

# Philosophical Inquiry into the Modern World

## Syllabus (February 10, 2023)\*

Course Code:	HUMA3900 / CORE3574
Course Title:	Philosophical Inquiry into the Modern World
Course Offered:	Spring Semester 2023, February 3 to May 8
Course Schedule:	Monday 15:00 – 16:20pm; Friday 10:30 – 11:50pm
Course Location:	Room 2503, Lift 25-26
Course Instructor:	Dennis PROOI (Lecturer, Philosophy, HUMA); <a href="mailto:hmdprooi@ust.hk">hmdprooi@ust.hk</a>
Office Hours:	Thursday, 13:30 – 14:45pm (Room 3348)
Teaching Assistant:	Kyung-ah NAM ( <a href="mailto:knamab@connect.ust.hk">knamab@connect.ust.hk</a> ) Office Hours: Monday, 13:00 – 15:00pm (HUMA PG Commons) by appointment only

### Course Description

That we can resolve our differences through reasonable debate is an ideal that lies at the heart of many contemporary institutions, from the university to the United Nations. Many people moreover seem optimistic that human ingenuity is capable of overcoming the severest problems of our times, such as economic crises and ecological disasters. The idea that we can determine our collective destiny through knowledge and debate has its roots in the Enlightenment and the scientific revolution that preceded it. But are we today truly as rational as we would like to believe, or have we taken a wrong turn somewhere along the way? And what if our faith in reason turns out to be the cause of, rather than the solution to, our present-day predicament?

This course offers an introduction to modern European philosophy. We will trace the development of the ideal of reason through history to our current time. In the first half, our classes begin by briefly examining ancient Greek thought, according to which man is a rational being who lives in a teleological universe, before moving on to consider early modern metaphysics, which preserves the idea that man is rational but in which, under the influence of advances in physics, the teleological nature of the universe is strongly contested. We then look into the revolution in thought, undertaken by Immanuel Kant, whereby metaphysical truth is no longer thought to be “out there” but part of the way in which our intellect orders the world for us. In the second half, after witnessing the belief in reason reach its pinnacle in G. W. F. Hegel, we survey the challenges

19<sup>th</sup>-century philosophy poses to the idea that man is a rational being and the universe a rational place. Finally, we examine 20<sup>th</sup>-century analyses of the socio-political construction of reason.

<b>Course Intended Learning Outcomes (CILOs)</b>	
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.
4	Foster understanding of the arguments, ideas, and the historical formation of modern European philosophy in the context of scientific and social transformations.

<b>Course Outline</b>	
<b><u>Introduction: The Idea(I) of Reason</u></b>	
1. February 3 (F)	<b>The public use of reason and its contemporary status</b> Jürgen Habermas, <i>The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere</i> , chapter 2
2. February 6 (M)	<b>Reason and the highest Form</b> Plato, <i>Republic</i> , book VII (selection)
3. February 10 (F)	<b>Teleology and the rational animal</b> Aristotle, <i>Physics</i> , book II sections 1-3, 8-9
<b><u>Part One: Early Modern Metaphysics</u></b>	
4. February 13 (M)	<b>Mind-body dualism and anti-teleological mechanist physics</b> René Descartes, <i>A Discourse on the Method</i> , part 4-5
5. February 17 (F)	<b>Corpuscularism</b> Thomas Hobbes, <i>Leviathan</i> , introduction & part 1, chapters 1, 2 & 5
6. February 20 (M)	<b>Substance monism</b> Baruch Spinoza, <i>Ethics</i> , book I propositions 1-15 & appendix

7. February 24 (F)	<b>Vitalism</b> Anne Conway, <i>Principles of the Most Ancient and Modern Philosophy</i> , chapters 7 & 9
8. February 27 (M)	<b>The reintroduction of teleology</b> G. W. Leibniz, <i>Principles of Nature and Grace</i>
<b><u>Part Two: Kant's Copernican Revolution</u></b>	
9. March 3 (F)	<b>Hume's sceptical challenge to metaphysics: the problem of causality</b> David Hume, <i>Treatise of Human Nature</i> , book I part 3 sections 1-6
10. March 6 (M)	<b>Taking on Hume's challenge</b> Immanuel Kant, <i>Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics</i> , preface & preamble
11. March 10 (F)	<b>The possibility of metaphysics as a science</b> Immanuel Kant, <i>Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics</i> , sections 4-5
12. March 13 (M)	<b>Resolving Hume's challenge</b> Immanuel Kant, <i>Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics</i> , sections 14-30
13. March 17 (F)	<b>The public and private uses of reason</b> Immanuel Kant, <i>What is Enlightenment?</i>
14. March 20 (M)	<b>Exam One</b>
15. March 24 (F)	<b>Reason as the world's ruling principle</b> G.W.F. Hegel, <i>The Philosophical History of the World</i> , introduction & section A
<b><u>Part Three: 19<sup>th</sup>-century Challenges to Reason</u></b>	
16. March 27 (M)	<b>Romantic criticism of systematic philosophy</b> Karoline von Günderode & Bettina Brentano-von Armin, <i>Günderode</i> (selection)
17. March 30 (F)	<b>Reason as ideology</b> Karl Marx & Friedrich Engels, <i>The German Ideology</i> , Volume I, preface & chapter 1 sections 1-4, chapter 2 sections 1, 6-8, chapter 3 section 1

18. April 3 (M)	<b>The human intellect in a non-rational universe</b> Arthur Schopenhauer, <i>Parerga and Paralipomena</i> , chapter 3 sections 27-39 & 50-56
19. April 14 (F)	<b>The invention of “truth” and the self-deception of reason</b> Friedrich Nietzsche, <i>On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral sense</i>
<b><u>Part Four: The Socio-Political Construction of Reason</u></b>	
20. April 17 (M)	<b>The mythology of the Enlightenment</b> Max Horkheimer & Theodor Adorno, <i>Dialectic of Enlightenment</i> , chapter 1
21. April 21 (F)	<b>Reason and the female Other</b> Simone de Beauvoir, <i>The Second Sex</i> , book II chapter 6
22. April 24 (M)	<b>The contingency of the universal</b> Michel Foucault, <i>What is Enlightenment?</i>
23. April 28 (F)	<b>Reason and the colonial Other</b> Edward Said, <i>Orientalism</i> , introduction
24. May 5 (F)	<b>An alternative to reason: science fiction and thinking-with</b> Donna Haraway, <i>Staying with the Trouble</i> , chapter 2
25. May 8 (M)	<b>Exam Two</b>

<b>Assessment</b>		
1	<b>Two exams</b> Exam questions are based on the course readings and lectures. Students have 80 minutes to answer four out of five questions.	30%*2
2	<b>Reflection essay</b> Students write a 700-word essay on one of the philosophers treated in the course, in which they concentrate on the exposition of a key idea and provide their personal reflection on it. Deadline: TBA (most likely one week after exam two). Students are allowed and encouraged to hand in a draft version of their essay before the last class on May 5 in order to receive feedback for improvement.	20%

3	<p><b>Participation</b></p> <p>Participation takes the form of online discussion (mandatory for all students) and in-class peer-reviewed presentations (optional). Students write a minimum of eight 200-word posts or replies on the Canvas discussion board over the course of the semester, in which they present their thoughts on a topic covered in the reading or the lectures. Optionally, every week a student may, if needed together with another student, choose to deliver a short presentation, which will be commented on by up to two other students. Participants receive a separate bonus. Details will be announced in class.</p>	20%
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**Additional notes:**

- All readings will be available on Canvas.
- No marks are awarded for attendance. Failure to attend class on a regular basis will result in a penalty. Further details regarding attendance requirements will be announced in class.
- HKUST upholds academic integrity and has a **no plagiarism policy** (see: <https://registry.hkust.edu.hk/resource-library/academic-integrity>). Plagiarism will result in failure of the course.

\* Be prepared for changes in the schedule. Regularly check Canvas for updates.