Science, Technology, and Modern Politics

From their beginnings in the 16th century, the political communities we call modern have been marked by a distinctive understanding of the relationship between science and politics. The great English philosopher, scientist, and statesman Francis Bacon first held out the hope that scientific knowledge could contribute to the “relief of man’s estate” by improving the material conditions of human life. Later thinkers have come to refer this project to use science to improve the human condition as a technological project. Many also hold that improvements to the material conditions of human life made possible by science and technology have opened up a “brave new world” of unprecedented political possibilities: less war, more peace, less conflict and misery, more harmony and happiness, less domination, more freedom, less of human fate determined by accident and force, more of it determined by reflection and choice.

This course will consider the great arguments for and against this distinctively modern understanding of relation between science and politics. We will begin by studying Francis Bacon, the first thinker to draw the connection between a more efficacious natural science and the advent of fundamentally new political possibilities. We will then turn to Shakespeare, who, in his *Tempest*, presents an understanding of the relation of wisdom, power, and politics that can be understood as a critique of the Baconian view *avant la lettre*. Next, we will consider the thought of John Locke and Karl Marx, who first articulated the rival classical liberal and socialist interpretations of the true meaning of the modern project. Our final major text will be Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World*, a poetic meditation on some of the shortcomings of the modern project and the mode of human self-understanding that project implies. Throughout the term, we will pause from our reading of classic texts to consider recent essays that will help us relate the thought of our long-dead authors to contemporary debates about science, technology, and politics.

**Books for Immediate Purchase**


**Schedule**

Tuesday, August 27: Introduction


Thursday, September 12: Bacon, *The New Atlantis*, p. 64-83; II Samuel, chapters 11-12 (Moodle).

**Friday, September 13: Paper I due.**

Tuesday, September 17: Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, Act I.


Tuesday, September 24: Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, Act III.

Thursday, September 26: Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, Act IV (Guest Teacher: Larry Goldberg, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill).

**Thursday, September 26, 4:30 PM, Furman Hall 214, CLP Lecture by Larry Goldberg, “What is Liberal Education?” Attendance Required.**

Tuesday, October 1: Shakespeare, the *Tempest*, Act V.

**Wednesday, October 2: Paper II due.**

Thursday, October 3: Ray Kurzweil, “The Singularity is Near” (Moodle).

Tuesday, October 8: Leon Kass, “Why Not Immortality?” (Moodle).


**Tuesday, October 15: No Class (Fall Break).**


**Wednesday, October 23: Paper III due.**

Tuesday, October 29: Marx, *Theses on Feuerbach* and *the German Ideology*, p. 145-163.

Thursday, October 31: Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, p. 70-93.


Thursday, November 7: Alexander Solzhenitsyn, “A World Torn Apart” (Moodle).

Tuesday, November 12: Peter Lawler, “Communism Today” (Moodle).

**Wednesday, November 13: Paper IV due.**


**Wednesday, November 25: Paper V due.**

**Thursday, November 28: No Class (Thanksgiving)**


Tuesday, December 10: Conclusion

**Thursday, December 12: Take-Home Exam/Term Paper due at Noon.**
**Course Requirements and Grading**

**Requirements**

1. **Four short papers**: During the term, five short papers will be assigned; you must write four of them. Papers must be no longer than 2 pages, in 12-point font, with 1-inch margins (line spacing is up to you). These papers should be organized, compressed, and polished.

2. **Take Home Exam/Term Paper**: At the end of the term, you will write an essay that *radically* rewrites and greatly expands one of the short papers you have written over the course of the term. This paper is intended to be one of the major writing exercises of your college career, fit for use as a writing sample for graduate school applications or other future endeavors. This paper should draw on at least two of our major readings (Bacon, Shakespeare, Locke, Marx, and Huxley) and at least one of our minor readings (Kurzweil, Kass, Solzhenitsyn, Lawler, Schmidt and Cohen, Morozov). An outline of your paper is due on **Tuesday, December 3** in class; your twelve-page (maximum) exam will be due on **Thursday, December 12 at Noon**.

3. **Class Participation**: Perfect attendance in class and at our guest lecture with no active participation earns a C for class participation. The addition of regular participation earns a B; frequent, helpful, intelligent participation earns an A. After 2 unexcused absences, every further absence results in the loss of one partial letter grade (B becomes B-, B- becomes C+, and so on).

**Academic Integrity**: In your papers, you must cite our primary texts frequently. Use parenthetical citations and a works-cited page to document your sources. If you consult any source beyond the assigned reading for an assignment, you must also cite that source. This includes electronic resources. Quotations or paraphrases from any source which are not accompanied by proper citations constitute plagiarism and will be treated as academic integrity violations.
Grade Composition

Short Papers:       4 papers, 12.5% each       50%
Term Paper:        40%
Class Participation: 10%
Total:            100%

Grade Scale:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade Values</th>
<th>Grade Range</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B-</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C+</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C-</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D+</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D-</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>