

**Course Code:** HUMA 3900-L1 (4261)  
**Course Title:** Philosophical Inquiry into the Modern World  
**Course Offered:** Fall Semester 2024: September 2 – November 29  
**Course Schedule:** Mo 3:00 pm - 4:20 pm and Fr 10:30 am - 11:50 am  
**Course Location:** Rm 4620, Lift 31-32  
**Course Instructor:** Eric S. NELSON (Professor, Philosophy, HUMA)  
**Office Hours:** Mo 1:00 to 2:30 pm and Fr 1:00 to 2:30 pm  
**TA:** Taylor Lau

**Course Description:**

What does it mean to know? What is truth? Can we genuinely know nature, society, or ourselves? How can and do we come to know given the prevalence of dogma, error, relativity, ideology, and skeptical doubt? These are a few key questions we will pursue this semester in the context of the development of modern European philosophy.

This course will offer an introductory survey of modern European thought from Galileo and the early modern scientific revolution to contemporary issues. In the first half of our course, classes will explore the development and philosophical significance of the new sciences in relation to early modern epistemology (theory of knowledge) and natural philosophy from Galileo and Descartes to Kant and Mill. In the second half, we will examine changing conceptions of nature, history, and society, inquiring into the prospects and limits of truth and knowledge in response to questions of the relativity of worldviews, errancy, skeptical uncertainty and doubt, and social-political ideology and power relations.

**Course Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs):**

1	Encourage skills in reading, interpretation, critical thinking, and argumentation.
2	Foster abilities to understand, evaluate, and discuss ideas and arguments.
3	Learn diverse approaches and viewpoints in developing one’s own perspective.
4	Develop understanding of the arguments, ideas, and the historical formation of Modern European philosophy in the context of modern scientific and social transformations.

## Course Outline and Schedule

1.	<b>Sept 2 (M): Introduction</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduction to the Course and introduction to Galileo, the Scientific Revolution, and the Emergence of the New Sciences</li> <li>• Preliminary Readings: short selection from Galileo, <i>The Assayer</i> (1623)</li> </ul>
<b>I. Early Modern Philosophy: knowledge, nature, and the new sciences</b>	
2-4.	<b>Sept 6, 9, 13 (F, M, F): A new paradigm of knowledge, nature, and selfhood</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Close reading: René Descartes, <i>Meditations</i> (1641), (1) chapters 1-2, (2) chapters 3-4, (3) chapters 5-6</li> </ul>
5.	<b>Sept 16 (M): God, nature, and the critique of teleology</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Baruch Spinoza, appendix 1 from the <i>Ethics</i> (1677)</li> </ul>
6.	<b>Sept 20 (F): Mechanism and spirit - two ways of conceiving nature</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Margaret Cavendish, <i>Philosophical Letters</i>, Letters 35-37, 42 (1664)</li> <li>• Anne Conway, <i>Principles of the Most Ancient and Modern Philosophy</i>, ch. 8 (1692)</li> </ul>
7.	<b>Sept 23 (M): The rational order and perfection of nature and grace</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• G.W. Leibniz, <i>Principles of Nature and Grace</i> (1714)</li> </ul>
8.	<b>Sept 27 (F): in-class Quiz 1 (Galileo to Leibniz)</b>
<b>II. Enlightenment and the nineteenth-century</b>	
9-11.	<b>Sept 30, Oct 4, Oct 7 (M, F, M): Empiricism and the challenge of skepticism</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 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)</li> <li>• Supplemental: Lady Mary Shepherd, critique of Hume on cause and effect from <i>An Essay upon the Relation of Cause and Effect</i> (1824)</li> </ul>
<b>Oct 11 (F): holiday - no class</b>	
12.	<b>Oct 14 (M): Skepticism or critical philosophy?</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Immanuel Kant, <i>Prolegomena</i> (selection) (1783)</li> <li>• Supplemental selection from Kant, <i>Critique of Pure Reason</i> (1781)</li> </ul>
13.	<b>Oct 18 (F): Enlightenment, Autonomy, and the Public</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Immanuel Kant, “What is Enlightenment?” (1784)</li> </ul>
14.	<b>Oct 21 (M): Naturalism and its struggles</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• John Stuart Mill, <i>On Nature</i> (1873)</li> <li>• Supplemental: Charles Darwin on the struggle for existence (1859)</li> </ul>

15.	<b>Oct 25 (F): Worldviews and their conflict</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wilhelm Dilthey, <i>The Types of World-View and Their Development in Metaphysical Systems</i> (selection, pages 251-262) (1911)</li> </ul>
<b>16.</b>	<b>Oct 28 (M): in-class Quiz 2 (Hume to Dilthey)</b>
<b>III. truth and knowledge</b>	
17.	<b>Nov 1 (F): What is truth?</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Martin Heidegger, “On the Essence of Truth” (1930)</li> <li>• Emmanuel Levinas, “Truth of Disclosure and Truth of Testimony” (1972)</li> </ul>
18.	<b>Nov 4 (M): Existentialism and gender</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• selections from Simone de Beauvoir, <i>The Second Sex</i> (1949)</li> </ul>
19.	<b>Nov 8 (F): Doubt and certainty</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• G. E. Moore, “Proof of an External World” (1939)</li> <li>• Ludwig Wittgenstein, <i>On Certainty</i> (selections) (1950-51)</li> </ul>
20.	<b>Nov 11 (M): Skepticism and naturalizing knowledge</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Willard Van Orman Quine, selections from “Two Dogmas of Empiricism” (1951) and “Epistemology Naturalized” (1969)</li> </ul>
21.	<b>Nov 15 (F): Can truth survive politics?</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hannah Arendt, “Truth and Politics” (1967)</li> <li>• Hannah Arendt, Postscript to <i>Eichmann in Jerusalem</i> (1964 edition)</li> </ul>
22.	<b>Nov 18 (M): Truth and ideology</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rahel Jaeggi, “Rethinking Ideology” (2009)</li> </ul>
23.	<b>Nov 22 (F): Debating the legacy of Modernity and the Enlightenment</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Selections from Jürgen Habermas, Enrique Dussel, Michel Foucault</li> </ul>
<b>24.</b>	<b>Nov 25 (M): in-class Quiz 3 (Heidegger to Foucault)</b>
<b>25.</b>	<b>Nov 29 (F): Group projects - poster session and brief presentations</b>

**Assessment** (100% of final grade):

1. Three in-class Quizzes = 60%
2. Group Posters = 10%
3. Attendance = 10%
4. Direct in-class participation and discussion = 10%
5. Random in-class brief individual or group assignments = 10%

**Notes on Assignments**

1. Quizzes will be a mixture of hand-written short essay, multiple choice, and fill in the blank questions. No devices, aids, or plagiarism will be permitted.

2. Group posters are a small group assignment (3-4 persons per group) where your group formulates an idea and analysis and presents it in printed poster form during our final meeting.
3. Every class you attend will increase your attendance grade.
4. Every class in which you make comments and ask questions will increase your participation grade.
5. Random short assignments will be to briefly answer or reflect on an in-class question.

**Note:**

- **No plagiarism allowed:** HKUST upholds academic integrity and has a **no plagiarism policy**. Plagiarism will result in failure of the course.
- **Pay attention to schedule changes:** Make sure that you can receive CANVAS notifications, as some classes might change 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.

**Further Details are available on CANVAS.**