HUMN 150 – Art, Nature, Knowledge

For out of the five and twenty centuries over which the memory and learning of men extends, you can hardly pick out six that were fertile in sciences of favourable to their development. In times no less than in regions there are wastes and deserts. For only three revolutions and periods of learning can properly be reckoned: one among the Greeks, the second among the Romans, and the last among us, that is to say, the nations of Western Europe. And to each of these hardly two centuries can justly be assigned.

Francis Bacon, *Novum Organum* (1620)

Course Logistics:

HUMN 150.01
MF 1-1:52, Taylor 210; W 7-8:52, Coleman 221
Instructor: John Hunter
Office: Carnegie 209D (through 209A)
Office Hours: T 10-12, F 10-12, or by appointment
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Course Description:

This course will chart some of the most important intellectual, political, and artistic trends in the West from the Renaissance to the nineteenth century. We will examine how concepts like “the Renaissance,” “the Reformation,” “the Scientific Revolution,” and “the Enlightenment” came into being and the ways in which they represent (or misrepresent) the history of this period. Along the way, we will examine how continuities and discontinuities in Western thought have been established and continue our exploration of how (or if) this intellectual heritage resonates in the present.

Book List:

E-reserve (password is “pico”) containing:

- Francis Bacon, “The Four Idols” from *The New Organon*
- Charles Darwin, extracts from *The Origin of Species* and *The Descent of Man*
- René Descartes, from *Discourse on Method* and *Meditations*
- Desiderius Erasmus, selected letters
- Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*
- Thomas Hobbes, extracts from *Leviathan*
- David Hume, “Abstract” from *A Treatise on Human Nature*
- Immanuel Kant, “What is Enlightenment?”
- Pierre Simon Laplace, *A Philosophical Essay on Probability*
- Martin Luther, “Letter to the Christian Nobility of the German Nation”
- Niccolò Machiavelli, extracts from *Discourses on Livy*
- Pico della Mirandola, “On the Dignity of Man”
- Isaac Newton, extracts from the *Principia Mathematica* (“Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy”)
- William Tyndale, “Luther’s Prologue to the Book of Romans”
- James McNeill Whistler, “Mr. Whistler’s Ten O’Clock”
- Mary Wollstonecraft, selections from *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*

Books (available in the bookstore)

- René Descartes, *The Discourse on Method* and *Meditations on First Philosophy*, trans. Cress (Hackett)
Henrik Ibsen, *A Doll’s House*, trans. McGuinness (Faber)
Marx, *The Communist Manifesto* (International)
Marlowe, *Dr. Faustus*, ed. Keefer (Broadview)

**Schedule:**

*(Re)Birth Pangs: Early Modernity and the Idea of Renewal*

**Week One. January 18 and 20. Rebirth and Representation.**

Course Introduction by Prof. John Hunter
Lecture on Northern Renaissance art by Dr. Mary Brantl
 Readings: selections from “On the Dignity of Man,” Erasmus’s letters

**Week Two. January 23, 25, and 27. Knowledge and Power I – The Limits of Learning.**

Christopher Marlowe, *Dr. Faustus*. Lecture by Prof. John Hunter (comparative humanities)

**Week Three. January 30, February 1, and 3. Knowledge and Power II – Humanism and Political Power.**

Machiavelli, *The Prince*, especially ch. 5-9, 17-18, 21-25; letter; *The Discourses on Livy*, Book One: intro, chapters 2, 25, 27, 28; Book Two: intro, chapters 13, 29; Book Three: chapter 1. Lecture by Prof. Elena Past (Italian)

**Week Four. February 6, 8, and 10. The German Reformation**


**Seventeenth-Century Revolutions: Science, Art, Politics**

**Week Five. February 13, 15, and 17. Hearing Different Harmonies.**


**Week Six. February 20 , 22, and 24. The End of Tradition.**


**FEBRUARY 24: FIRST ESSAY DUE**

**Week Seven. February 27, March 1, and 3. The New Law of Nature.**


**Week Eight. March 6, 8, and 10. Universal Motion and the Problem of Determinism**

Isaac Newton, selections from *Principia Mathematica*; Laplace, selections from “A Philosophical Essay on Probability; David Hume, selections from *A Treatise on Human Nature*. Lecture by Prof. Tom Solomon (physics).

**MARCH 10: MID-TERM EXAMINATION**
Week Nine. March 13, 15, and 17.

SPRING BREAK

Week Ten. March 20, 22, and 24. The Limits of Freedom


Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*; Mary Wollstonecraft, selections from *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*. Lecture by Prof. Ghislaine McDayter (English).


The “Evolution” of Modern Art. Lecture by Dr. Mary Brantl

Week Thirteen. April 10, 12, and 14. Humanity and Nature

Charles Darwin, selections from *The Origin of Species* and *The Descent of Man*. Lecture by Prof. Mark Spiro (biology).

**NB: CLASS CANCELLED ON APRIL 14**


**APRIL 21: SECOND ESSAY DUE**

Week Fifteen. April 24, 26, and 28. Representing the Unthinkable.

Henrik Ibsen, *A Doll’s House*. Lecture by Prof. Slava Yastremski (Russian and comparative humanities)

Week Sixteen. May 1.

Course Conclusion

Assignments:

Essays (40%) – two essays of 10 pages in length, due February 24 and April 21. A one-page abstract is due one week prior to the deadline, and a conference to discuss the abstract and/or a rough draft may be scheduled as well

Mid-term Exam (15%) – a test on the material covered in the first-half of the course

Class participation (15%) – attendance and participation in lectures and seminars

Final Exam (30%) – a three-hour final exam during the scheduled exam period

Comprehensive Oral Exam (pass/fail) – an optional oral exam for those students who wish to join the Humanistic Scholars Program

Contractual Obligations:

All late assignments will be penalized at a rate of one grade unit per day (i.e. a B becomes a B- and so forth). Technological excuses for lateness (“My printer cartridge ran out . . .”); “My roommate borrowed my laptop
for the week-end . . .”; “My dog ate my hard drive . . .” etc.) will not be accepted, so please don’t try them.

Extensions for the essay will be readily granted, provided that you ask me at least a week in advance. After that point, they will be granted very selectively, usually only for medical reasons.