



PSCI 6301

Political Theory II

“The Conquest of Nature ”

This course will focus on the meaning of political modernity as the conquest of nature. Classical political theory as typified by Plato and Aristotle was premised on the assumption that the best way of life for human beings would be found within the order of nature; that human nature fulfilled itself through the exercise of its moral and intellectual virtues as members of a deliberative political community. Beginning with Machiavelli, modernity defines itself as the summons to conquer nature through the exercise of human will-power, the capacity to stand entirely outside of nature and re-shape it, formerly reserved for God but now transferred to human agency. Human fulfillment was now to be found by attempting to wrench free of nature’s constraints in the the maximization of “security and well-being” for Princes and Peoples. We will examine the evolution of classical liberal political theory as a social contract maximizing every individual’s net self-interest as a rights-bearing individual, the outgrowth of Machiavelli’s original vision, as exemplified by Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau. We will then consider the great counter-movement initiated by Hegel which sought to restore a holistic sense of human community and virtue, but within the time-bound processes of History rather than by a return to the classical teleological conception of nature. Finally, we will look at some important contemporary political thinkers including Heidegger, Strauss, Kojeve, Grant and Voegelin on the theme of global technology as the final working-out of the modern project, and in particular at the debate between Strauss and Kojeve over the character of modern versus ancient tyranny.

This course is open to MA students

Instructor: Professor Waller R. Newell

Schedule: January to April 2016

Time: Mondays 2.35-5.25 pm / LA A602

Prerequisites: There are no prerequisites for this course.