

MODERNITY AND THE CRISIS OF VALUE
(HUMS 288 / ENGL 284 / LITR 246)

Spring 2020
W 3:30-5:20pm
WLH 115

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What is genuinely valuable? What makes one thing better than another? How can we make judgments of value that transcend personal or group prejudice? These questions have come to seem impossible to ask, let alone answer. And yet they remain central to our lives, especially in a time of conflict so intense it threatens thought. In order to gain insight into our predicament, this course offers a moral psychology of the human subject since 1800: an account of the transformations of human consciousness that accompanied the social changes of modernization, including the rise of capitalism and democratic egalitarianism, the decline of aristocratic and religious authority, and the growth of technology and the mastery of nature. Readings are split evenly between social theory and literature, and include Hegel on the master/slave dialectic, Marx on alienated labor, Nietzsche on nihilism and the revaluation of values, James on religious experience, Du Bois on double consciousness, Weber on rationalization and disenchantment, Adorno and Horkheimer on the dialectic of enlightenment, and poetry and prose texts by Wordsworth, Emerson, Thoreau, Whitman, Dickinson, Stevens, and Baldwin that, amid modernity's crises of transcendence, reground value in persons, things, and existence itself. Students will also develop their own methods of judgment and discrimination in order to discover what these critical practices might look like in 2020. We will ask: What criteria of value can we bring to bear upon works of art and thought? What does it mean to "get it right" in the humanities as opposed to the sciences? What is the relation between a fact and an insight? Above all, we will seek to grasp how acts of judging and valuing are central to what it means to be a person.

Course Requirements

Careful preparation; attendance; active participation (20%)
Short paper: 5 pp. (20%)
Reading responses: 1-2 pp. (20%)
15 min. in-class presentation (10%)
Final paper: 10-12 pp. (30%)

*A list of required texts will be posted shortly on Canvas, and they will be available at the Yale Bookstore. Other texts will be provided as PDFs, as marked below.

Schedule of Readings (subject to change)

1. 1/15: Introduction to the course

Optional background readings:

Geoffrey Hartman, "Romanticism and Anti-Self-Consciousness" [PDF]

Robert Pippin, introduction to *Modernism as a Philosophical Problem* [PDF]

Marshall Berman, introduction to *All that is Solid Melts into Air* [PDF]

Jürgen Habermas, chs. 1 and 12 of *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* [PDF]

2. 1/22: William Wordsworth: "Preface" to *Lyrical Ballads*, "The Old Cumberland Beggar," "Tintern Abbey," "Michael," "Resolution and Independence," "Ode: Intimations of Immortality," "The Solitary Reaper," "Elegiac Stanzas"

3. 1/29: G. W. F. Hegel: "Lordship and Bondage" from the *Phenomenology of Spirit* [PDF]; Alexandre Kojève, "In Place of an Introduction" in *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel* [PDF]; Judith Butler, *Subjects of Desire*, ch. 1 [PDF]

4. 2/5: Karl Marx: *Economic-Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844* ("Estranged Labor" and "Private Property and Communism") in *Marx-Engels Reader*, pp. 70-93; "Theses on Feuerbach" [1845] pp. 143-45; *Manifesto of the Communist Party* [1848], p. 469-500; *Capital, Vol. 1* [1867]: on commodities, pp. 302-312, 319-29

5. 2/12: Ralph Waldo Emerson: "Self-Reliance," "Circles," "The Poet," "Experience"

6. 2/19: Henry David Thoreau: *Walden* ("Economy"; "Where I Lived, What I Lived For"; "Sounds"; "Solitude"; "The Bean-Field"; "The Ponds"; "Higher Laws"; "Brute Neighbors"; "The Pond in Winter"; "Spring"; "Conclusion"); "Civil Disobedience"

7. 2/26: Walt Whitman: 1855: "Song of Myself" sections 1-11, 21-33, 50-52; 1856: "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry"; 1860: "As I Ebb'd With the Ocean of Life"; "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking"; 1865-66: "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd"; selections from Civil War hospital sections of *Specimen Days* [1882]

8. 3/4: Emily Dickinson: "Success is counted sweetest" (Franklin 112/Johnson 67); "I should have been too glad, I see" (F283/J103); "There's a certain slant of light" (F320/J258); "I felt a funeral in my brain" (F340/J280); "The soul has bandaged moments" (F360/J512); "After great pain a formal feeling comes" (F372/J341); "I dwell in possibility" (F466/J657); "Because I could not stop for death" (F479/J712); "There is a pain so utter" (F515/J599); "I heard a fly buzz when I died" (F591/J465); "The brain is wider than the sky" (F598/J632); "The tint I cannot take is best" (F696/J627); "I cannot live with you" (F706/J670); "My life had stood a loaded gun" (F764/J754); "Four trees upon a solitary acre" (F778/J742); "Tell all the truth but tell it slant" (F1263/J1129)

9. 3/25: Friedrich Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals* (read all); other selections [PDF]

10. 4/1: William James: "Is Life Worth Living?"; "The Sick Soul"; "Pragmatism and Humanism"; "The Energies of Men"

Wallace Stevens, selected poems: "Sunday Morning," "The Snow Man," "Tea at the Palaz of Hoon," "The Idea of Order at Key West," "The Poems of Our Climate," "Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction," "Final Soliloquy of the Interior Paramour," "Prologues to What Is Possible," "The World as Meditation," "Of Mere Being"; Eleanor Cook, glosses from *A Reader's Guide to Wallace Stevens* [PDF]

Optional: David Bromwich, "Stevens and the Idea of the Hero" [PDF]

11. 4/8: W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, chs. 1-5; last 2 paragraphs of 6; 9-14

12. 4/15: Max Weber, "Science as Vocation" [PDF]; T. W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, from *Dialectic of Enlightenment*: "The Concept of Enlightenment" and "Excursus 1: Odysseus or Myth and Enlightenment"

13. 4/22: James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time*

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Further reading:

Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* and *Sources of the Self*; Hans Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*; Jurgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*; Robert Pippin, *Modernism as a Philosophical Problem* and *The Persistence of Subjectivity*; Steven Smith, *Modernity and its Discontents*; Martin Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology"; Isaiah Berlin, "Two Concepts of Liberty," "The Counter Enlightenment," "JS Mill and the Ends of Life"; Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (ch. 6); Immanuel Kant, "What is Enlightenment?"; Michel Foucault, "What is Enlightenment?"; M. H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism*; Anthony Kronman, *Confessions of a Born-Again Pagan*; Rahel Jaeggi, *Alienation*; Marshall Berman, *All That is Solid Melts into Air*; Seyla Benhabib, *Critique, Norm and Utopia*; Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*; David Hume, "Of the Standard of Taste"; John Guillory, *Cultural Capital*, ch. 6, "The Discourse of Value," 269-340; PB Shelley, "A Defence of Poetry"; Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction; The Rules of Art*; Schiller-->Marx, John Ruskin, William Morris; Barbara Herrnstein Smith, *Contingencies of Value*, ch. 3; Elaine Scarry, *On Beauty and Being Just*; Martha Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge*; Simone Weil, *Notebooks; Gravity and Grace*; Iris Murdoch, "The Sovereignty of Good"; Geoffrey Hill, *Inventions of Value*; Allen Grossman, *True-Love: Essays on Poetry and Valuing*; Stanley Cavell, *The Claim of Reason*; Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History* (ch. on Weber: "Distinction betw. Facts and Values"); Justin Smith, *Irrationality*; Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*; Simmel, "The Metropolis and Mental Life"; Herbert Marcuse, "The Aesthetic Dimension" in *Eros and Civilization*; Gayatri Spivak, introduction to *An Aesthetic Education in a Globalized World*; Jacques Rancière, *Aesthetics and its Discontents*, 26-36; Paul de Man, "Kant and Schiller" in *Aesthetic Ideology*; Paul de Man, "Literary History and Literary Modernity," in *Blindness and Insight*; Stanley Rosen, Introduction to *Hermeneutics as Politics*; Martin Hägglund, *This Life* (sections on Marx and value); Michael Clune, "Judgment and Equality"