

The College of the Humanities Humanities Program

HUMS4000: Politics, Modernity and the Common Good

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Lectures: Mondays and Wednesdays 11:35 - 12:55 (Paterson 303)

Tutorials: G-1. Wednesdays 13:05 - 14:55. G-2. Tuesdays 10:05 - 11:25 (Paterson 302)

Description

The Bachelor of Humanities program focuses on the human condition and the civic virtues. Year one approached humanity as *homo dei*, year two centered on human reason, and year three considered humanity in its aesthetic dimensions. The fourth year core seminar explores how, beginning with the French Revolution, the most radical forces of modernity set out to emancipate humanity from all forms of traditional authority. How did this project unfold and what efforts were made either to restrain or intensify it? Although new and radical, these ideas emerged from a debate stretching all the way back to ancient Greece. The fourth year core seminar, therefore, brings the whole adventure of the Bachelor of Humanities curriculum to a conclusion and returns the conversation to the world of the 21st century.

In the first term, we undertake a philosophical exploration of the problems of modernity and freedom by considering some major themes in 19th and early 20th century European philosophy and political thought. We will pay particular attention to the emergence and unfolding of the Philosophy of Freedom, also known as German Idealism. We attempt to return to a classical conception of human existence rooted in our communal connectedness with one another, a synthesis of the ancient Greek polis with the individual liberties of the modern age. This historicist philosophy tries to restore a full sense of cultural, aesthetic and civic satisfaction as against what was seen as the vulgarity, narrowness and philistinism of Enlightenment individualism and the concept of the state as nothing more than a heartless utilitarian contract among producers and consumers of commodities.

Thus, we will begin with Plato in order to consider the classical conception of the good life, which provided both a precedent and a foil for German Idealism, especially Hegel, whose *Phenomenology of Spirit* is a conscious re-enactment of the Platonic ascent to wisdom and happiness on historicist grounds. We will then examine Hobbes' *Leviathan* as the foundational text of modern liberal individualism at what the German thinkers considered its worst. We will then turn to Rousseau, severe critic of Hobbesian materialism and the first modern thinker to attempt to recover the classical vision of the

polis on the basis of modern natural right, and whose struggle to reconcile freedom with happiness provides German Idealism with its central enigma. After considering Burke's critique of the French Revolution and its Terror as the culmination of Rousseau's political theory, we will examine how Kant and Schiller each take up one of the two poles inherited from Rousseau's thought, setting the stage for Hegel's grand synthesis of freedom and community, the "absolute Science of Spirit," designed to promote freedom and community while avoiding revolutionary violence. The rest of the course examines a series of on-going assaults on Hegel's Absolute Idealism from the Left (Marx) and (in the European sense of the term) the Right (Nietzsche and Heidegger). Of special interest will be the internal debate among these thinkers as to whether history is rational and progressive (Hegel and Marx) or a cycle of existential experiences deeper than any rational account can penetrate, and with no teleological direction (Nietzsche and Heidegger). We will also re-encounter a number of themes that arose in previous B. Hum. courses in light of their connection to Hegel, Nietzsche and Heidegger: e.g., poetry versus philosophy, reason and revelation, the meaning of tragedy, the Apollonian and Dionysian. From Schiller down to Heidegger, German Idealism was deeply concerned with the relationship of music, art and liberal education to human wholeness and this theme will also be considered throughout the course. With Heidegger, we reach the fragmentation of German Idealism into the 20th century schools of existentialism, neo-Marxism and post-modernism, and a growing despair over the benevolent progress of history as the 20th century is faced with the juggernaut of world war and global technology

In the second term, we continue with the presupposition that underlined the first semester, namely that a gigantic paradigm shift happened in human consciences as well as its consciousness. However, while the first term took the conversation through a philosophical debate as to the nature of these new ideas, this part of the course will look at the unfolding of those ideas in the real world as the civilization of modernity. The "common good," however defined, requires a robust civilizational framework to help its materialization. The Athenian civilization proved the breeding ground for the ideas, notions, and concepts that form the foundation of the modern West. The new ideas, concepts and notions have led to the emergence of a civilization with autonomy, independent, and freedom as qualities for agency, the modus operandi, and the social structures, that not only have led to the emergence of the self as agent/actor, but also to the societal form of the sovereign state, and the anarchical society of states, and the global capitalist system. What are the nuances of this transformation? What did it entail? The First half of the term concentrates on the unfolding of modernity process into a civilization through the works of the giants of our time.

We begin the term with the classic work of the American/German philosopher, Hannah Arendt, on the human condition. Even though she has been described as one of "Heidegger's children," she has gone beyond the German tradition and provides a giant revival of the Aristotelian question of what does it mean to be human but within the context of the modern condition. Then through examining the works of our own Canadian philosopher, Charles Taylor, we explore the modus operandi of the modern civilization. For Taylor the modern condition of secularity means a great dis-embedding

from the brink of tradition, where the self is left on his/her own reason and how this idea has led to the emergence of an all-pervasive order. We shall continue with the works of the International Relation Theorist, Hedley Bull, who provides an insightful portrait of the spatial structures and organizations (or the international system) that shapes the public square in the modern civilization. In the second part of the course, we turn to thinkers who are harsher about the modern civilization than the aforementioned thinkers are. They argue that in practice, power politics and money, not freedom, and autonomy dominate the public domain in the unfolding of the industrial European and American worlds and more so, it extended to the non-Western world as well. We deal with the literary, philosophical, religious, and post-modern treatments of the modernity-based civilization. Here, we begin with Salman Rushdie and continue with Edward Said and Gandhi, ending with Michael Foucault. These thinkers invite us to a radical reconsideration of the present condition of globalized and yet fragmented world. They provide insightful meditation on our present epistemology, the nature of our relation with the world and the divine and may help us comprehend the prevalence of the various forms of extremism, politics of identity, terrorism and 21st century tribalism.

Course Requirements: The final grade of this course will be calculated as follows:

Attendance and participation* (35%)

A term paper** (40%)

An in-class review exam of the reading materials (25%) held late in the terms
(November 21 and March 20).

* Attendance of lectures and discussion groups is obligatory, not optional. The grade is based on regular attendance of lectures and discussion groups, participation during the discussion groups (asking questions and offering comments) and discussion group presentation(s). Students will be asked to make presentations in the discussion groups, on an equally rotating basis, on the readings for that week. The mechanics of this will take some time to work out. On average, we will aim to have two presentations at each discussion group. Occasionally, more may have to be scheduled to give everyone an opportunity to present. Every effort will be made to enable students to present on the readings of their choice, but some flexibility will be necessary to fit everyone in. Students are encouraged to review the readings and volunteer sooner rather than later if there is a particular text you would like to concentrate in your presentation.

** 10-12 pages double-spaced typed paper. The fall term version is a textual exegesis to be submitted on Friday December 7 (Topics will be provided).

The winter term version is a fourth year paper, with a topic of your choice in consultation with the instructor and submission is on Monday April 8.

E-submissions are not acceptable. Late papers suffers fine by a fraction of a grade (i.e., A to A-) for each day.

Fall Term Texts:

Plato. *The Symposium*. Hackett
Thomas Hobbes. *The Leviathan*. Hackett.
Jean-Jacques Rousseau. *Basic Political Writings* Hackett.
Edmund Burke. *Reflections on the Revolution in France*. Oxford.
Immanuel Kant. *Foundation of the Metaphysics of Morals*. Hackett.
Friedrich Schiller. *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man*.
Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel. *Introduction to the Philosophy of History*.
Hackett.
----- *Phenomenology of Spirit*.
Friedrich Nietzsche. *Beyond Good and Evil*. Vintage
----- *On the Advantages and Disadvantages of History for Life*.
Hackett.
Karl Marx. *Selected Writings*. Hackett.
Martin Heidegger. *An Introduction to Metaphysics*. Yale.
----- *Basic Writings*. Harper.

Approximate Schedule of Themes and Readings for the Fall Semester:

Introductory Remarks.

Lecture 1: Classical holism. Modernity's break with classical holism. The Philosophy of Freedom/German Idealism as an attempt to restore classical holism on the basis of modern autonomy and liberty.

Nature versus Freedom: The Origins of German Idealism

Lecture 2: Plato, Symposium, first half (to speech of Socrates).
Lecture 3: Plato, Symposium, second half (from speech of Socrates to end).
Lecture 4: Hobbes, Epistle Dedicatory, chapters 1 – 14.
Lecture 5: Hobbes, chapters 15 to 24.
Lecture 6: Rousseau, First and Second Discourses.
Lecture 7: Rousseau, Social Contract Books 1 and 2.
Lecture 8: Burke, Reflections on the Revolution in France.
Lecture 9: Kant, Metaphysics of Morals, parts 1-2. Schiller, Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man, letters 1,2,13,20,21,22.

Oct. 22-26, Fall Break

The Hegelian Absolute and the Science of Spirit

Lecture 10: Hegel, On Love; Introduction to the Philosophy of History;

Lecture 11: Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Miller translation (Oxford).

Readings are by section number, not page number. Preface, 1-41; Introduction (entire); The Truth of Self-Certainty, 166-167; Lordship and Bondage, 178-196.

Lecture 12: *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Stoicism, 197-201; Skepticism, 202-205; Unhappy Consciousness, 206-230; Spirit, 438-443; Ethical World, 446-463; Ethical Action, 464-476; Right, 477-483; Self-estrangement, 484-486. Absolute Freedom and Terror, 582-596; Forgiveness, 670-671; Religion, 672-683.

The First Assault on Hegelian Idealism: Marx and Marxism

Lecture 13: Marx, *On the Jewish Question*.

Lecture 14: Marx, *The Communist Manifesto*.

The Second Assault on Hegelian Idealism: Nietzsche and the World as Will to Power

Lecture 15: Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy* (hand-out); *The Advantages and Disadvantages of History for Life*; *The Three Metamorphoses* (hand-out); *Beyond Good and Evil*, Preface, Parts 1-3.

Lecture 16: Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, parts 5-9.

The Third Assault on Hegelian Idealism: Heidegger, Existentialism and Post-modernism

Lecture 17: Heidegger, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, parts 1-3

Lecture 18: Heidegger, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, part 4.

Lecture 19: Heidegger, *The Origin of the Artwork*; *Letter on Humanism*.

Lecture 20: Heidegger, *An Essay Concerning Technology*.

Lecture Class 21: In class Review Exam (November 21, 2018)

Lecture 22: *The Aestheticization of Revolutionary Violence: a screening of Leni Riefenstahl's Triumph of the Will*.

Lecture 23: *The Fragmentation of German Idealism into Critical Theory, neo-Marxism and Post-modernism*.

Lecture 24. *Concluding Remarks*.

Winter Term Texts:

Hannah Arendt. *The Human Condition*

Hedley Bull. *The Anarchical Society*

Michel Foucault, *Discipline & Punish*

M.K. Gandhi. *Hind Swaraj and Other Writings*

Salman Rushdie. *Midnight's Children: a Novel*

Edward Said. *Orientalism*

Charles Taylor. *Modern Social Imaginaries*

Approximate Schedule of Themes and Readings for the Winter Semester:

Civilization

Lecture 1 (Jan. 7): Introductory Remarks; Civilization and Modernity

The Civilization of Modernity

Lecture 2 (Jan. 9): Being Human (Arendt, 1-78)

Lecture 3 (Jan. 14): Labour and Work (Arendt, 79-174)

Lecture 4 (Jan. 16): Action (Arendt, 175-247)

Lecture 5 (Jan. 21): Modern Age, and the Good (Arendt, pp. 248-325)

Lecture 6 (Jan. 23): Modern order and “Self-Understanding” (Taylor, 1-67)

Lecture 7 (Jan. 28): “Social Self-Understanding” I (Taylor, 69-107)

Lecture 8 (Jan. 30): “Social Self-Understanding” II (Taylor, 109-161)

Lecture 9 (Feb. 4): Consequence; Secularity (Taylor, 163-196)

Lecture 10 (Feb. 6): Anarchical Society (Bull, 3-50)

Lecture 11 (Feb. 11): Ends of AS: Order and Justice (Bull, 51-94)

Lecture 12 (Feb. 13): Means in AS-I (Bull, 97-155)

February 18th –22nd Winter Break

Lecture 13 (Feb. 25): Means of AS-II (Bull, 159-222)

II: Critics of the Civilization of Modernity

Lecture 14 (Feb. 27): The World of Optimism Disease (Rushdie, 1-288)

Lecture 15 (Mar. 4): The Fractured Modern Soul (Rushdie, 289-533)

Lecture 16 (Mar. 6): Swaraj as the Human Condition (Gandhi, 5-41)

Lecture 17 (Mar. 11): The Reality of India (Gandhi, 42-65)

Lecture 18 (Mar. 13): True Civilisation (Gandhi, 66-119)

Lecture 19 (Mar. 18): Said and Orientalism (Film)

Review Exam (Mar. 20): In class

Lecture 20 (Mar. 25): Anatomy of “Orientalism” (Said, 1-28, 31-110, and 284-328)

Lecture 21 (Mar. 27): The New Phase of Orientalism (Said, 329-352)

Lecture 22 (Apr. 1): Constructed Worlds (Foucault, 3-31)

Lecture 23 (Apr. 3): The Working of the System (Foucault, 135-169)

Lecture 24 (Apr. 8): Maintaining the System, Surveillance (Foucault, 195-228)