

**Philosophical Inquiry into the Modern World
Preliminary Tentative Syllabus (19 Jan. 2022)**

Course Code:	HUMA 3900
Course Title:	Philosophical Inquiry into the Modern World
Course Offered:	Spring Semester 2022: Feb 4 to May 11
Course Schedule:	Wed, Fri 4:30PM - 5:50PM
Course Location:	Rm 2303, Lift 17-18
Course Instructor:	Eric S. NELSON (Professor, Philosophy, HUMA)
Office Hours:	Wed, Fri 2:30PM to 4:00PM
TA:	Dennis Prooi

Please Note: Please be prepared for changes in scheduling and follow scheduling announcements throughout the semester. Classes are currently scheduled to be in-person. But classes can be mixed-mode or online only depending on the situation.

Course Description:

What does it mean to know? Can we genuinely know the natural world and truth? How can and do we come to know given the prevalence of dogma, error, relativeness, ideology, and skeptical doubt? These are some of the key questions we will pursue this semester.

This course offers an introductory survey of modern European philosophy from Galileo and the early modern scientific revolution to contemporary thinkers. In the first part of this course, our classes will examine the development and philosophical significance of the new sciences in relation to early modern epistemology (theory of knowledge), natural philosophy, and the philosophy of nature from Galileo to Kant. In the second part, we will explore changing conceptions of life, nature, and knowledge in philosophers such as Mill and Nietzsche in the wake of the Darwinian revolution in biology and its ideas of an elemental “struggle for existence.” In the third part, we will further inquire into the prospects and limits of understanding truth, the natural world, and knowledge in response to questions of errancy, skeptical uncertainty and doubt, social-political ideology, and the formation of the sense of the self and the real.

Course Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs):

1	Encourage skills in critical thinking, reading, and interpretation.
2	Improve the ability to understand, evaluate, and discuss ideas and arguments.
3	Learn diverse approaches and viewpoints in developing one’s own perspective.

**Philosophical Inquiry into the Modern World
Preliminary Tentative Syllabus (19 Jan. 2022)**

4	Foster understanding of the arguments, ideas, and the historical formation of modern European philosophy in the context of scientific and social transformations.
---	---

Course Outline

1.	<p>Introduction: February 4 (F)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction to the Course and introduction to Galileo, the Scientific Revolution, and the Emergence of the New Sciences • Optional Readings: short selections from Galileo (1623) and Bacon (1620)
<p>I. Early Modern Philosophy: knowledge, nature, and the new science</p>	
2-4.	<p>A new paradigm of knowledge, nature, and selfhood? February 9, 11, 16 (W, F, W)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A close reading of René Descartes, <i>Discourse on the Method</i>, (1) parts 1-2, (2) parts 3-4, (3) parts 5-6 (1637)
5.	<p>Mechanism and spirit - two ways of conceiving nature: Feb 18 (F)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Margaret Cavendish, <i>Philosophical Letters</i>, Letters 30–42 (1664) • Anne Conway, <i>Principles of the Most Ancient and Modern Philosophy</i>, chs. 8–9 (1692)
<p>Discussion I: Feb 18 to March 4 Online Class Discussion on nature in early modern philosophy (discussion question tba) (online only)</p>	
6.	<p>God and nature without teleology? Feb 23 (W)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Baruch Spinoza, appendix 1 from the <i>Ethics</i> (1677)
7.	<p>The rational order and perfection of nature and grace: Feb 25 (F)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • G.W. Leibniz, <i>Principles of Nature and Grace</i> (1714)
8-10.	<p>The challenge of skepticism: March 2, 4, 9 (W, F, W)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A close reading: David Hume, <i>An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding</i>, (1) sections 1-3, (2) sections 4-6, (3) sections 7 and 12 (1748) • Lady Mary Shepherd, critique of Hume on cause and effect from <i>An Essay upon the Relation of Cause and Effect</i> (1824)

**Philosophical Inquiry into the Modern World
Preliminary Tentative Syllabus (19 Jan. 2022)**

11.	<p>The transcendental critique of skepticism: March 11 (F)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Immanuel Kant, <i>Prolegomena</i> (selection) (1783) • Supplemental selection from Kant, <i>Critique of Pure Reason</i> (1781)
12	<p>March 16 (W): 4:30PM to 5:50PM (online only) Exam One: answer two of four essay questions. Assignment posted and due on CANVAS</p>
<p>II. The nineteenth-century and beyond: life, nature, and worldview</p>	
13.	<p>Nature as will and the negation of willing: March 18 (F)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arthur Schopenhauer, <i>World as Will and Representation</i> (selection) (1818/1844)
14.	<p>Nature and its struggles: March 23 (W)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • John Stuart Mill, <i>On Nature</i> (1873) • Supplemental: Charles Darwin on the struggle for existence (1859)
15-17.	<p>The errors of reason, truth, and morality? March 25, 30, April 1 (F, W, F)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A close reading: Friedrich Nietzsche, <i>Twilight of the Idols</i>, (1) pages 3-17, (2) pages 18-29, (3) pages 30-42 (1889)
18.	<p>The philosophy of worldviews and their conflict: April 6 (W)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wilhelm Dilthey, <i>The Types of World-View and Their Development in Metaphysical Systems</i> (selection, pages 251-262) (1911)
<p>Discussion II: March 18 to April 7 Online Class Discussion on nature in nineteenth-century philosophy (discussion question tba) (online only)</p>	
<p>III. truth, error, and the self</p>	
19.	<p>Concealment, errancy, and truth: April 8 (F)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Martin Heidegger, “On the Essence of Truth” (1930)
<p>No Classes: Spring Break (April 13, 15)</p>	
20.	<p>A debate over certainty and skepticism: April 20 (W)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • G. E. Moore, “Proof of an External World” (1939) • Ludwig Wittgenstein, <i>On Certainty</i> (selections) (1950-51)

**Philosophical Inquiry into the Modern World
Preliminary Tentative Syllabus (19 Jan. 2022)**

21.	<p>Skepticism and naturalizing knowledge: April 22 (F)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Willard Van Orman Quine, selections from “Two Dogmas of Empiricism” (1951) and “Epistemology Naturalized” (1969)
	<p>Discussion III: April 20 to May 8</p> <p>Online Class Discussion on truth in recent philosophy</p> <p>(discussion question tba) (online only)</p>
22.	<p>Can truth survive politics? April 27 (W)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hannah Arendt, “Truth and Politics” (1967)
23.	<p>Truth and the problem of ideology: April 29 (F)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rahel Jaeggi, “Rethinking Ideology” (2009)
24.	<p>The ethics of the real: May 4 (W)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alenka Zupancic, selection from <i>Ethics of the Real</i> (1995)
25.	<p>Hermeneutics of the subject: May 6 (F)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Michel Foucault, first lecture, pages 1-24, from <i>The hermeneutics of the subject: Lectures at the College de France</i> (1981-1982)
26.	<p>March 11 (W): 4:30PM to 5:50PM (online only)</p> <p>Exam Two: answer two of four essay questions.</p> <p>Assignment available and due on CANVAS</p>

Assessment:

- | | |
|---|-----|
| 1. Two Essay Exams: | 60% |
| 2. Three Online Discussions: | 30% |
| 3. Attendance and Class Participation: | 10% |

Further Details can be found on CANVAS:

1. **Essay exams on CANVAS:** each exam will be one hour and twenty minutes. Exam questions are based on course readings and lectures. They will be posted on CANVAS during one class period. Students will answer two of four questions in their own words on their own computers during this period.
2. **Online discussions on CANVAS:** each discussion will last two to three weeks. These require substantive online participation and discussion of the ideas and issues in question with your fellow students.
3. **Attendance and Class Participation:** these are expected and encouraged as key elements of your learning experience. Classes will be in person in-class, mixed-mode, or zoom only depending on circumstances. Pay attention to

**Philosophical Inquiry into the Modern World
Preliminary Tentative Syllabus (19 Jan. 2022)**

announcements.

Note:

- **No plagiarism allowed:** HKUST upholds academic integrity and has a **no plagiarism policy**. Plagiarism will result in failure of the course. For further information, see: <http://ugadmin.ust.hk/integrity/student-1.html>
- **Pay attention to schedule changes:** Make sure that you can receive CANVAS notifications, as some classes might be changed due to external circumstances.

Course Readings: Selections in Modern European Philosophy

- All readings and other materials are available on CANVAS.
- Readings are 5 to 20 pages in length.
- Supplemental optional or “b” readings are not required but will be mentioned in lectures and will help you further understand the required or “a” reading.