COURSE DESCRIPTION

In the late eighteenth century Immanuel Kant proclaimed his age to be “the genuine age of criticism.” He went on to develop the critique of reason, which set the stage for many of the themes and problems that have preoccupied Western thinkers for the last two centuries. This fall quarter course is intended as an introduction to these themes and problems as encountered through several of the most influential scholars of the long 19th century. Following a consideration of Kant, we will read selected texts by Hegel, Baudelaire, Schlegel, Marx, Darwin, Nietzsche, DuBois, Weber, and Heidegger.

This course is the first of a two-course sequence. There are no prerequisites for this course, but it is intended specifically for first-year Ph.D. students in Modern Thought & Literature. First-year Ph.D. students in English will also have preference. Please note that the instructors’ approval is required for enrolling in this class. The course will be capped at 12 students.

REQUIRED TEXTS

Kant, Immanuel. *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*
Darwin, *The Origin of Species*. Available at Darwin online.
DuBois, W.E.B. *The Souls of Black Folk*
Hegel, G.W.F. *The Phenomenology of Spirit*
Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Genealogy of Morals*
Weber, Max. *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*
Various Authors. *Course Reader*
Note: Books are available at the Stanford Bookstore. If you opt to buy them elsewhere, please take note of the editions we have ordered. Selected readings in the Course Reader (CR) will be available for download through Stanford Coursework.

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

NOTE: Because of the nature of this class some of the readings are very demanding. The effectiveness of your learning depends on your thoughtful and thorough reading in advance of class discussion. The course requirements have been designed with these exigencies in mind.

**A. Read thoughtfully in advance and participate.** You are expected to do the reading thoroughly before the class meeting for which it is assigned, and to participate actively in class discussions. Emphasis is on responding critically and creatively to assigned readings, integrating the seminar’s material, and, especially, extracting ideas or approaches that are useful to you in your own work. Try to draw something of value from each assigned reading, even as you evaluate it critically.

**B. Nine commentaries.** During each week of the course, you are required to submit (via the Coursework online discussion website) one commentary of no less than 200 words on the week’s readings. These are due no later than noon the Monday before class. (No credit will be given for commentaries posted late, as part of the point is to prepare you to participate actively in seminar discussions.) Please view these commentaries as writing and thinking exercises, not as polished, finished essays. Use them to engage the week’s materials, respond with questions, criticisms and new ideas they suggest, put into words impressions that seem worth developing, and think about how the readings might contribute to your own intellectual projects. Commentaries allow you to build an archive of your responses to the material and enable the instructors to gauge what issues we should emphasize during our seminar meetings. You are encouraged to read your classmates’ postings, and to engage their comments and questions as a jumping off point for your own postings and for class discussion.

**C. Two brief presentations.** Each of you will make two brief (15 minute) presentations to the seminar on topics relevant to the week’s readings and your colleagues’ posted commentaries. The presentations are intended to further the discussion of the week’s materials and focus attention on issues of most interest to you. Presenters will meet with in a group before their presentations to review content and presentation strategies. We will begin these individual presentations during the second meeting. Please look ahead to see if there are particular sessions that you would like to reserve as your own. Otherwise, we will assign students to presentation dates randomly.

**D. Conference paper:** In lieu of a term or research paper, you will prepare a 15-minute conference-style paper for oral presentation during our final class session. (Please note that you will need to hand in to the instructors the written text of your presentation no later than 5:00 p.m. on the day before the conference.) We will stage two or three panels, with the professors acting as
moderator for each panel. Students not on the presenting panel will pose questions to the presenters and engage them in critical discussion of their ideas. The aim is to recreate as closely as we can the form and style of conference panels.

E. **Evaluation**: Your grade will depend on your willingness and ability to fulfill all the course requirements as set out above. We would be happy to meet with you to discuss your performance in the course as often as is feasible during the quarter. Finally, we are happy to give you substantive feedback on up to two postings of your choice anytime during the quarter prior to December 6.

F. **There is no final examination or paper required for this course.** By mutual agreement with the professor, English and MTL students have the option to expand one of their presentations or their final paper through individual study with that professor the following quarter by enrolling in English or MTL 398R.

**SCHEDULE OF READINGS**

**September 24**

Kant, Immanuel. *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics* (1783)
---, “What is Enlightenment?” (1784) (CR)

Supplemental:
Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, “Immanuel Kant” (CR - please note reading instructions available for download on Coursework)

**October 1**


**October 8**

Friedrich Schlegel, “On Incomprehensibility” (1805) (CR)

Charles Baudelaire, “The Painter of Modern Life” (1863) (CR)

**October 15**

Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, selections from *The German Ideology* (c. 1845-46), pp. 119-81 (CR)
Karl Marx, Ch. 1 of *Capital* (1867), Vol. 1, “The Commodity,” pp. 125-77 (CR)

**October 22**

October 29
Friedrich Nietzsche, On the Genealogy of Morals (1887)

November 5
W.E.B. Du Bois, The Souls of Black Folk (1903)

November 12
Max Weber, The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism (1905)

November 19
Martin Heidegger, “Introduction” to Being and Time (1927) and “The Origin of the Work of Art” (CR)

November 26
Thanksgiving Week – no classes

Friday, December 6
Final class presentations

Books - Required


Books - Recommended

Kant, Immanuel, Immanuel Kant, Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals