

History 144-401: Foundations of Modern Thought: Secularism and its Discontents in Modern European Thought

Spring 2019

College Hall 318

Tues/Thurs 12:00-1:30

WARREN BRECKMAN

College Hall 206E

Office Hours: Tuesday 1:30-3:00

Or by Appointment

215-898-8518

breckman@ sas.upenn.edu

“God is dead,” declared Friedrich Nietzsche, “and we have killed him.” Nietzsche's words came as a climax of a longer history of skepticism, criticism of, and dissent toward, the religious foundations of European society and politics. The critique of religion had vast implications for the meaning of human life, the nature of the person, and the conception of political and social existence. The course will explore the intensifying debate over religion in the intellectual history of Europe, reaching from the Scientific Revolution and the Enlightenment to the twentieth century. There is no straight line from belief to atheism, however. Indeed, the age of Enlightenment witnessed a proliferation of new conceptions of religion as skeptical thinkers confronted the apparent conflict between faith and reason. Orthodox Christians dug in their heels in resistance to these seemingly dangerous currents, yet some religious thinkers responded with nuanced arguments that did not simply reject the currents of modern thought. Modernity is not synonymous with unbelief, but rather with the dialectical tensions that were spawned between the impulse to liberate humans from the gods and the imperative to reimagine religion in light of the skeptical challenge.

Course Requirements:

Assignments: **Take-home mid-term exam** (5 pages) due **Thursday, February 21, at 4:00 (please email your exam to me)**, and a cumulative **take-home final exam** (8 pages) due **Monday, May 6, at 10:00 a.m.**

Mid-Term Exam	30%
Final Exam	50%
Participation	20%

You may write an **optional paper** on a topic of your choice, which will count for 30% of your final-exam grade. The optional paper will be due on May 13. **You must discuss your topic with me before writing, and you must still pass the final examination to pass the course.**

Note: Most of the assigned reading in this course is primary. Lectures will provide information about the social and political context of these figures, as well as interpretations of the texts. You cannot do well in the exams if you do not attend lectures. Attendance is required.

Course Materials:

The following books are available for purchase in paperback at the Penn Bookstore:

Warren Breckman, ed. *European Romanticism: A Brief History with Documents*

Charles Guignon, ed. *Existentialism: Basic Writings*

The above books are also available in the Rosengarten Reserve Library

All other readings are in the Bulk Pack available at Campus Copy Center on Walnut St.

Jan 17 Introduction

Jan 22 The Coming of the Enlightenment

“The Scientific Revolution and the Enlightenment,” 635-652

Jan 24 Reason and Faith in the Age of the Scientific Revolution

Francis Bacon, “The Great Instauration,” 82-88; Galileo Galilei, “Letter to the Grand Duchess Christina,” 43-58; Blaise Pascal, “The Wager,” 119-122

Jan 29 At the Origins of the Radical Enlightenment

René Descartes, “I Think, Therefore I Am,” 181-185; Spinoza, “To Henry Oldenburg (September 1661),” 122-123; Spinoza, “Ethics Demonstrated in the Geometrical Manner,” 318-322

Jan 31 Spinoza, contd

Feb 5 Empiricism, God and Toleration

Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, 185-187; John Locke, “A Letter Concerning Toleration,” 81-90; Voltaire, “On Mr. Locke,” 190-194

Feb 7 Voltaire’s Deism

Margaret Jacob, “The Social Meaning of Newtonianism,” 40-53; Voltaire, “Reflections on Religion,” 115-133; Voltaire, “On Descartes and Newton,” 60-65

Feb 12 Skeptics and Atheists

Pierre Bayle, “On Superstition and Tolerance,” 75-81; David Hume, “Of Miracles and the Origin of Religion,” 109-115; Edward Gibbon, “The Progress of Superstition,” 150-155; Baron d’Holbach, “No Need of Theology ... Only of Reason,” 140-150

Feb 14 Catch Up and Review

Feb 19 No Class: Pick Up Midterm after 10 am

Feb 21 No Class: Midterm is due by 4:00 pm

Feb 26 The Varieties of Romantic Spirituality

Breckman, "A Revolution in Culture," in *European Romanticism*; Wilhelm Heinrich Wackenroder, "Of Two Wonderful Languages and their Mysterious Power," in *European Romanticism*, 43-47; Novalis, "Christianity or Europe: A Fragment," in *European Romanticism*, 47-61

Feb 28 The Varieties of Romantic Spirituality

William Wordsworth, "Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey," in *European Romanticism*, 71-75; François-René de Chateaubriand, *The Genius of Christianity*, in *European Romanticism*, 84-94

March 5-7 Spring Break

March 12 Guest Lecture: Religion and Painting in the Nineteenth Century

Breckman, "The Nineteenth Century: Introduction," *Cambridge History of Modern European Thought*, vol. 1; Guest Lecture by Dr. Cordula Grewe: Religion and Painting in the Nineteenth Century

March 14 Radical Critique of Religion: Young Hegelianism

Breckman, "The Young Hegelians: Philosophy as Critical Praxis"; Hegel, "Reason in History," 12-18; Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, xxxiii-xliv, 1-32;

March 19 Radical Critique of Religion, contd

Karl Marx, "Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*: Introduction," in Tucker, 53-54

March 21 Kierkegaard and the Origins of Religious Existentialism

Søren Kierkegaard, "On Himself," in Kaufmann, *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre*, 83-99; Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, in *Existentialism: Basic Writings*, 18-47

March 26 Kierkegaard Contd

March 28 Thinking with a Hammer

Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, Book I, Book III, Book IV, §283, §285, §434, §354, §355

April 2 Nietzsche, contd

April 4 Religious Existentialism

Edward Baring, "Existentialism," in *Cambridge History of Modern European Thought*, vol. 2; Karl Jaspers, "Kierkegaard and Nietzsche," 158-184

April 9 Religious Existentialism

Gabriel Marcel, "On the Ontological Mystery," 86-107; Martin Buber, "I and Thou," 181-188

April 11 No Class

April 16 Atheistic Existentialism: Sartre

Sartre, "The Humanism of Existentialism," 290-308

April 18 Atheistic Existentialism: Camus

Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, 312-315; Camus, "Absurd," 192-201

April 23 Catch Up

April 25 Film: "The Unbelievers"

April 30 Conclusion

Breckman, "Secular Revival," 203-212

.....
Pick-up TAKE-HOME FINAL on Friday, May 3, after 10:00 a.m.
FINAL EXAM is due on Monday, May 6, at 10:00 a.m.