European Intellectual History Since 1880

The course is designed as an introduction to the intellectual life of modern continental Europe. Emphasis is placed on the reading of those primary texts that have had the greatest impact upon it and the greatest extension into intellectual life elsewhere, but some attention is also given to lesser known texts that evidence important themes. These themes may be briefly articulated as four questions which this course will address: 1) how do writers in this period conceive of human knowledge (its sources, nature, range, and character)? 2) how do they conceive of human community amidst rapid social change, political and economic crises, world wars, and a shrinking globe? 3) how do they think about art, human creativity, and their relation to rationality and irrationality? and 4) how do they conceive the human individual and the possibility of “selfhood” in a world governed by impersonal forces and prone to collective crisis?

The following books should be available for purchase at both bookstores:

- Ferdinand Tönnies, Community and Civil Society
- Joris-Karl Huysmans, Against Nature
- Henri Bergson, Introduction to Metaphysics
- Wassily Kandinsky, Concerning the Spiritual in Art
- Peter Gay, ed., The Freud Reader
- Arthur Koestler, Darkness at Noon
- Walter Kaufmann, ed., Existentialism from Dostoyevsky to Sartre (optional)
- Samuel Beckett, Waiting for Godot
- Vaclev Havel, The Power of the Powerless
- Milan Kundera, The Unbearable Lightness of Being

Selections, mostly short – from Sorel, Kafka, Benjamin, Weber, Hesse, Levi, Irigaray, and Vattimo – are available through the on-line reserve system of Woodruff Library. They include the Sartre as well (which is why purchase of the Kaufmann volume is optional).

This course is designed to satisfy the writing requirement. Improving student writing skills is a primary course objective. Course evaluation will be based on a “perfect paragraph,” two short “reflection papers” (20%), two take-home exams at mid-semester and end-of-term (20% each), a term essay (20%), and class participation (20%). Reflection papers should be 3-4 pages double-spaced. Term essays (8-12 pages) should focus on the interpretation of a text – either one by a European author or intellectual group, or one arising elsewhere in the world, which illustrates how a European author or idea has been received and critically appropriated. A prospectus for the essay is due by email by noon on Monday, March 23. The essays themselves will be due in class on the last day of class, Thursday, April 23.

The success of the class depends heavily on active student participation. Each student is allowed two (2) unexcused absences during the semester without penalty; after that, downgrading for class participation will be incurred. Students with more than five (5) unexcused absences will automatically receive an “F” for class participation.
This class is governed by the Honor Code of Emory College. Plagiarism and other forms of cheating will not be tolerated.

An office hour will be held on Tuesday, 11:30-12:30, in Bowden 205. No appointment is necessary; appointments may also be scheduled at other hours. I may also be reached via email: wadamso@emory.edu.

The following is a class schedule. Students are expected to be prepared to discuss each reading on the day for which it is assigned. Please bring the text to class on that day.

**I. Two Assessments of Late-Nineteenth-Century Europe**

Tu Jan 13 – Introduction; and Europe after 1850 and the Question of Community.


Wed Jan 28 – **Perfect paragraph due on email** by 12 noon.

**II. Explorations of Rationality and Irrationality**

Th Jan 29 – Bergson, *Introduction to Metaphysics*.


Th Feb 5 – Freud’s Discovery of the Unconscious.


Mon Feb 16 – **First reflection paper due at 5pm in Bowden Hall 205 (outside box is fine)**

**III. Explorations of Individuality and Creativity**

Tu Feb 17 – Franz Kafka, “Metamorphosis,” in *Complete Stories*, 89-139.

Th Feb 19 – Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*.

IV. Rethinking Human Life after a World War


Th Mar 5 - **Take-home exam due** at 10am in Bowden 205. No class.

Tu Mar 9 - **Spring break**

Tu Mar 17 – Koestler, *Darkness at Noon*, “First Hearing.”

Th Mar 19 – Koestler, *Darkness at Noon*, remainder of book (“Second Hearing,” “Third Hearing” and “Grammatical Fiction”)

M Mar 23 - **Prospectus for term essay due by email at noon.**

V. Existentialism and the Crisis of Humanism


Wed Apr 1 – **Second reflection paper due at 5pm in Bowden Hall 205 (outside box is fine)**

VI. Language and Power, Modernity and Postmodernity

Th Apr 2 – Luce Irigaray, “Equal or Different?, in *The Irigaray Reader*, 30-33; and “The Female Gender,” in *Sexes and Genealogies*, 107-23.


Th Apr 23 – Conclusion. **Term essays due in class.**

Th Apr 30 – **Take-home exam due, 12 noon in Bowden 205.**