

General Studies 146: Modernity
Professor Melissa M. Wilcox
M 10:00-10:50 / WF 11:00-11:50, Olin 343
Whitman College
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appointment

Official course description:

A two-semester exploration of the formation and transformation of some western world views (ways of understanding nature, society, the self, and the transcendent). The course will focus on the World of Antiquity and the Modern World. Attention will be given not only to the continuity in the transition of dominant world views, but also to competing and alternative visions. The course will examine some of the important individuals and events which have significantly shaped, reshaped, and challenged these world views. In this process, revolutions in thought and society, encounters between peoples and cultures, and perspectives on "us" and "them" will constitute major objects of study. The study of primary sources, discussion, and writing will be emphasized. The two semesters will be taught as a single year-long course, with the first semester a prerequisite for the second. The P-D-F grade option may not be elected for this course.

Themes for this section:

Underlying the individual texts of Antiquity and Modernity lies the opportunity to explore the construction, contestation, and common themes of the "West" as a concept (and a powerful reality) through analysis of some of the central texts of the so-called "Western intellectual canon." As with the fall semester of Core, our focus will be on close readings of the assigned texts, with the goal of developing your abilities to "read with the grain," "read against the grain," discuss texts thoughtfully and respectfully with your peers, and write in a clear, organized, and analytical manner.

As we move into the "modern" period of Western history, several themes come to the foreground, all of which interweave in some way questions of reason, the self, and the other. Such themes include the philosophical and social definitions of the autonomous individual, human relationships to nature, the types and uses (and misuses) of power, the relationship between mind and body, and the roles and voices of the socially disempowered, on whose backs rest the industrial revolution and the rise of Western global military and economic power. If you enjoy our work on these topics, you should consider continuing on to the optional third semester of Core, Critical and Alternative Voices.

Required texts:

- Machiavelli, Niccolò. *The Prince*. Ed. and trans. David Wootton. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1995. ISBN: 0872203166.
- Shakespeare, William. *The Tragedy of Othello the Moor of Venice*. Ed. Russ McDonald. New York: Penguin, 2001. ISBN: 0140714634.
- Descartes, René. *Discourse on Method*, 3rd ed. Trans. Donald A. Cress. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1998. ISBN: 0872204227.
- Harvey, William. *On the Motion of the Heart and Blood in Animals*. Amherst., NY: Prometheus Books, 1993. ISBN: 0879758546.
- La Mettrie, Julien Offray de. *Man a Machine*. Trans. Richard A. Watson and Maya Rybalka. Indianapolis: Hackett, 2004. ISBN: 0872201945.
- Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*. Trans. Donald A. Cress. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1992. ISBN: 0872201503.
- Kant, “What is Enlightenment.” In James Schmidt, ed., *What is Enlightenment: Eighteenth-century Answers and Twentieth-Century Questions*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996.
- Applebaum, Stanley, ed. *English Romantic Poetry: An Anthology*. Mineola, N.Y.: Dover Publications, 1996. ISBN: 0486292827
- Marx, Karl. *Selected Writings*. Ed. Laurence H. Simon. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1994. ISBN: 0872202186.
- Brontë, Emily. *Wuthering Heights*. Ed. Diane Long Hoeveler. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2002. ISBN: 061808486X.
- Kafka, Franz. *The Metamorphosis*. Ed. and trans. Stanley Corngold. New York: Bantam Dell, 2004. ISBN: 0553213695.
- Frayn, Michael. *Copenhagen*. New York: Anchor Books, 1998. ISBN: 0385720793.
- Morrison, Toni. *Beloved*. New York: Vintage. 2004. ISBN: 1400033411.

All course materials will also be on reserve in Penrose Library. Please note that library editions may have slightly different page numbers or slightly different wording from the editions available in the bookstore, but we are making an effort to ensure that they will be as closely matched as possible when they aren't exactly the same. They are still okay to use for my section.

Course requirements:

Preparation for class: Please come to class having thoroughly read and thought about the day's assignment. If you plan to keep your books, you should engage with the text as you read by highlighting or underlining important passages, words, and phrases, and making notes in the margins. If you don't plan to keep your books, or you're using the library copies, buy a notebook especially for Core and engage with the text by making notes as you read, being sure to write down the page numbers and/or line numbers of the passages on which you're commenting. Come to class with your book and your notes (or a photocopy and notes, if you're using the library reserve copies), plenty of spare writing paper, and writing utensils. *Be prepared, be alert, and be on time!*

Keeping track of assignments: Only rarely will I remind you about assignments that are due. This syllabus is your reminder: keep it in a prominent place, and check it regularly to make sure you know when each assignment is due. If you keep a calendar of any sort, it's a very good idea to put all of your major assignments on your calendar in order to plan ahead adequately for them.

Respectful participation in class discussion: Disagreement and debate are central parts of academic discussion; it is only by weighing our ideas against those of others that we can develop and strengthen our ideas and our own analytical processes. All productive academic debate, however, turns on two central principles: respect and listening. In this class, as in all classes at Whitman, you will be expected to treat each other with respect and to listen respectfully to others' ideas, regardless of how much you may disagree with them. Dismissiveness, offensive remarks, and more subtle forms of disrespect will not be tolerated in this classroom. Three easy guidelines will help us to ensure that everyone's voice is heard:

- ✓ **“Ouch!”** If a classmate says something that you find disrespectful (to you or to someone else), say “ouch!” You can help out your classmate by explaining what you found disrespectful and why.
- ✓ **“Oops!”** If you accidentally say something that another person finds disrespectful, say “Oops!” We're all learning, and sometimes we make mistakes and inadvertently hurt someone. Saying “oops” lets your classmates know that you've realized you made a mistake.
- ✓ **“Don't yuck my yum”** This is my personal favorite. Don't forget that what you may find to be a central good or truth in life may be anathema to someone else, and vice versa. If a classmate believes in or values something that you completely disagree with, it's OK to state your own values, but don't disparage your classmate's choices.

Grading:

Final grades in this course will be determined as follows:

Leading discussion.....	15 %
Essays (3 @ 15% each).....	45%
Annotated bibliography for research paper.....	5 %
Peer editing for research paper.....	5 %
Research paper.....	20 %
Class participation	10 %

Remember to keep all papers I return to you so that you can track your own grade in the course.

Leading discussion: Once during the semester it will be your responsibility to summarize the day's reading, suggest topics for discussion, and lead the class in discussing the reading. Please keep your summary to five concise and insightful minutes (you will be timed, and time management will be part of your grade), and please suggest at least three questions for discussion. We'll sign up for these sessions in class on Friday, January 18.

Essays: I will hand out topics for these 4-5 page essays in class one week before each essay is due. You may rewrite *one* (and only one) of these essays if you wish; your final grade on the essay will then be the average of your first grade and the rewrite grade. Rewrites are due two weeks after I return the paper. As with last semester, all papers must use Chicago style as presented in the Hacker style manual, and you may not use outside sources.

Research paper: This paper will serve as the capstone to both the writing aspects and the Western intellectual history aspects of Core. Your task will be to research the national debate over a required common first-year college course, and to take a position in that debate. (Note that there are a number of intermediate and “compromise” positions, so your own stance doesn't have to be simply “for” or “against.”) We'll have a special class session with a reference librarian who will

show you the tools to use in researching this question, and your first assignment for this project will be to turn in an annotated bibliography for your paper. (An annotated bibliography includes a sentence or two describing each work, in addition to the citation itself). You will also need to bring your pre-writing and a rough draft to class for peer editing, to be done as homework this time rather than as an in-class workshop. Your final paper should be 7-8 pages in length, excluding the bibliography (the 8th or 9th page), *which should not be annotated*. Our final exam session (Friday, May 9, from 9:00-11:00) will serve as a forum in which to present your positions in this debate, and papers are due in class on that day.

Class participation: Since this course relies heavily on discussion, it is extremely important that you be in class, on time and prepared, each day. Your active respect for others will be a part of your participation grade. **Students who miss more than four class sessions without informing me in advance will lose 50% of this portion of their grade.**

General policies for Core:

1. Writing assignments are to be set by each instructor, but there will be a minimum of four written assignments and fifteen pages of writing each semester, as well as a final evaluative exercise at the end of each semester.
2. Students who wish to change Core section may do so only at the semester break, prior to the beginning of second semester, by making a request to the Registrar. Students are not allowed to choose which section they would like to enter. Those students who seek to change sections will be assigned to other sections by the Registrar.
3. All assignments must be completed for a student to receive a passing grade. If a student fails to turn in a paper or to take an examination, that student must receive an F or an Incomplete for the semester.
4. The penalties for academic dishonesty are described in the Statement on Academic Honesty and Plagiarism that all students accept as proper rules for academic behavior when they arrive on campus. Any substantially plagiarized written assignment will not be considered a completion of the assignment, and will result in failing the course.
5. The grading criteria in the various sections are determined by each instructor. Some sections may place a greater emphasis upon some aspect of the students' work (papers, oral reports, participation in discussion, examinations, etc.) in the determination of a course grade. This course has a common set of readings, but the process of evaluation is unique to each section.
6. Attendance, itself, is necessary but not sufficient. Students must participate in the conversation.

Policies for this section:

Students with disabilities: If you have a disability and need my help in making this course fully accessible to you, please feel free to contact me, either in person or through the Academic Resource Center (527-5213). I'll be happy to help in whatever way I can.

Inclusive language: Inclusive language is the use of accurate and unbiased gender terminology (see Hacker pp. 20-21), and it is required in this course. It's important for a number of reasons. For one thing, language shapes how people think. When religious studies was considered to be the study of the beliefs of *man*, for instance, people (usually male scholars) tended to study male writers, male believers, male religious leaders, and so on simply because it didn't occur to them to study women as well. As a result, they had a less accurate understanding of religion than we have today. "Humanity" and "humans" are gender-inclusive terms; "man" and "men" are not.

Non-inclusive language also can be misleading, inaccurate, or vague. Traditional formal English, for example, requires that you use the singular pronoun “he” as a generic pronoun. Thus, you might say that “when a new member is initiated into the secret society, he must undergo several hours of ordeals.” People who read that sentence are left wondering whether “he” includes women or whether this secret society is for men only. The solution? When you use singular generic terms (like “one,” “anyone,” “a person,” etc.), use the combined pronoun “she or he.” Or, for a less awkward sentence, simply use a plural noun (“people,” “initiates,” “members,” etc.), because English has a non-gendered plural pronoun (“they”).

“Late fees”: Without advance notice, there will be no make-ups for discussion leading sessions. Late rewrites and rough drafts/pre-writing will not be accepted; the essays, bibliography, peer editing, and research paper will lose 5 percentage points for each day they are late (including weekends).

Academic dishonesty: Honesty is an integral part of academic learning; any form of cheating expresses gross disrespect for the efforts of your teacher, the hard work of your classmates, and your own privilege in having access to a quality education. I will not hesitate to report and pursue incidents of suspected academic dishonesty, including plagiarism and copying others’ assignments. **The maximum penalty for academic dishonesty is permanent expulsion from Whitman.**

This class is an educational safe zone. It welcomes and respects the viewpoints of students of all sexual orientations and genders as well as all races, ethnicities, religions, and abilities. All members of this learning community are expected to treat each other with respect and dignity, and to listen especially carefully to the voices (in text and in person) of cultural and social minorities.

Course Schedule

→ Watch for the arrows! They tell you when an assignment is due.

Week 1: Reason and rule

Monday, 1/14: Machiavelli, "Letter to Vittori," "Dedication," Chs. 1-11

Wednesday, 1/16: Read syllabus; Machiavelli, Chs. 12-20

Friday, 1/18: Machiavelli, Chs. 21-26

→ Sign up to lead a class discussion

Week 2: Self and other

Monday, 1/21: MLK Day – Whitman Symposium (extra credit opportunity!)

Wednesday, 1/23: Shakespeare, Act 1

Friday, 1/25: Shakespeare, Act 2

Week 3: Reason and tragedy

Monday, 1/28: Shakespeare, Act 3

Wednesday, 1/30: Shakespeare, Act 4

Friday, 2/1: Shakespeare, Act 5

Week 4: Self as subject and object of reason

Monday, 2/4: Descartes, Parts 1-2

Wednesday, 2/6: Descartes, Parts 3-4

Friday, 2/8: Descartes, Parts 5-6

Topics for Essay #1 available in class

Week 5: Scientific method – Reason, empiricism, and the human

Monday, 2/11: Harvey, "Dedication" (pp. 9-11), Chs. 1-2, 7-14

Wednesday, 2/13: La Mettrie, "Man a Machine" – read all

Friday, 2/15: Recap – Descartes, Harvey, La Mettrie

→ Essay #1 due in class

Week 6: Human inequality

Monday, 2/18: Presidents' Day – No class!

Wednesday, 2/20: Rousseau, pp. 1-18

Friday, 2/24: Rousseau, Part I

Week 7: Self and morality

Monday, 2/25: Rousseau, Part II

Wednesday, 2/27: Kant, "What is Enlightenment?" (on e-Reserves)

Friday, 2/29: Mid-semester overview

Topics for Essay #2 available in class

Week 8: Self and nature *Look up words you don't understand in the OED online!*****

Monday, 3/3: In *English Romantic Poetry*: Keats – "Bright Star," "Ode to a Nightingale," "Ode on a Grecian Urn," "Ode on Melancholy"; Wordsworth – "I Wandered Lonely As a Cloud," "My Heart Leaps Up When I Behold," "Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey," "Mutability"; Shelley, "Mutability" (handout)

Wednesday, 3/5: Poetry discussion

Friday, 3/7: Poetry discussion

→ Essay #2 due in class

~ SPRING BREAK: MARCH 8 THROUGH MARCH 23 ~

Week 9: Self, class, and capitalism

Monday, 3/24: Marx, "Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts" (pp. 54-97)

Wednesday, 3/26: Marx, "Theses on Feuerbach" (pp. 98-101), "Preface to a Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy" (pp. 209-213); "Toward a Critique of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*: Introduction," p. 28 only

Friday, 3/28: Marx, "Communist Manifesto" (pp. 157-186)

Week 10: Knowledge, power, and truth

Monday, 3/31: Session with reference librarian – Meet in Penrose Library!

Wednesday, 4/2: Brontë, Chs. 1-5

Friday, 4/4: Brontë, Chs. 6-12

Week 11: Self and other

Monday, 4/7: Brontë, Chs. 13-20

[Wednesday, 4/9: Brontë, Chs. 21-29]

[Friday, 4/11: Brontë, Chs. 30-34]

Note: I will be out of town on 4/9 and 4/11. You may attend other Core sections for extra credit. Please finish Brontë regardless!

Week 12: Late modernity – Instability in knowledge, the world, and the self

Monday, 4/14: Kafka, Chs. 1 and 2

→ **Annotated bibliography due in class**

Tuesday, 4/15: *Undergraduate Conference – Extra credit opportunity!*

Wednesday, 4/16: Kafka, Ch. 3

Topics for Essay #3 available in class

Friday, 4/18: Frayn, Act I

Week 13: Unstable, destabilizing, and destabilized – the atom and the self

Monday, 4/21: Frayn, Act II

Wednesday, 4/23: No class today – Read Morrison; concentrate on plot

→ **Essay #3 due in my box (Olin front office) by 4:00 pm**

Friday, 4/25: No class today – Finish Morrison; concentrate on plot

Week 14: Science, capitalism, self, other, power, tragedy, memory – Morrison's *Beloved*

Monday, 4/28: Discuss Morrison (read Hayman and Levit; theme – race and gender)

Wednesday, 4/30: Discuss Morrison (reading TBA; theme – self, nature, divine)

Friday, 5/2: Discuss Morrison (reading TBA; theme – trauma, memory, rememory)

→ **Research paper rough drafts due in class for peer editing**

Week 15: Modernity and postmodernity

Monday, 5/5: Discuss Morrison – How are each of the themes we've studied this semester reflected in *Beloved*?

→ **Peer editing due (Return the original draft to the author, along with your peer editing sheet; turn in a photocopy of the marked-up draft and the editing sheet to me)**

Final forum: Friday, May 9, 9:00-11:00, in our regular room. Research papers due in this class session.

Hooray! You're done! Have a great summer!