

English/History/MALLT 740
Approaches to the Modern I
Professor Mark Netzloff
Thursdays 6:30-9:10
Synchronous online meetings via Microsoft Teams

This course provides a survey of foundational texts in cultural theory, political philosophy, and historicist criticism. We will focus on critical works whose analyses are grounded in a study of the early modern period (ca. 1500-1800) in order to explore some of the complex and overarching genealogies of the modern.

The course fulfills requirements for a pre-1800 course for MA and Ph.D. students in the Literature and Cultural Theory program, and is also a required course for Plan A doctoral students. In addition, nearly all of the readings are represented on one or more reading lists of the Literature and Cultural Theory program's preliminary examination areas, such as Cultural Theory, Theories of Modernism and Modernity, and Political Theory/Philosophy, among other fields.

Among the topics to be discussed:

- Theories of ecology and new materialism, in conjunction with the annual Literature and Cultural Theory lecture by Hester Blum (Penn State) on February 25-26.
- Political theory and its early modern foundations, with sessions on models of the nation, public sphere, sovereignty, as well as the concept of the political itself. Readings will include B. Anderson, Arendt, Balibar, Habermas, Rancière, and Schmitt.
- Key works of Foucault, with special attention to his late work on political theory and lectures on race, governmentality, and biopower.
- Early modern capitalism, with extensive sections from Marx's Capital alongside readings from economic historians such as Robert Brenner and Ellen Meiksins Wood.
- Modernity and the history of slavery: primary texts from Hobbes and Locke alongside critical work from Ian Baucom and others.
- Periodization, modernity, and models of temporality. Readings will include Benjamin, Latour, Serres, and others.
- The archive of colonial history and theories of modernity, with readings from Bhabha, Chakrabarty, Said, and Spivak.

Texts (tentative list):

Anderson, Benedict, Imagined Communities (rev. ed; Verso, 2016)

Arendt, Hannah, The Origins of Totalitarianism (Harcourt, 1973)

Foucault, Michel, “Society Must Be Defended”: Lectures at the College De France, 1975-76, ed. Mauro Bertani and Alessandro Fontana (Picador, 2003)

---. The Foucault Reader, ed. Paul Rabinow (Pantheon, 1984)

Habermas, Jürgen, The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society, trans. Thomas Burger (MIT, 1993)

Marx, Karl. Capital, Volume I, trans. Ben Fowkes (Penguin, 1992)

Schmitt, Carl, The Concept of the Political, trans. George Schwab (Chicago, 1996)

---. Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty, trans. George Schwab (MIT, 1985)

Wood, Ellen Meiksins, The Origin of Capitalism (rev. ed.; Verso, 2002)

+Other readings posted on Canvas