

Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences

Minor Great Thinkers: Leading Paradigms of Western Culture (not for AC/CW students) Coordinator: M. Kardaun

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 Said. 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*.

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.

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). However, it is also possible to sign up for the individual courses.

Good to know: *Studium Generale* will offer a series of lectures devoted to a number of thinkers addressed in the minor. This series will run parallel to the first two courses of the minor, and is open to students of the minor.

For any questions concerning the minor 'Great Thinkers' you may contact the Minor Coordinator Dr M. Kardaun at: m.kardaun@maastrichtuniversity.nl.

The Birth of Reason

- MGT3000
- Period 1: 03 Sep 2018 – 26 Oct 2018
- ECTS credits: 12
- Instruction language: English
- Coordinator: J. Spruyt
- Teaching methods: PBL, Lecture(s)
- Assessment methods: Assignment, Written exam, Participation
- 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 ideas of leading thinkers of Antiquity (Pre-Socratics, Sophocles, and the big three, viz. Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle), of the Middle Ages (among others Augustine, Thomas Aquinas and William of Ockham) and of Early Modernity (featuring Machiavelli). Emphasis will be on how their ideas came into being and paved the way for a rationalised, disenchanted and anthropocentric world view (with a profound disregard of animals and other more natural forms of life), and on how they contributed to the further development of culture and society.

Course objectives

Students 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.

Modernity and Its Discontents

- MGT3001
- Period 2: 29 Oct 2018 – 21 Dec 2018
- ECTS credits: 12
- Instruction language: English
- Coordinator: M. Doorman
- Teaching methods: PBL, Lectures(s)
- Assessment methods: Assignment, Written exam, Participation
- Keywords: Naturalism, Pessimism, Nihilism, Egalitarianism, (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 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, cultural pessimism, the death of God, the emergence of democratic movements, psychoanalysis, and the opposition between Western and Eastern philosophy.

Course objectives

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

Great Books and Debates

- MGT3002
- Period 3: 07 Jan 2019 – 1 Feb 2019
- ECTS credits: 6
- Instruction language: English
- Coordinator: M. Kardaun
- Teaching methods: PBL, Lecture(s)
- Assessment methods: Participation, Assignment
- Keywords: Marxism, Darwinism, Religion, Atheism, Imperialism, Orientalism

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 Edward Said's *Orientalism*.

Course objectives

Students will:

- recognise the background of some of the major controversies in contemporary Western culture, such as inequality versus social justice, Darwinism versus religion, vitalism versus nihilism, orientalism versus Occidentalism;
- learn how to analyse, evaluate and reflect upon the complex arguments featuring in the controversies studied in this course.