

THE UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN  
Department of History

Semester II Year 81-82

<u>COURSE NO.</u>	<u>COURSE TITLE</u>	<u>INSTRUCTOR</u>
597	Sorcerer's Apprentice: A History of Modernity	John Smail

COURSE DESCRIPTION

In the medieval fable the sorcerer's apprentice uses a simple spell he has learned to set the brooms to work cleaning the premises for him, and thereby unleashes vast forces he cannot control.

The purpose of this course is to try to develop a comprehensive picture of the workings of the modern world order that emerged out of the chrysalis of old Europe about two centuries ago. The course aims to present not a sequence of events but the evolution of the major underlying structures of modernity, such fundamental features as the individual, freed and re-bound; unlimited knowledge, goods and social mobility; bureaucratic structures throughout society; propaganda: commercial, political etc; a scientific world-view-- impersonal, secular, infinite, abstract-- to replace literate religions as a master picture of the cosmos; a new sense of time-- linear, infinitely subdivided, austerely independent of the rhythms of daily life and giving rise to new notions of evolution and history; reliance on fossil fuels in addition to biomass conversion for energy; and the world-wide, ever-accelerating sweep of change that has carried mankind today to the point of a great crisis, and makes one think of the apprentice.

This is a rather large enterprise; students must be prepared to do a great deal of their thinking for themselves. It is also only the second run of the course, which is still far from being beautifully organized. Some students will find these conditions particularly appealing. Others will not.

LECTURES Tuesdays (full session and Thursdays (half session). Discussions (Thursday half session) I will divide the class into several smaller groups. These will meet separately at the same time; I will circulate. Early in the semester each group will gather with me for an evening.

WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS and EXAMINATIONS

1. Six journal entries of 600-1000 words, consisting of informal reflections on lectures and readings, due on specified dates.
2. Two short essays of 5-7 pages
3. Two 60-min exams, based on advance lists of questions, in the 7th and 15th weeks. Also optional final (see below).

GRADING SYSTEM

Essays and exams count 25% each. I will pass out course grades at the last class. Those who want to may take the optional 60 min final in exam week to replace the lowest of the four grades. No grades for journals, but bonuses for particularly interesting entries.

REQUIRED READINGS

No text. Roughly 1982 pages of reading will be required, a good half of it up to individual choice from a wide range of works. Most readings will be available in Reserve and/or book stores.