

History 337
European Intellectual History
Fall, 2006

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office hours: T, 12:30-2:30

Intellectual history deals with the mental tools men and women have used to understand themselves and their world. It seeks to reconstruct how people defined human nature and a just society, what they thought the physical world was like, what beliefs they held about supernatural forces and beings. This course asks how Europeans answered such questions over the 600 years from the late Middle Ages to World War I. These centuries witnessed dramatic changes both in ideas and in the situations in which intellectuals worked. But there were also surprising continuities in the questions that they asked, and in some of their answers. Hence this course is partly an examination of how individuals use and adapt the traditions they've inherited from the past, while also trying to meet the needs of their own time.

The course will have no textbook. Instead, we'll read and discuss ten works from the period; information on background and interpretation will be supplied in lectures. Students will be expected to prepare the readings for class discussions, and about 5 percent of the class grade will be based on a combination of attendance and class participation. There will also be a take-home mid-term (25 percent of class grade), take-home final (35 percent), and seven-page essay assignment, to be based on the assigned reading.

Topics and assignments

August 29-31: Introduction: definitions and methods

September 5-7: The medieval cultural synthesis

assigned: Thomas Aquinas, Law, Morality, and Politics, 11-26, 36-38, 44-55, 114-119, 176-214, 220-222, 231-246, 249-257, 263-272

September 12-14: The Renaissance and the problem of worldly action

assigned: Machiavelli, The Prince

September 19: UB CLASSES CANCELED

September 21-28: From Renaissance to Reformation

assigned: Thomas More, Utopia

October 3-5: Scientific Revolution and its social meanings

assigned: René Descartes, Discourse on Method

October 10-12: Politics in a post-religious setting

Assigned: John Locke, Second Treatise on Government

October 17-24: Enlightenment assumptions and the question of human nature
Assigned: Denis Diderot, Rameau's Nephew and D'Alembert's Dream

October 24: **Mid-term due**

October 26-31: Liberalism and the idea of improvement
Assigned: John Stuart Mill, On Liberty

November 2-9: Modernity, democracy, and fear
Assigned: Alexis de Toqueville, Democracy in America, 1-168 (in the original, volume 1)

November 14-16: The late nineteenth-century critique of western culture
Assigned: Friedrich Nietzsche, On the Genealogy of Morality

November 21-30: After catastrophe: reconstructing the bourgeois soul
Assigned: Sigmund Freud, Civilization and Its Discontents

November 23: THANKSGIVING HOLIDAY

November 28: **Essay due**

December 5-7: Western traditions and the post-modern condition

December 12: **Final exam due**