

MODERNITY AND ITS DISCONTENTS

Dr. Yoav Fromer

Spring semester

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Office Hours: TBA (Webb, Room 531)

Short description:

This introductory seminar to the liberal arts examines the origins, meanings, legacies and consequences of Modernity starting in the 18th century with the dawn of European Enlightenment and stretching across three centuries to the aftermath of the Second World War. The course will explore the political, philosophical, economic, social, technological and cultural transformations ushered in by Modernity and will, among other things, ask the following questions: what does it mean to be modern? What values, norms and institutions does Modernity entail? What are its benefits and consequences? Is there a “crisis” of modernity? Are we still living in a modern age – and if not – what comes after? Among the themes to be explored are: secularism and religion, individualism, science and rationality, democracy, bureaucracy, capitalism, nationalism, mechanization and industrialization, consciousness and identity, gender and race.

The course will engage a strong interdisciplinary approach and proceed thematically and chronologically through a study of key political-philosophical tracts paired with corresponding works of literary fiction (primarily novellas and short stories). Readings will include works by seminal political thinkers such as Kant, Paine, Rousseau, Wollstonecraft, Marx, Freud and Foucault, and by authors such as Balzac, Goethe, Dostoevsky, Conrad, Kafka, Woolf and Beckett. The readings will be complemented by corresponding works of art (David, Goya, Friedrich, Munch, Picasso, Dali, and Magritte) and Music (Mozart, Wagner, Beethoven, and Stravinsky) in an effort to demonstrate how powerful impulses of Modernity manifested themselves commensurately across different forms of aesthetic representation.

Grading and Assignments:

19% in-class Midterm Exam with Reading ID's

31% Final Paper (5-7 pages).

50% class Participation and a Short Response Paper (2 pages).

Participation includes either informed in-class participation about the assigned readings/materials or written participation sent via email to me prior (or immediately after) the class.

Attendance:

Attendance is mandatory. Students are permitted a maximum of three absences without penalty. Any additional absences will affect the final grade and may result in failure of the course.

Academic conduct:

Plagiarism is taken extremely seriously. Any instance of academic misconduct which includes: submitting someone else's work as your own; failure to accurately cite sources; taking words from another source without using quotation marks; submission of work for which you have previously received credit; working in a group for individual assignments; using unauthorized materials in an exam and sharing your work with other students, will result in failure of the assignment and will likely lead to further disciplinary measures.