

Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences

Great Thinkers: Leading Paradigms of Western Culture

Name coordinator:	M. Kardaun – m.kardaun@maastrichtuniversity.nl
Full period of this minor:	1-3
ECTS credits in total of this minor:	24/30
Language of instruction:	English
Teaching methods:	PBL, Lectures
Assessment methods:	Participation, Presentation, Written exam
Number of available places:	60 students

Keywords:

History of Ideas, Rationalisation Processes, Demythologisation, History of Logic, Raison d'état, Individualism, Cultural Pessimism, Democracy, Enlightenment, Romanticism, Egalitarianism, the Death of God, Psychoanalysis, (Post)modernism, Political Ideologies, Marxism, Darwinism, Religion, Atheism, Imperialism, Racism, Western versus Non-Western World Views, Art works and the Unconscious

Full course description

The minor 'Great Thinkers' is an interdisciplinary programme that focuses on the roots of Western culture. The courses will familiarise you with turning points in the history of Western Ideas, such as the birth of rational thinking, the invention of individuality, the political plea for the separation of powers, and the notion of the so-called unconscious. You will study the world views of a range of thinkers, such as Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, Ockham, Machiavelli, Rousseau, Kant, Nietzsche, Marx, Darwin, Freud, Arendt, and Jung. As such, the minor is meant for ambitious students who are looking for an intellectually challenging programme and are willing to invest in their *Bildung*.

Course objectives

The minor will enable you

- * to gain insight into the fundamental characteristics of Western culture by studying the views of important thinkers within their social and historical context;
- * to train yourself in critical thinking and analytic skills;
- * to reflect upon the underlying philosophical assumptions of the discipline(s) you are studying at your own faculty;
- * to reflect upon the Western canon and its supposed superiority.

Practical information

The complete minor programme is a unified whole, comprising a sequence of three courses (The Birth of Reason – Modernity and Its Discontents – Great Books and Debates). Successfully completing all three courses will earn you the 30 ECTS minor certificate.

However, it is also possible to sign up for one or two individual courses. Successfully completing the first two courses (The Birth of Reason – Modernity and Its Discontents) will entitle you to the 24 ECTS minor certificate.

Prerequisites:



None

Course period 1: The Birth of Reason

Course code: MGT3000

Course Period: 1

ECTS credits of this course: 12

Instruction language: English

Coordinator: M. Kardaun:

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methods: PBL, Lecture(s)

Assessment methods: [Participation](#), [Presentation](#), [Written exam](#)

Keywords

History of Ideas, Rationalisation Processes, Demythologisation, History of Logic, Raison d'état

Full course description

The first course will take you on a journey of discovery from Antiquity to early Modernity. You will study and contextualize the amazing world views of leading thinkers of Antiquity (the Pre-Socratics, Sophocles, and 'the big three', viz. Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle), the Middle Ages (among others Augustine, Thomas Aquinas and William of Ockham) and Early Modernity (featuring Machiavelli). Emphasis will be on what triggered their ideas and how these ideas contributed to today's rationalised, disenchanted and anthropocentric world view. Finally, we will discuss some conspicuous aspects of the Western intellectual inheritance with regard to environment, human rights, political (non-)inclusivity, (in)equality, animals' rights.

Course objectives

You will

- learn to recognise the theoretical assumptions underlying the dominant paradigms of today's global society;
- be able to analyse, evaluate, and reflect upon the complex arguments brought forward by the great thinkers studied in this course;
- enhance your critical thinking and flexibility of mind.

Prerequisites

None

Course period 2: Modernity and Its Discontents

Course code: MGT3001

Course Period: 2

ECTS credits of this course: 12

Instruction language: English

Coordinator: R. Gabriëls: r.gabriels@maastrichtuniversity.nl Teaching

methods: PBL, Lecture(s)

Assessment methods: [Participation](#), [Presentation](#), [Written exam](#)

Keywords

Individualism, Cultural Pessimism, Democracy, Enlightenment, Romanticism, Egalitarianism, the Death of God, Psychoanalysis, (Post)modernism, Political Ideologies

Full course description

The second course will cover the emergence of new ideas that structured modern life and society up to today. Many leading ideas and principles from the political, social, and cultural world (such as political ideologies, naturalised world views, and optimism about the potential of science) as well as opposition against them can be traced to Enlightenment thinkers and Romantic views. This course will present major Western thinkers (Descartes, Locke, Voltaire, Rousseau, Kant, Tocqueville, Hegel, Marx, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Freud, Weber, Arendt) who shaped modern society and culture from the eighteenth to the twentieth century. Themes will include the rise of individualism, belief in progress, cultural pessimism, the death of God, the emergence of democratic movements, psychoanalysis, and the opposition between Western and Eastern philosophy.

Course objectives

You will learn about

- the intensifying processes of rationalisation that emerged during the Enlightenment;
- the opposition to these developments in the nineteenth and twentieth century, discussing such values as freedom, justice, and authenticity;
- the processes underlying the emergence of political ideologies and alternative perspectives on Western culture.

Furthermore, you will learn to analyse, evaluate, and reflect upon the complex arguments brought forward by the great thinkers studied in this course.

Prerequisites

None

Course period 3: Great Books and Debates

Course code: MGT3002

Course Period: 3

ECTS credits of this course: 6

Instruction language: English

Coordinator: M. Kardaun:

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methods: PBL, Lecture(s)

Assessment methods: [Participation](#), [Presentation](#), [Written exam](#)

Keywords

Marxism, Darwinism, Religion, Atheism, Imperialism, Racism, Western versus Non-Western World Views, Art works and the Unconscious

Full course description

'Great Books and Debates' comprises a series of sessions in which key readings of Western culture will be read, thoroughly contextualised, and discussed in depth. You will read (excerpts from) highly influential books, such as Karl Marx's Capital, Darwin's Origin of Species, Nietzsche's Antichrist, and Carl Gustav Jung's Man and His Symbols.

Course objectives

You will

- recognize the roots of some of the major controversies in contemporary Western culture, such as capitalism versus the call for social justice, perfectionism versus an ideal of completeness, Darwinism versus a religious understanding of what it means to be human, techno-optimism versus the power of the unconscious.
- learn how to analyse, evaluate, and reflect upon the complex arguments featuring in the controversies studied in this course.

Prerequisites

None