

# REASON AND ITS DISCONTENTS: AN INTRODUCTION TO MODERN EUROPEAN INTELLECTUAL HISTORY

History 317N (39395), CTI 310 (34075), EUS 306 (36340)

Spring 2013

Instructor: Prof. Tracie Matysik

This course introduces students to themes and methods in the study of European Intellectual History. We will address what it means to read philosophy and social theory in historical context, understanding close reading as historical methodology. In terms of chronological focus, the course will concentrate on the modern era broadly understood, roughly 1600-present. We will examine how reason came to be a dominant and contested category of philosophical inquiry in the seventeenth century and then follow its vicissitudes into the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Along the way we will witness the embrace and rejection of what has come to be known as the “Enlightenment tradition.” Readings will be primarily philosophical and social-theoretical.

## COURSE EXPECTATIONS

**Reading:** Students are expected to complete and to be prepared to discuss the assigned readings as indicated in the Course Schedule and prior to each class session. Assigned books are available at the University Co-Op. In addition, select readings will be available on Blackboard. Students should print out readings posted to Blackboard, as we will need to be able to refer to the readings in detail in class.

Books for purchase at the University Co-Op include:

- René Descartes, *Meditations, Objections, and Replies*, ed. and trans. Roger Ariew and Donald Cress (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2006).
- Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract and Other Later Political Writings*, trans. Victor Gourevitch (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997).
- G.W.F. Hegel, *Reason in History*, trans. R. Hartman (New York: Macmillan, 1953).
- Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein* (New York: Dover, 1994).
- Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. Helen Zimmern (New York: Dover, 1997).
- Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*, trans. James Strachey (New York: Norton, 1961).
- Peter Weiss, *The Persecution and Assassination of Jean-Paul Marat as Performed by the Inmates of the Asylum of Charenton Under the Direction of the Marquis de Sade (or Marat Sade)*, trans. Otto Georges Weiss (New York: Waveland Press, 2001).

## Essays:

You are all expected to write four short essays (3-4 pages) over the course of the semester. Provisional due dates are indicated on the syllabus; however, we may need to move those dates back from time to time to accommodate our in-class discussions. At the outset, I will give you topics for the papers. Midway through the semester we will craft topics together. By the end of the semester, you will be expected to come up with a topic of your own.

## Weekly Writing, Blackboard Postings:

Most weeks – weeks when you are not submitting an essay – you will be asked to write a one-page commentary on the reading (no more than two pages!). In sum you will be asked to write ten of these. (Note that there are eleven listed, which means you can skip one.) You will also be required to post five of them to the Blackboard discussion site. These posts will aid us in orienting our in-class discussions. Posts should thus be available no later than 10 a.m. on the day of the relevant discussion. Early in the

semester we will have a sign-up sheet for some of the posts, to make sure we have a somewhat balanced distribution.

Neither the weekly responses nor the posts will be graded during the semester. You will, however, revise and re-submit them at the end of the semester as part of a final journal. See below for details.

**Final Journal, due on the day and hour of what would be our final exam (must wait for Registrar's schedule for details):** For the final journal, you will compile your **ten weekly responses** as well as **two additional responses** to submit as a final journal. This final journal will serve in place of a final exam, and consequently should be considered as your opportunity to demonstrate what you have learned over the course of the semester. The ten weekly responses should thus be revised both for writing style and for content. Because this course qualifies for an "Ethics" flag, the two additional responses must address practical ethical questions. These two should be tied to one or more readings from the course. The final journal will thus consist of **12 entries**.

**Note:** Students are responsible for writing a response paper for any missed session, regardless whether the absence is excused or unexcused. Response papers written for a missed session must be submitted within two weeks of the missed session and may be included in the final journal as part of or in addition to the ten entries.

**A Note on Writing Format:** All writing assignments should be typed, paginated, double-spaced and printed in 12-point font with one-inch margins. They should be well-written, spell-checked, and proofread for grammar and content. They should be stapled and should include your names.

**Participation:** Regular attendance and participation in class discussions is required. Absences will be excused only for **documented** family and medical emergency (doctor's note, obituary, etc.), or religious holiday. One unexcused absence will be overlooked. Each subsequent unexcused absence will result in a 1/3-grade deduction to the participation grade. **No student attending less than twenty sessions without documented excuse will pass the class.**

You should come to every class session prepared to pose at least one analytical question for the purposes of class discussion.

**FLAGS:** This course carries Ethics, Global Cultures, and Writing Flags. For information on these three flags and their requirements, please see: <http://www.utexas.edu/ugs/ccf/flags>

**RELIGIOUS HOLIDAYS:** Absences for religious holidays are excused. I would be grateful, however, if you would alert me in advance in these cases.

**ACCOMMODATIONS:**

Students who need special accommodations should notify me at the beginning of the semester (or as soon as possible), and such accommodations will be made. Students with such requests should secure a letter from the Services for Students with Disabilities Office. To ensure that the most appropriate accommodations can be provided, students should contact the SSD Office at 471-6259 or 471-4641 TTY.

**ACADEMIC INTEGRITY:**

Academic integrity will be taken very seriously in this course. Students who violate University rules on scholastic dishonesty are subject to disciplinary penalties, including the possibility of failure in the course and/or dismissal from the University. For an overview of University policy regarding scholastic dishonesty, see the website of Student Judicial Services: <http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/sjs/>

## **GRADING (using the +/- system)**

- **Essays: 50%**
- **Final Journal: 30%**
- **Participation (including attendance, sustained constructive contribution to class discussion, and regular submission of responses and blackboard postings): 20%**

## **PRELIMINARY SCHEDULE (subject to change depending on pace of conversation)**

Week 1

M 1/14: Introduction

W 1/16: LaCapra on reading and intellectual history (On Blackboard)

Write one-page summary of the article (required)

### **Part 1: The Rational World**

Week 2

M 1/21: NO CLASS

W 1/23: Descartes, 1-29

Write a one-page discussion question: what doesn't make sense? what don't you understand? what seems like a specifically seventeenth-century claim or assumption? Is there a term that you might benefit from carefully defining and critically analyzing? (required)

Week 3

M 1/28: Descartes, 29-50

W 1/30: Spinoza, "Short Treatise" 37-47 (On Blackboard)

Write one-page discussion question.

Week 4

M 2/4: Spinoza, "Short Treatise" 60-70, 79-90, 92-95, 99-102 (On Blackboard)

W 2/6: Paper Drafts Due – in-class peer review

### **Part 2: Politicization**

Week 5

M 2/11: Rousseau

W 2/13: Rousseau

One-page discussion question

Week 6

M 2/18: Kant, "An Answer to the Question, 'What is Enlightenment?'" (On Blackboard)

W 2/20: Hegel, *Reason in History*

One-page discussion question

Week 7:

M 2/25: Hegel, *Reason in History*

W 2/27: Shelley, *Frankenstein*

One-page discussion question

### **Part 3: Skepticism and doubt**

Week 8

M 3/4: Shelley  
W 3/6: **Papers Due**

Week 9: SPRING BREAK

Week 10  
M 3/18: Nietzsche  
    One-page discussion question  
W 3/20: Nietzsche

Week 11  
M 3/25: Freud  
W 3/27: Freud  
    One-page discussion question

Week 12  
M 4/1: Surrealism (no reading)  
    **Papers due**  
W 4/3: Surrealism (cont.)

Week 13  
M 4/8: Max Horkheimer, "The End of Reason" (On Blackboard)  
W 4/10: Martin Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology" (On Blackboard)  
    One-page discussion question on either of these texts (but must be written and submitted for the relevant session)

Week 14  
M 4/15: Foucault, "What is Enlightenment?" (On Blackboard)  
W 4/17: Habermas, tba (On Blackboard)  
    One-page discussion question on either of these texts (but must be written and submitted for the relevant session)

Week 15:  
M 4/22: Hardt and Negri on Enlightenment (subject to change) (On Blackboard)  
W 4/24: *Marat/Sade*  
    One-page discussion question on either of these texts (but must be written and submitted for the relevant session)

Week 16:  
M 4/29: *Marat/Sade*  
W 5/1: Conclusion  
    **Papers Due**