MALS 78500
Hist 72100

Professor Helena Rosenblatt
Mondays, 4:15-6:15
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Course Description:

In recent decades there has been a new development in the academic study of political and social thought. Much attention is now being paid to “key concepts” and their historicity. The so-called “linguistic turn” has played a significant role in this process.

By “key concepts” we mean the big ideas and indispensable terms without which it would be virtually impossible to engage in any meaningful political discussion. We use such concepts daily to make sense of our world and communicate with others. And yet, as scholars today are realizing, the meanings of these concepts are not static or timeless. They are constantly evolving and being contested in reaction to their historical context. Key concepts can be seen as tools and weapons wielded at specific times for specific political purposes.

In this course we will examine the meaning and evolution of a number of key concepts essential to our current vocabulary, among which “democracy,” “populism,” “conservatism” and “liberalism,” as well as “happiness,” “common sense” “genius” and “woman”. We will consider questions such as the following: What did “democracy” mean to the ancient Greeks and what does it mean to us today? How does our notion of “genius” compare to that of the Renaissance? When and why was the word “liberalism” coined and how has its meaning changed over time? Has our understanding of “woman” remained the same across the centuries?

Learning Objectives:

Upon successful completion of this course, students should be able to

- Display a grasp of the key methodological questions involved in conceptual history
- Read texts more critically and effectively
- Identify and summarize ideas in texts in an articulate and persuasive manner, verbally and in writing
- Display a grasp of the history of the concepts studied over the course of the term.

Requirements:

- Regular class participation demonstrating careful reading of all assigned texts: 30%
• 4-5 sentence summaries of the argument(s) of each (all) of the weekly readings. Sentences may be in bullet form and must be submitted via the instructor and brought to class email to: 20% (TEN times over the course of the term)
• A 10 minute presentation on an extra reading (see lists)
• Final paper: A 10 page book review of three of the books read this term.

NO CLASS ON JANUARY 27

Week One: Introduction to the Course (2/13)


Week Two: Democracy (2/10)


James Miller, Can Democracy Work?, entire.

February 2/17 NO CLASS (President’s Day)

Week Three: Liberalism (2/24)

Domenico Losurdo, Liberalism: A Counter-History, chapters 1, 2, 9 and 10.

Helena Rosenblatt, The Lost History of Liberalism from Ancient Rome until the Twenty-First Century, introduction, chapters 1, 2 3, 8, and epilogue


Week Four: Happiness (3/2)


Regimes of Happiness: Comparative and Historical Studies, eds. Yuri Contreras-Vejar, Joanna Tice Jen and Bryan S. Turner, introduction, chapters 1 and 15.

**Week Five: Populism (3/9)**


Charles Postel, “If Trump and Sanders Are Both Populists, What Does Populism Mean?” The American Historian, February, 2016b


Jan-Werner Müller, *What is Populism?*, introduction, chapters 1 and 2.

**Week Six: Genius (3/16)**


**Week Seven: Conservatism (2/23)**

Edmund Fawcett, *Conservatism: The Fight for a Tradition*, pages TBA


**Week Eight: Civil War (3/30)**

David Armitage, *Civil Wars: A History in Ideas*, entire

**Week Nine: Socialism (4/6)**


**APRIL 8-16 SPRING RECESS**

**Week Ten: Woman/Gender (4/20)**

Carol Gilligan: *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women’s Development*, chapter One.

Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud*, chapters 1, 2, 3, 5.


**Week Eleven: Feminism (4/27)**

Elinor Burkett and Laura Brunell, “Feminism” at https://www.britannica.com/topic/feminism


**Week Twelve: Fear**


**Week Thirteen: Human Rights (5/4)**


**Week 14: Conclusions (5/11)**