

Course title: Great Ideas that Have Shaped our World: from the Axial Age to the Robot Revolution

Language of instruction: English

Professor: Associate Professor of Politics - Camil Ungureanu

Professor's contact and office hours: camil.ungureanu@upf.edu

Course contact hours: 45

Recommended credit: 6 ECTS credits

Course prerequisites: There are no prerequisites for this course.

Language requirements: The course is taught in English. Recommended level in the European Framework B2 (or equivalent: Cambridge Certificate if the teaching language is English).

Course focus and approach:

This course focuses on moral-political, philosophical, and scientific ideas that have revolutioned and shaped our world.

This course is useful for students in social science, humanities, and natural sciences. The approach of the course is interdisciplinary.

Primary sources will be granted a central importance: original texts from Aristotle and Darwin to Gandhi and Einstein will be discussed in the class. We will also use video materials and documentaries.

Course description:

This course starts from the premise of the crucial importance of moral-political, philosophical, and scientific imagination in the development of human societies. It focuses on key moral-political, philosophical, and scientific innovative ideas that have revolutionized and shaped society from Antiquity to nowadays.

The course deals not only with understanding the context of emergence of these ideas, but also their impact on the contemporary world and mentality. We begin with the "Axial Age" (Karl Jaspers) characterized by a series of ethical-religious, scientific, and philosophical innovations from China to Ancient Greece, and move chronologically to Renaissance, Enlightenment, and the current digital and robot revolution.

The substantive and methodological approach is not Euro-centric and reductionist, but global and interdisciplinary. We adopt a problem-solving approach based on understanding why and how new and creative ideas - from Buddhism and monotheism to Marxist materialism,

genetical engineering and quantum physics - answer different types of challenges and queries - existential, epistemic, or ethical-political.

Learning objectives:

- Critical assessment of fundamental ideas that have revolutionized the world (e.g. confucianism, liberalism, environmentalism, genetics, theory of relativity).
- Deeper understanding of contemporary world, its challenges, and crises.
- Creative use of ideas in building autonomous research and collaborative projects.
- Having a better understanding of the interaction between science and politics
- Deeper understanding of the future challenges and of the existing toolkits that can help in dealing with them

Course workload:

The workload is made of readings (generally one 20-page reading per lecture). Excellent and acclaimed videos and documentaries will be also used.

The lectures and seminars support the better understanding of the readings.

Teaching methodology:

The course is structured in both lecture and on-site classes. We will also pay a guided visit to the fantastic science museum of Barcelona.

The classes are structured in lectures (1 hour) and open discussions based on texts and videos/documentaries. The emphasis is on discussing primary sources (e.g. texts by Confucius, Newton, Darwin, and Einstein) and relevant videos/documentaries with the aim of understanding revolutionary ideas, their relevance, and their long-standing influence on current practices and societies.

We adopt a problem-solving approach based on understanding why and how new and creative ideas - from Buddhism and monotheism to Marxist materialism, genetical engineering and quantum physics - answer different types of challenges and queries - existential, epistemic, or moral-political.

The methodology is comparative and global (Edward Said 1978; Amartya Sen 2009), and not parochial or Eurocentric; to illustrate, we will explore comparatively the ideas of human excellence in Aristotle and Confucius, or the notions of salvation in Buddhism and Christianity.

Second, the methodological approach is based on the importance of interdisciplinarity, namely on approaching societal phenomena from the pluralist perspective of different disciplines – scientific and humanistic (Sapolsky, 2017).

Assessment criteria:

Projects: 30% Students will be encouraged to propose projects that are original in substance and form by using creatively the background knowledge their passions and interests and the knowledge acquired in the class. The project can be individual or involve 2 or 3 students (the latter case entails a proportional increase in the amount of work). The project can take a written, video, or other form.

Exams: 50% (10% mid-term, 40% final exam). The format of the exam will not be oriented toward the passive reproduction of the class materials, but towards solving problems. Critical reasoning will be encouraged.

Participation: 20% Students will be encouraged to raise questions and participate in the class.

Evaluation: English.

Absence policy

Attending class is mandatory and will be monitored daily by professors. Missing classes will impact on the student’s final grade as follows:

Absences	Penalization
Up to two (2) absences	No penalization
Three (3) absences	1 point subtracted from final grade (on a 10-point scale)
Four (4) absences	2 points subtracted from final grade (on a 10-point scale)
Five (5) absences or more	The student receives an INCOMPLETE (“NO PRESENTADO”) for the course

The BaPIS attendance policy **does not distinguish between justified or unjustified absences**. The student is deemed responsible to manage his/her absences.

Only absences for medical reasons will be considered justified absences. The student is deemed responsible to provide the necessary documentation. Other emergency situations will be analyzed on a case by case basis by the Academic Director of the BaPIS.

The Instructor, the Academic Director and the Study Abroad Office should be informed by email without any delay.

Weekly schedule:**INTRODUCTION: The role of ideas and imagination in the development of human societies****Compulsory:**

R. Sapolsky, Behave. The Biology of Humans at their Best and their worst, Penguin, 2017, Introduction

R. Sapolsky, "The Uniqueness of Humans", available at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GY1x8k79bZE>

Optional:

Y. Harari, Sapiens. A Brief History of Humankind, HarperCollins, 2015, ch. 1.

C. Ungureanu & P. Monti, Contemporary Political Philosophy and Religion, Routledge, 2018, Introduction.

PART I. The Axial Age:**Religious-Philosophical Universalism and the Invention of Democracy****1. The rise of the idea of one God the faces of monotheism****Compulsory:**

J. Assmann, Of God and Gods: Egypt, Israel, and the Rise of Monotheism, 2008, Stanford University Press.

The New Testament, excerpts.

K. Anderson, A History of God, Penguin, 2013, ch. 1, 2.

Optional:

K. Anderson, A History of God, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9fHxtARpB4I>

P.-P. Pasolini, The Gospel according to St. Matthew, 1958

M. Scorsese, The Last Temptation of Christ (1988)

The Story of God with Morgan Freeman, available at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GwL57ZP873Q>

2. The democratic idea and the invention of philosophy**Compulsory:**

J.-P. Vernant, The Origins of Greek Thought, Cornell University Press, 1984, ch. 1.

Plato, The Apology of Socrates (excerpts)

Aristotle, Politics (excerpts)

Optional:

A. Sen, The Idea of Justice, Harvard University Press, 2009, Introduction

Marcus Aurelius, Meditations, Penguin, 1998, 1-50.

3. The Hindu tradition and the challenge of Buddha**Compulsory:**

Sayings of the Buddha, Oxford World's Classics, Oxford University Press, 2008, 1-20

The Bhagavad Gita, Penguin, 2003, 1-30

Optional:

The Buddha, documentary, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EDgd8LT9AL4> The

4. Confucius and the Hundred Schools of Thought**Compulsory:**

Confucius, Analects, Oxford World's Classics, 2008, 1-20.

Optional:

Confucian Philosophy on World Affairs, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ff7OB_QRiag

Confucius, 2010 (film)

Fung Yu-Lan, A History of Chinese Philosophy, Princeton Univ. Press, 1952.

PART II. From Renaissance and the Scientific Revolution to the Crisis of Enlightenment

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1. The Renaissance: artistic, political, and scientific**Compulsory:**

Galileo Galilei, 1638, Dialogues Concerning Two New Sciences, 1974, 1-10

Descartes, Discourse on Method, 2003, Penguin, ch. 1.

Machiavelli, The Prince, Penguin, 1999, chs. XVI-XIX

Optional:

The Renaissance - the Age of Michelangelo and Leonardo da Vinci,

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BmHTQsxxkPk> (documentary)

Shakespeare, Hamlet

2. The Invention of Individualism: Th. Hobbes's and J. Locke's liberal revolution**Compulsory:**

Th. Hobbes, Leviathan, Penguin, 1999, 1-25.

Optional:

J. Locke, Two Treatises of Government, ch. "On Property"

3. The Industrial Revolution and the Emergence of Capitalism

Adam Smith, The Wealth of Nations, Princeton University Press, 2003, cp. 2

Optional:

M. Friedman, *Capitalism and Liberty*, University of Chicago Press 1958, ch. 1

M. Friedman, *Capitalism and the future of freedom*, available at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YfKqhxANGgE> (video)

4. Human rights, the American and French Revolutions: a genealogical and comparative view

Compulsory:

The Federalist (10, 17)

“The American Declaration of Independence”

Olympe de Gouges, “Declaration of the Rights of Woman and of Female Citizen” (1791)

Optional:

S. Schama, *David*, 2015 (documentary)

S. Spielberg, *Lincoln*, 2012 (film)

5. The Darwinian Revolution

Compulsory:

Ch. Darwin *On the Origin of Species*, Penguin, 1999, ch. 1, 2

F. de Waal, *The Bonobo and the Atheist: In Search of Humanism Among the Primates*, W. W. Norton, 2014, ch. 2.

Optional:

F. de Waal, *Moral behavior in animals*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GcJxRqTs5nk> (video)

D. Attenborough, *Charles Darwin and the Tree of Life* (documentary)

<https://www.dailymotion.com/video/xsxbuk>

6. The Revolution of the Unconscious: from Sigmund Freud to cognitive science and brain research

Compulsory:

S. Freud, *Introduction to Psychoanalysis*, Harcourt, 2001, ch. 1

D. Eagleman: *The Brain: The Story of You*, Vintage, 2017, 1-25

Optional:

S. Freud, *The Father of Psychoanalysis*, available at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C8k-lrJrldw> (documentary)

The Brain with David Eagleman - What Is Reality - BBC Documentary 2016, available at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C8k-lrJrldw>

7. Socialism and communism: Karl Marx**Compulsory:**

K. Marx & Fr. Engels, The Communist Manifesto

Optional:

Karl Marx: The Power of Money, BBC Documentary, available at:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lyrhoHtSkzg>

**8. The Crisis of the Enlightenment and Modernity: from Nietzsche to the Rise of
Totalitarianism****Compulsory:**

F. Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil, Cambridge University Press, 1-20.
H. Arendt, The Origins of Totalitarianism, Harcourt Press, 1996, chapter "Ideology and
Terror"

Optional:

C. Schmitt, The Concept of the Political, Univ. of Chicago Press, 2007, 1-36

PART III. The Contemporary World: from the Theory of Relativity to the Robot Revolution**1. Albert Einstein, the Theory of Relativity, and Beyond****Compulsory:**

A. Einstein, How I see the world, Penguin, 1956, ch. 4 and 6
W. Heisenberg, "The Principle of Indeterminacy"

Optional:

Albert Einstein, How I see the world, <https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x1tgws5>
(Documentary)
Quantum Theory, available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CBrsWPCp_rs
Interstellar (2018, Ch. Nolan, movie)

2. Anticolonialism, orientalism, and the paradoxes of postcolonialism,**Compulsory:**

F. Fanon, The wretched of the earth, Penguin, 2007, ch. 1

E. Said, Orientalism,

Optional:

O. Sembene, The Black Girl, (1966, movie)

J. Conrad, The Heart of Darkness (novel)

3. The unfinished feminist revolution

4. Genetical engineering: beyond humanism?

Compulsory:

A. Buchanan, Better than Human: The Promise and Perils of Biomedical Enhancement (Philosophy in Action), Oxford University Press, 2017, ch. 1-2.

Optional:

Gattaca (1997, A. Niccol, movie)

5. Artificial intelligence, artificial ignorance and the robot revolution

Compulsory:

Isaac Asimov, "Runaround" (1942, orig.) in I, Robot, Oxford University Press, 2008

Tzafestas, Spyros G. (2016). Roboethics A Navigating Overview. Berlin: Springer, ch. 1.

Optional:

I, Robot (2002, movie).

6. Environmental justice, alternative economics, and the future of earth

Compulsory:

P. Singer, "Environmental Ethics", chapter in Practical Ethics, Oxford University Press, 2012.

Optional:

J. S. Dryzek, The Politics of the Earth, 2007 (2nd edition), Oxford University Press, ch. 1-2

G. Kallis & al., Degrowth. A Vocabulary for a New Era, Routledge, 2016