

COURSE OUTLINE

1. Course Number and Name: Govt4307, 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 us, “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 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 using the analysis of Eric Voegelin.
- m) identify the origins of atheist humanism and relate that to the concept of "Ideology."

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
- i) Atheist humanism

6. Required Texts:

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. *Modernity without Restraint*. Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2000. ISBN: 978-0-8262-1245-0.

Yates, Francis. *The Occult Philosophy in the Elizabethan Age*, Routledge & Keegan Paul, 1979. ISBN: 0-415-25409-4.

Lubac, Henri de, *Drama of Atheist Humanism*, Ignatius Press, 1995. ISBN: 13: 9780898704433.

7. Recommended Reading

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 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*. See, also, McGinn, *Visions of the End*, chapter 32, for materials on the Hussites and Taborites listed in "Bibliography" at Lectures/Text in your course delivery system.

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 in the Lectures/Texts 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>)