

**Political Studies Program, Summer 2016**  
**LIBERAL MODERNITY**  
**Instructor: Peter Berkowitz**  
**Washington, D.C.**

**Discussion Section 1 – Alan Levine**, professor, American University

**Discussion Section 2 – Diana Schaub**, professor, Loyola University Maryland

We introduce the study of politics by exploring seminal twentieth-century thinkers who sought to grasp the distinctive contours of liberal modernity, or that distinctive form of politics based on the natural freedom and equality of all. We will read writings by Leo Strauss, Michael Oakeshott, and Alasdair MacIntyre.

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## **Monday, June 22, 2015**

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### **9:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m. Introduction**

- Leo Strauss, "What is Political Philosophy?"

**Questions:**

1. What does Jerusalem stand for (pp. 9–10), and how is it related to the problem of political philosophy?
2. What is political philosophy, and how does it differ from political theory, political theology, and political science?
3. What is positivism, and what are its limitations?
4. What is historicism, and why is it "the serious antagonist of political philosophy" (p. 26)?
5. What are the distinguishing characteristics of classical political philosophy?

### **11:15 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. Discussion Session 1**

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## **Tuesday, June 23, 2015**

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### **9:00 a.m. to Noon Session 2**

- Leo Strauss, "What is Political Philosophy?"

**Questions:**

1. What are the "two very common objections" (p. 36) to classical political philosophy, and how might classical political philosophy reply?
2. What are the distinguishing characteristics of modern political philosophy?
3. What is the first wave of modernity?
4. What is the second wave of modernity?
5. What is the third wave of modernity?

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## **Wednesday, June 24, 2015**

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## 9:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m. Session 3

- Leo Strauss, “Preface to Spinoza’s *Critique of Religion*,” pp. 1–15 (ending with “only if Spinoza were wrong in every respect”), and pp. 28–31 (beginning with “The results of this examination”).

### **Questions:**

1. What concerns and principles characterize modern political philosophy?
2. What weaknesses caused modern political philosophy to degenerate into nihilism?
3. What today is the proper relationship between classical political philosophy and modern political philosophy?
4. What is Heidegger’s challenge?
5. What is Nietzsche’s challenge?
6. What are the practical and theoretical implications of the challenges of Heidegger and Nietzsche?
7. What are the implications of Nietzsche’s failure “to escape from the evidence of the Biblical understanding of man” (pp. 12–13, and 30–31)?

## 11:15 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. Discussion Session 2

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### Thursday, June 25, 2015

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## 9:00 a.m. to Noon Session 4

- Michael Oakeshott, “Rationalism in Politics,” in *Rationalism in Politics and other Essays*, pp. 5–42

### **Questions:**

1. What are the characteristics of the Rationalist?
2. How do technical knowledge and practical knowledge differ?
3. What are the “deeper motivations” (p. 23) of rationalism?
4. How did rationalism warp politics?
5. How does rationalism deform education?

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### Friday, June 26, 2015

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## 9:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m. Session 5

- Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, pp.1–22, 62–78, 109–20, 146–64

### **Questions:**

1. What characterizes modern morality?
2. In what sense does Nietzsche reveal the essence of modern morality?
3. What characterizes Aristotelian ethics?

4. What obstacles—theoretical and practical—must be surmounted to embrace the virtues as Aristotle understands them?
5. If Aristotle is right about the virtues, what follows for liberal democracy?

**11:15 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.    Discussion Session 3**