

Govt305 Roots of Modern Ideologies

1. **Course Number and Name:** Govt305, Roots of Modern Ideologies

Credits: 3

2. Course Description: A significant cause of the revolutionary and terrorist activity of recent times is a species of political thought called “ideology,” and two of the roots sustaining modern ideology are the ancient religious ideas of Gnosticism and millennialism. This course is a study of these two religious ideas and their evolution into two of the fundamental assumptions that underlie much of the secular and even anti-religious doctrine of today.

3. Course Goals: Much confusion surrounds the meaning of the concept “ideology” with its most common meaning being “opinion.” In its most common use, “ideology” is a person’s view about government or economics. A long tradition of European scholarship, however, traces the growth of ideology to ancient and medieval religious movements. The goal of this course is to survey that scholarship with special reference to millennialism—the apocalyptic expectation of a one thousand-year reign of Jesus Christ described in the Book of Revelation and millennial prophecies in the Old Testament. Through a reading of Norman Cohn’s *Pursuit of the Millennium* the course examines medieval European movements that are the immediate ancestors of many contemporary ideological movements. We then examine Ernest Tuveson’s *Redeemer Nation* to review the millennialist influence on American political and social thought. The course then looks at Gnosticism, an ancient religion of radical alienation from the natural order. We will study Gnosticism both in its ancient forms, as recounted by Hans Jonas in *The Gnostic Religion* and in its principal modern development discussed by Eric Voegelin in various writings.

4. **Course Learning Outcomes:** Successful completion of Roots of Modern Ideologies will enable students to:

a) Describe key passages from the Old and New Testament that prophesy a transformation of earthly existence into a heavenly bliss.

b) Describe the apocalyptic tradition of millennial expectations.

c) Summarize the origins of the American civil religion.

d) Contrast the Messianism in the first Crusades as seen in the Emperor of the Last Days and Pseudo Baldwin.

e) Compare the Flagellant Movement and the Brethren of the Free Spirit.

f) Compare and contrast the Taborites with the new Jerusalem of Thomas Munster.

g) Discuss the English background that informs American millennial speculations.

h) Explore millennial expectations in the doctrine of Manifest Destiny and a view of Anglo-Saxons as the chosen race.

i) Compare millennial expectations of the American Civil War to their equivalents during the Crusades.

j) Describe key Gnostic symbols including the ‘alien,’ the ‘stranger’s sojourn,’ light vs. darkness.

k) Compare and contrast the Gnostic systems of Simon Magus, Hermes Trismegistus and Valentinus.

l) Compare and contrast ancient and modern variants of gnosis using the analysis of Eric Voegelin.

5). Course Concepts

- a) Millennialism
- b) Millenarian
- c) Immanentist apocalyptic
- d) Augustinian view of history
- e) Periodization of history
- f) Manifest Destiny
- g) Gnosticism
- h) Ideology

6. Required Texts:

Bishirjian, Richard J., *The American Political Tradition and the Nature of Public Philosophy* (Copley, 2004), ISBN: 1-58152-339-4. Available at \$12.00 each.
Contact your Instructor.

Cohn, Norman. *The Pursuit of the Millennium*. 2d ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 1990. ISBN: 13: 9780195004564.

Jonas, Hans. *The Gnostic Religion*. 3d ed. Boston: Beacon Press, 2001. ISBN: 13: 9780807058015.

Tuveson, Ernest Lee. *Redeemer Nation*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968; reprint, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, Midway Reprint, 1980. ISBN: 13: 9780226819211.

Voegelin, Eric, *Science Politics and Gnosticism*, (ISI Books, 2004) ISBN: 13: 9781932236484.

7. Recommended Reading

Voegelin, Eric, *Modernity Without Restraint*, University of Missouri Press, 1999.
ISBN: 13: 9780826212450.

Voegelin, Eric, *New Science of Politics*, University of Chicago Press, 1987,
ISBN: 13: 9780226861142.

St. Augustine's treatment of the millenarian vision in the book of *Revelation*, as recounted by Tuveson in Chapter One of *Redeemer Nation*, can be found in Book 20 of the *City of God*, which is available via New Advent at [City of God, Book XX](#) and via the Christian Classics Library at [City of God, Book XX](#). St. Augustine's concept of linear time is central to Western consciousness of history.

John Adams's "Dissertation on Canon and Feudal Law," also discussed by Tuveson in Chapter 1 of *Redeemer Nation*, is available in George Peek's edition of *The Political Writings of John Adams* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1954) and via www.founding.com

http://www.founding.com/founders_library/pageID.2138/default.asp

Richard Hooker, in the Preface to his *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, provided an analysis of the Puritan critique of the Church of England in the Sixteenth Century. Hooker's analysis is summarized in Voegelin's *New Science of Politics*, chapter 5. Hooker's analytical concepts seem to fit closely some of the messianic movements recounted by Norman Cohn.

Steven Runciman's *Medieval Manichee* provides a history of gnostic activity in southern Europe that complements the picture of the Free Spirit activity in northern Europe drawn by Cohn in chapters 8 and 9.

Several writings by Thomas Muntzer are available in Michael Baylor's collection entitled *The Radical Reformation*, which is listed in the Bibliography section of this course [found in "Handouts" on your Control Panel. See, also, McGinn, *Visions of the End*, chapter 32, for materials on the Hussites and Taborites.

Thomas Paine's division of political history into the "old governments" and the "new" ones can be found in the first three chapters of the *Rights of Man, Part Two*, available via the University of Adelaide at <http://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/p/paine/thomas/>

Selected writings of Richard Price, including his sermons on "The Evidence for a Future Period of Improvement in the State of Mankind (1787)" and "A Discourse on the Love of our Country (1789)," can be found in D.O. Thomas's edition of *Richard Price: Political Writings*, Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991). An online version is available at via the Liberty Library of the Constitution Society at [Selected Political Works of Richard Price](#).

Michael Barkun's study of the Christian Identity movement and its British-Israelism background in *Religion and the Racist Right* (see the Bibliography section of this course) provides a detailed look at some of the contemporary strands of American millennialism. See particularly chapters 1, 2, 5, & 6

Steven Runciman also provides an excellent brief introduction to gnosticism in chapters 1 & 2 of *The Medieval Manichee* (see the Bibliography section of this course), as does Kurt Rudolph in *Gnosis: the Nature and History of Gnosticism*. James Robinson's *The Nag Hammadi Library* collects the texts from this recently found treasure trove of ancient gnostic writings. This library is also made available online via a link from the Gnostic Society at <http://www.gnosis.org/naghamm/nhl.html>
An additional online source of information on gnosticism is [The Pearl](#)

8. Additional Resources

The Gnostic Society Library (www.gnosis.org/library.html)

The Pearl: A Gnostic Christian Website (www.thepearl.org)

Apocalypticism and Millennialism: A Select Bibliography for Research (<http://www.ambs.edu/ljohns/ApocMillBibliography.htm>)

Course Syllabus

Course Number: Govt305

Course Title: Roots of Modern Ideologies

Faculty: Richard J. Bishirjian, Ph.D.

Performance Requirements/Course Grade:

Writing Assignments (20% each): There are two writing assignments found in the "Assignments" section of your course template. (Total: 40%)

Discussion Topics (3.5% each): Discussion topics are graded. There are ten sessions of topics for you to respond two. (Total: 35%)

Final Exam (25%): A two part final exam is also required. The first part of the Final (10%) is a multiple choice test composed of a list of key terms and symbols for which you are to select the correct definitions. Some key terms are listed in "Key Concepts" in Lectures. In the second part of the Final (20%), you will be given three essay questions of which you are to answer one. You may take the Final in two stages the first part is located in the Quizzes section of your course delivery system located on your Home Page. The essay portion of your final exam is located in Assignments. You must write your answers offline, save the document and upload it in the Assignments section of your course delivery system. 10%/15% (Total: 25%)

Course Participation and assignment submissions: Students are responsible for participating in the course through the following academic activities: uploading assignments, posting to discussion folders, and responding to faculty inquiries. Students are expected to be involved in ongoing instructional activities based on the recommended schedule for course completion as detailed in the syllabus. In order to actively participate in a course, Students must make contact with their faculty mentor on a regular basis through one of the following methods:

- Posting of an assignment in the assignment area of the course web site (e.g., a paper, project, etc.).
- Posting of an assignment to share with the faculty mentor and other students in the course web site (e.g., a review of a book or article, a proposal for a research study, a presentation in the form of a PowerPoint presentation file, reporting on participation in a research study, etc).
- Participation in a threaded discussion in the course web site (e.g., commenting on a discussion question posted by the faculty mentor, providing feedback to another student, etc.).
- Viewing instructional materials (e.g., a PowerPoint presentation prepared by the faculty mentor, a streaming audio or video presentation, etc.).

Rubrics

Rubrics that will guide your Instructor's grading of your assignments are located at http://www.yorktownuniversity.com/grad_rubrics.cfm

Academic Integrity

Available both in the student and faculty handbooks.

Recommended schedule for course completion

Session One: Introduction to Course; Biblical basis of millenarianism; early texts.

Lecture: Lecture 1, pts. 1, 2

Reading Assignments: Read Concepts of Ideology found in Lectures and Key Concepts. Next read: Genesis, chs. 3, 4, & 6; Daniel, chs. 7-10; Matthew, chs. 24 & 25; Mark, ch. 13; Luke, ch. 21: 5-36; Acts of the Apostles, ch. 1: 1-11; 2 Thessalonians, ch. 2; 2 Peter, ch. 3; Revelation, chs. 18-22 (esp. chs. 19:11 to 21:4);

Discussion Topics:

The Bible has been a strong influence on Western thinking about "end time." Your first reading assignments introduced you to Jewish and Christian "apocalyptic" prophesies. Cohn writes, "Already here one can recognize the paradigm of what was to become and to remain the central phantasy of revolutionary eschatology." Sketch the outlines of this "paradigm" by reference to the Biblical texts.

Does this relate to any of the concepts of ideology listed in Lectures?

Learning Outcomes: 4.a

Session Two: Apocalyptic tradition in medieval Europe; Millennialism and millenarianism.

Reading Assignments: Cohn, Pursuit of the Millennium, Introduction and chapter 1; and Tuveson, Redeemer Nation, Preface and chapter 1. Bishirjian, Chapter 2, "Civil Religion as Political Religion.

Lecture: Lecture 1, p. 3

Discussion Topics:

Both Cohn and Tuveson point to an "apocalyptic" tradition. What is the meaning of that concept? Can you apply it to any movements in America today?

Learning Outcomes: 4.b

Session Three. Civil Religion

Reading Assignments: Bishirjian, Chapter 4, Origins of the American Civil Religion and Chapter 5, Critique of the American Civil Religion

Discussion Topics: How does Woodrow Wilson fit into the greater concept of political religion? Are there any contemporary parallels?

Learning Outcomes: 4.c

Session Four: Medieval messianism; tradition of religious dissent

Lecture: Lecture 2, parts 1 and 2, and Lecture 3, part 1.

Reading Assignments: Please read chapters 2, 3, 4, and 5 of Cohn, Pursuit of the Millennium.

Discussion Topics:

Give an example of the 'messianism' that Cohn discusses in your readings for this session.

Learning Outcomes: 4.d

Session Five: Medieval cults; Sybilline Oracles, Joachim of Flora

Lecture: Lecture 3, part 1; part 2.

Reading Assignments: Chapters 6, 7, 8, and 9 of Cohn's Pursuit of the Millennium. First writing assignment is due.

Discussion Topics:

The movement called the Brethren of the Free Spirit is central to the readings in this section. Discuss this sect, outline its principle ideas, and explore what may have motivated members of this cult to express their hopes for salvation in these terms.

Learning Outcomes: 4.e

Session Six: Egalitarian State of Nature; English Peasant Revolt; 15th century Taborites; Thomas Muntzer; the New Jerusalem at Munster.

Lecture: Lecture 4, Parts 1 and 2.

Reading Assignments: Read Chapters 10, 11, 12, 13, and the conclusion of Cohn's Pursuit of the Millennium.

Discussion Topics:

Do any of the Egalitarian movements discussed in your readings have modern parallels?

Learning Outcomes: 4.f

Session Seven: Millennialist role of America, the English background; the belief in Progress.

Lecture: Lecture 5, part 1.

Reading Assignment: Tuveson, Redeemer Nation, read chapter 1 again, then read chapters 2, 3.

Discussion Topics:

America as a 'Chosen People' is a theme that appears frequently in American political discourse and literature. Tuveson writes that the Civil War was interpreted in moral terms, and eschatologically. Is America a "shining city on a Hill"? If so, what does that symbol have messianic overtones?

Learning Outcomes: 4.g; 4.h

Session Eight: Manifest Destiny, Millennialist Thought in America, cont.

Lecture: Lecture 5, part 2

Reading Assignment: Chapters 4, 5 & 6 of Tuveson.

Discussion Topics:

Analyze the "Battle Hymn of the Republic"

Learning Outcomes: 4.i

Session Nine: Main Symbols of ancient Gnosticism.

Reading Assignment: Chapters 1, 2, & 3 of Hans Jonas's *The Gnostic Religion* and the brief prefaces to the first two editions of that book. In "Lectures" read Dr. Bishirjian's essay titled "Modern Political Religions."

Discussion Topics:

Compare and contrast St. Augustine's "meaning of transcendental history" (Voegelin) and that of Joachim of Flora.

Learning Outcomes: 4.j

Class Ten: The Main Gnostic Systems.

Reading Assignments: Read chapters 4, 5, 6, and 7 of Jonas's *The Gnostic Religion* and the essay "Ersatz Religion" in Voegelin's *Science, Politics and Gnosticism*. Then read chapters 8 and 9 in Jonas's *The Gnostic Religion*. Second writing assignment is due.

Discussion Topics:

Valentinian gnosticism is a rich mine to explore because of its intellectual sophistication. Its "Iranian" counterpart was the system of Mani. Compare and contrast Valentinian gnosticism with Mani's system.

What is Voegelin getting at in his ten page "Introduction" to *Science, Politics, and Gnosticism*?

Learning Outcomes: 4.k; 4.l