

COURSE OUTLINE

- 1. Course Number and Name:** Govt4307, Roots of Modern Ideologies
Credits: 3

Prerequisite: Govt4405, History of Political Theory

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.

Beginning with 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 with special emphasis on Abraham Lincoln. 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 assigned readings. The course concludes with an examination of Renaissance Hermeticism.

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

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:

Cohn, Norman. *The Pursuit of the Millennium*. 2d ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 1990. ISBN-13: 9780195004564. \$15.74

Jonas, Hans. *The Gnostic Religion*. 3d ed. Boston: Beacon Press, 2001. ISBN-13: 9780807058015. \$21.60

Tuveson, Ernest Lee. *Redeemer Nation*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968; reprint, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, Midway Reprint, 1980. ISBN-13: 9780226819211. \$25.84

Voegelin, Eric. *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin, Volume 5, Modernity without Restraint*. Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2000. ISBN: 978-0-8262-1245-0. \$39.96

7. Recommended Reading [Located in Lectures/Texts]

8. Additional Resources [Located in 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>)