

## Modern European Intellectual History in Global Perspectives

Center for the Humanities, Spring 2016  
Wesleyan University

CHUM 320  
MonWed 11am-12:20pm  
CFH 106

Prof. Larry McGrath  
lmcgrath@wesleyan.edu  
CFH 103  
Office Hours: by appointment

### **Course Overview**

Does reason distinguish humans from other creatures? Or is it merely the reflection of passions and prejudices? Does rational deliberation ensure a just society? Or does the ideal of rationality safeguard the powerful? If reason is a ruse, then why fight for freedom at all?

These questions lie at the heart of modern European intellectual history. Yet recently, postcolonial critics have urged historians to reconsider the emergence of reason – an idea central the Western canon – as part of a global process. In this course, we will explore the political, metaphysical, and moral dimensions of European thought in dialogue with the non-West. These contexts lay bare thinkers who contributed to Europe’s conceptual legacy while contesting its colonial hegemony. We will ask: Is empire the natural consequence of rationality? Or were imperial conquests the unhappy betrayal of liberal and democratic ideals?

Chronologically, our focus is the past 250 years. We will trace the promise and peril of reason from the age of revolutions in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century through the rise of nationalism in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and into the anti-colonial struggles of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. By examining ideas within their social contexts, we will understand how philosophy, politics, and economics took shape within intellectual networks exceeding the European continent.

For this course, “global” does not mean the *entirety* of the Earth. Rather, we will address a series of particular historical exchanges through which ideas circulated. This approach does not aim to trace the emulations of Western ideas in the non-West. We will instead emphasize the mobile character of ideas as they transformed via receptions and appropriations.

### **Objectives**

1. Develop an understanding of the methods of intellectual history, taken as a distinct field of historical scholarship.
2. Identify the stakes on which ideas turn by setting theoretical texts in historical contexts.
3. Hone our close reading skills through in-class discussions as well as expository and argumentative writing.
4. Have fun by immersing ourselves in the ideas and debates that guide modern thought.

### **Course Requirements**

1. Attendance and active participation make up **20%** of the grade. Students are expected to post reflections (which are open to take the form of questions, arguments, or musings) to the course website on Moodle by each Tuesday evening at 10pm. The questions will serve as a launching pad for discussion.

2. The midterm essay is 7 pages and makes up **20%** of the grade. The essay is expository: you will be asked to reconstruct an argument in primary texts. Topics will be distributed during the fourth week. The essays are due at the end of the sixth week.
3. The literature review is 8 pages and makes up **20%** of the grade. Students will choose one weekly topic and research and compare three pieces of relevant secondary literature. Reviews are due the tenth week.
4. The final essay is 13-15 pages and constitutes **40%** of the grade. For the final essay, unlike the midterm, you are expected to interpret a set of texts in relation to at least three pieces of secondary literature. Final essays topics will be distributed during the 12<sup>th</sup> week and are due at the end of the exam period.

### **Required Texts**

Students should purchase the books below. The rest of the primary literature and all of the secondary literature will be available on Moodle.

Bergson, Henri. *Matter and Memory*. 1896. Trans. Nancy Margaret Paul and Scott Palmer. New York: Zone Books, 1990

Césaire, Aimé. *Discourse on Colonialism*. 1950. Trans. Joan Pinkham. New York: Monthly Review Press, 2001

Fanon, Frantz. *The Wretched of the Earth*. 1961. Trans. Richard Philcox. New York: Grove Press, 2005

Freud, Sigmund. *Civilization and Its Discontents*. 1930. Trans. James Strachey. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1989

James, C.L.R. *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution*. 1938. New York: Vintage, 1989

Nietzsche, Friedrich. *On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo*. 1887. Trans. Walter Kaufmann. New York: Vintage, 1989.

Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. *A Discourse on Inequality*. 1755. Trans. Maurice Cranston. New York: Penguin Classics, 1985

### **Accommodations**

Students who plan to miss seminar due to religious observances, or students with disabilities seeking assistance, should notify me at the beginning of the term, either after seminar, during office hours, or via email.

### **Plagiarism and Academic Dishonesty**

Plagiarism includes the reproduction of the work of others without quotation marks or attribution; paraphrasing or summarizing the work of others without attribution; using the work of another student as one's own; and failure to cite sources for information not commonly known. Plagiarism and cheating are serious infractions and will result in: a failing grade for the seminar and referral to the Dean of Student Life.

## Syllabus

Week 1	What is Reason?
Jan. 25	Introduction
Jan. 27	Kant, Immanuel. <i>Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?</i> 1784.

### Section 1 Reason in the Age of Revolutions

Week 2	Sovereignty, Natural Rights, and Civil Society
Feb. 1	Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. <i>Discourse on the Origin of and Basis of Inequality Among Men.</i> 1755. 77- 137.
Feb. 3	Robespierre, Maximilien: "On the Principle of Political Morality that Should Guide the National Convention in the Domestic Administration of the Republic." February 5, 1794. L'Ouverture, Toussant. "Letter to the General Assembly." July 1972.
Week 3	Revolutionary War between Paris and Saint-Domingue
Feb. 8	James, C.L.R. <i>The Black Jacobins.</i> 1938. 3-162.
Feb. 10	James, C.L.R. <i>The Black Jacobins.</i> 1938. 163-377.
Week 4	Transcendental Reason in German Idealism
	<i>Midterm topics distributed</i>
Feb. 15	Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich. <i>Lectures on the Philosophy of World History.</i> 1837. Introduction.
Feb. 17	Buck-Morss, Susan. <i>Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History.</i> Pittsburgh, PA: U of Pittsburg P, 2009. 21-75.

### Section 2 Between Nation and Empire

Week 5	The Rise of Nationalism in the 19 <sup>th</sup> Century
Feb. 22	Fichte, Johann. <i>Addresses to the German Nation.</i> 1808. Renan, Ernest. <i>What is a Nation?</i> 1882.
Feb. 24	Herzl, Theodor. <i>A Jewish State.</i> 1896. Selections. al-Husri, Sati', "Muslim Unity and Arab Unity." 1944. Selections.

Week 6 From Civil Society to Colonial Empire

---

*Midterm papers due*

Feb. 29 DeTocqueville, Alexis. *Democracy in America*. 1835. New York: Penguin Classics, 2003. 335-397.

Mar. 2 De Tocqueville, Alexis. "Essay on Algeria." 1841. In *Writings on Empire and Slavery, 1837-1847*. Ed. Jennifer Pitts. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2000. 59-116.

Spring Break

Week 7 The Making of Class-Consciousness

---

Mar. 21 Marx, Karl. *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*.

Mar. 23 Chakrabarty, Dipesh. *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2000. 47-71.

**Section 3 Modernity and the Eclipse of Reason**

Week 8 Nietzsche, History, and the Critique of Reason

---

Mar. 28 Nietzsche, Friedrich. *On The Genealogy of Morals*. 1887. Trans. Walter Kaufmann. New York: Vintage, 1989. Selections.

Mar. 30 Ratner-Rosenhagen, Jennifer. *Nietzsche in America. A History of an Icon and His Ideas*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2012. Selections.

Week 9 Transforming Time: Global and Psychological Temporalities

---

Apr. 4 Ogle, Vanessa. *The Global Transformation of Time: 1870-1950*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2015. 20-46; 75-98.

Apr. 6 Bergson, Henri. *Matter and Memory*. 1896. 17-76.

Week 10 Duration, Colonization, and the Modern Psyche

---

*Literature reviews due*

Apr. 11 Bachir Diagne, Souleymane. *African Art as Philosophy: Senghor, Bergson and the Idea of Negritude*. Chicago: Seagull Books, 2011. Selections.

Apr. 13 Minkowski, Eugène. *Lived Time: Phenomenological and Psychopathological Studies*. 1933. Selections.

## Section 4 Submission and Subjectivity

Week 11 From Drives to Desires

---

Apr. 18 Freud, Sigmund. *Civilization and its Discontents*. 1930.

Apr. 20 Manjapara, Kris. *Age of Entanglement: German and Indian Intellectuals Across Empire*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2014. 211-237.

Week 12 Race and Reason Beyond the Nation- State

---

*Final paper topics distributed*

Apr. 25 Césaire, Aimé. *Discourse on Colonialism*. 1950. Trans. Joan Pinkham. New York: Monthly Review Press, 2000. 29-78.

Apr. 27 Fanon, Frantz. *The Wretched of the Earth*. 1961. New York: Grove, 2005. Selections

Week 13 The Politics of Human Rights

---

May 2 Arendt, Hannah. "The Decline of the Nation-State and the End of the Rights of Man." In *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. 1951. New York: Harcourt, 1979. 267-304.

May 4 Moyn, Samuel. *The Last Utopia: Human Rights in History*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2010. Selections.

*Final papers due at the end of the semester*