

## **HIST 427/527: Ideas and Society in Modern Europe**

**Prof. John McCole**

**Spring 2021**

**How:** this is a remote/synchronous course, at the scheduled times via Zoom.

**When:** Tu/Th 10:15-11:45

This is a “topics” course number, meaning you can take it again if you took the other topic I teach under this number, on modern German intellectual history.

### **What the course is about**

We'll be exploring some major European thinkers' positions on:

- capitalism and socialism;
- regenerating community;
- democracy, liberty, and tyranny;
- Christianity and morality;
- the ever-increasing rationalization of social life;
- sexuality, gender, and feminism;
- power and resistance;
- multiculturalism.

“Ideas and Society” means, first, ideas about society. This course surveys a central thread in European intellectual history since the eighteenth century, by focusing on a series of powerful and influential analyses of these issues as they emerged as part of the European version of modernity. We'll begin with the eighteenth-century Enlightenment and take the story right up to our own times, including contemporary authors. The course addresses a long period of time and major issues and authors, but it trades off coverage in order to take in-depth looks at particular thinkers and the contexts that informed their work.

## **What is intellectual history?**

“Ideas and Society” means, second, that we’ll be looking at how the social context shaped these ideas. In other words, this is an intellectual history course. That means two things: we need to understand the contexts of the issues and the texts we are examining; and we need to think carefully and in detail about the texts themselves. All required readings are in primary sources—writings by the thinkers themselves rather than about them.

## **What we’ll read: excerpts from**

- Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*
- Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *On the Social Contract*
- John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty* and *The Subjection of Women*
- Karl Marx, *1844 Manuscripts on Alienated Labor; Capital*
- Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*
- Max Weber, “Bureaucracy,” “Politics as a Vocation,” “Science as a Vocation”
- Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*
- Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (Pantheon)
- Charles Taylor, *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*

## **Course requirements and assignments**

There are five requirements for this course, with equal weight:

- a midterm exam;
- a five-page essay on material from the first half of the course;
- a five-page essay on material from the second half of the course;
- a final exam;
- attendance and participation.

## **How the course will work**

In each unit, the first class and part of the second will be devoted to lectures, with questions and discussion always welcome. The rest of our second session for each unit will be reserved for discussion of the readings. The lectures will set up the week's readings by providing contexts--personal, social, political, and other ideas—for the readings. My presentations are meant to pave the way for us to discuss the texts themselves intensively.

*Attendance at discussions and informed participation in them are key—and required—parts of this course!*

## **Prerequisites and level**

There aren't any specific prerequisites for this course. It's primarily intended for upper-level undergraduates from a variety of majors.