that I have undertaken, and its result will be to show by appeal to reason and fact that nature has set no term to the perfection of human faculties; that the perfectibility of man is truly indefinite; and that the progress of this perfectibility, from now onwards independent of any power that might wish to halt it, has no other limit than the duration of the globe upon which nature has cast us.

Condorcet, The Sketch

‘We have invented happiness,’ say the last men and they blink. They have left the religion where it was hard to live, for one needs warmth. One still loves one’s neighbor and rubs against him, for one needs warmth. Becoming sick and harboring suspicion are sinful to them: one proceeds carefully. A fool, whoever still stumbles over human beings! A little poison now and then: that makes for agreeable dreams. And much poison in the end, for an agreeable death.

Nietzsche, Thus Spoke Zarathustra

So, therefore, two revolutions seem to be operating in our day in contrary directions: one continuously weakens power and the other constantly reinforces it; in no other period of our history has it appeared either so weak or so strong. But when one finally comes to consider the state of the world more closely, one sees that these two revolutions are intimately bound to one another, that they come from the same source, and that after having had different courses, they finally bring men to the same place.

Tocqueville, Democracy in America
INTRODUCTION TO THE COURSE

The aim of this course is to introduce students to the history of early modern political thought. Modernity is naturally a term that is notoriously difficult to define. Indeed “modern” seems to be but a void notion like “fashionable” or “new” that will be filled with deeper meaning maybe in a couple of hundred years’ time from now. The term often denotes a period in history that is distinctive enough for us to see it as a new entity, but we still have not gained enough perspective to discern its exact shape and define its terms so as to denote something more than our somewhat vague perception of difference.

During this course, however, we will try to modestly contribute to the grand project of defining the intellectual past from the perspective of the intellectual present. It has to be noted here that not all elements of modern political thought are as new as they seem. It is rather the method that becomes the most important message. Before the period our course will focus on, practical politics was separated from philosophy and theology. Modernity, however, for good and for bad, weakened those divisions. Suddenly political ideas started having more consequences than ever before. Political thinkers were no longer contained by the conditions of the “bios theoreticos”, “the theoretical life”; they became confident that political activity can and should change the fiber of reality itself. They were no longer satisfied with the age old separation between the ideal and the practical and between the divine and the profane.

For some of those thinkers, merging of the Platonic world of ideas and the Christian eschatological imagery with the world of practical politics meant that practice should triumph and morally normative considerations should be reduced to fairy tales or irrational myths. For others, on the contrary, the merging meant that cold, spiritual and moral perfection will rule politics supremely and destroy anyone who favors prudence over perfection. Those two seemingly opposite tendencies make modern political though particularly interesting but also particularly dangerous. Anyone who studies it has to be aware of the fact that it is not academic in the old classical sense. Its main concepts were written with something more than just ink.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

“Academic Misconduct” includes, cheating, plagiarism, collusion, falsifying academic records, and any act designed to give an unfair academic advantage to the student (e.g., submission of the same written assignment for two courses without permission of the instructors, providing false information to receive a postponement or an extension on a test, or other assignment) as well as attempts to commit such an act. Students should be familiar with the definition of academic misconduct and the Code of Student Conduct, available at http://www.lsu.edu/judicialaffairs/code.htm. If a student is found to have committed an act of academic misconduct, s/he will be referred to the Office of Judicial Affairs and penalized appropriately.

GRADING

Class Participation: 10%
Weekly Quizzes: 15%
Midterm Exam: 20%
Paper Proposal: 5% (Due March 20th)
Final Paper: 25% (10 pages, Due April the 29th)
Final Exam: 25%

ASSIGNMENTS

Attendance: Students are expected to actively participate in the in-class discussion. Students are responsible for READING the assigned texts and COMING TO CLASS prepared. Class attendance will be taken, and in accordance with the new LSU regulations, students who do not come to class will lose points counting towards their final grade.

Quizzes: There will be about 10 quizzes. The quizzes will consist of three short questions on the recently covered material.

Midterm and Final Exams: The midterm and the final will contain a variety of short answer and open questions. The final will be a cumulative exam, although focusing more on the topics covered in the second part of the course. The exams will not be long, but the questions may be quite specific.

Final Paper: All students will be asked to write a 2500-3000 word extended essay; essay topics have to be cleared with the instructor. The essay needs to written in formal academic style and contain a discussion of a thinker or a topic that is connected with the topic of the course and that the student finds particularly intriguing. The text should be double spaced, font no. 12, fully cited.
REQUIRED TEXTS:

1. Statecraft, utopianism and free government


2. Reason, tradition and rights


3. Democracy, society and individualism


RECOMMENDED READING

READINGS SCHEDULE:

Week 1
Jan. 16: Machiavelli Prince, Books XII-XXVI, (pp. 48-105)

Week 2
Jan. 21: NO CLASS – MLK DAY
Jan. 23: Campanella, The City of The Sun, (pp. 21-135)

Week 3
Jan. 28: Locke, Second Treatise, Ch. 1-7, (pp. 267-330)
Jan. 30: Locke, Second Treatise, Ch. 8-15, (pp. 330-384)

Week 4
Feb. 4: Locke, Second Treatise, Ch. 16-19, (pp. 384-428)
Feb. 6: Condorcet, The Sketch, (pp. 1-70)

Week 5
Feb. 11: NO CLASS – MARDI GRASS
Feb. 13: Condorcet, The Sketch, (pp. 70 -147)

Week 6
Feb. 18: Burke, Reflections on the Revolution in France, (pp. 16 -80)
Feb. 20: Burke, Reflections on the Revolution in France, (pp. 80 – 160)

Week 7
Feb. 25: Burke, Reflections on the Revolution in France, (pp. 160-266)
Feb. 27: Paine, The Rights of Man, (pp. 269-354)

Week 8
Mar. 4: Paine, The Rights of Man, (p. 354-387)
Mar. 6: REVIEW/ DISCUSSION

Week 9
Mar. 11: MIDTERM EXAM
Mar. 13: Tocqueville, Democracy in America, Vol. I: Pt. 1, Intro, Pt. 1, Ch 2-4, (pp. 3-56)

Week 10
Mar. 18: Tocqueville, Pt. 2, Ch 1-4, 6, (pp. 165-217)
Mar. 20: Tocqueville, Pt. 2, Ch 6-8, (pp. 220-264) PAPER PROPOSALS DUE

Week 11
Mar. 27: Tocqueville, Democracy in America, Vol. II: Pt. 1, Ch 1-20, (pp. 399-472)

Week 12
SPRING BRAKE

Week 13
Apr. 8: Tocqueville, Democracy in America, Vol. II: Pt. 2, Ch 1-11, Pt. 4, Ch. 4-8, (pp. 479-509, 646-676)
Apr. 10: Tocqueville, Ancien Régime and the Revolution, Book I, (pp. 1-33)

Week 14
Apr. 15: Tocqueville, Ancien Régime and the Revolution, Book II, (pp. 33-141)
Apr. 17: Tocqueville, Ancien Régime and the Revolution, Book III, (pp. 141-207)
Week 15
Apr. 22: Marx, *Manifesto of The Communist Party, The Demands of the Communist Party in Germany* (pp. 201 – 244)
Apr. 24: Marx, *Theses on Feuerbach, German Ideology*, (pp. 155-195)

Week 16
Apr. 29: Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Pt. I, (pp. 115-191), PAPERS DUE
May 1: REVIEW/ DISCUSSION

Week 17
May 10: EXAM 3.00-5.00