

Great Ideas that Have Shaped our World: from God to the Post-Human and Singularity

Language of instruction: English

Professor: Óscar García Jaén; Pol Capdevilla

Professors' contact:

oscar.garcia@upf.edu

pol.capdevilla@upf.edu

Office hours: appointment by email

Course contact hours: 45

Recommended credit: 6 ECTS credits

Course prerequisites: There are no prerequisites for this general course.

Language requirements: 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 philosophical ideas that are connected to the moral, political, scientific, and artistic spheres, and that have revolutionized and shaped our world. We will analyze these revolutionary ideas dealing with the subjective, intersubjective, and natural world as providing resources for understanding and tackling problems in times of radical uncertainty and transformation generated by disruptive technologies (AI, genetic engineering), climate emergency, populist-authoritarian upheavals, and the hot geopolitical board.

Given the interdisciplinary nature of this course, it will be helpful for students in social sciences, humanities, economics, and hard sciences. Students will be encouraged to write projects based on their previous knowledge and background.

Primary sources will be granted central importance: original texts from Aristotle to Darwin and Einstein will be discussed in the class. We will also use video materials and documentaries on key figures, ideas, and theories (e.g., Einstein's theory of relativity, or the dilemmas posed by Artificial Intelligence and biotech).

Course Description:

Our world is in a multilayered crisis and transformation: the genetic, robot and AI revolutions challenge the limits between natural and artificial, human and non-human. At once, democratic societies are plagued by (gender) inequality, ecological emergency, and the rise of different forms of authoritarianism, which generate radical uncertainty and raise anew the question of the possibility of leading a good life and organizing a free society.

This course starts from the premise of the crucial importance of ethical-political, philosophical, and scientific imagination in developing human societies and tackling these crises. It focuses on critical philosophical ideas coming from morality, politics, science, and art that have revolutionized and shaped society from Antiquity to nowadays.

The course deals with understanding the context of these ideas' emergence and their impact on the contemporary world and mentality. We deal with three interrelated Kantian questions: What can I know? What must I do? And, what may I hope?

We begin with the idea of the monotheistic God that appeared during the Ancient Age, and move both synchronically and diachronically. For each new idea, we will start by paying attention to the historical context in which it appeared, and to the historical context in which that idea suffered a critical inflection point.

Learning objectives:

- Critical assessment of fundamental ideas that have revolutionized the world (i.e. God, the State, Science, Progress & Evolution, Space & Time, Nature, Gender...).
- A deeper understanding of the 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 society
- Deeper understanding of the future challenges and of the existing toolkits that can help in dealing with them.

Course workload and materials:

The workload comprises readings (generally one 20-page reading per lecture; sometimes students will have to watch a video/documentary/film). All materials will be made available to the students via Moodle.

The PowerPoint for each class will be also uploaded.

Teaching methodology:

The classes are structured in lectures (1 hour) and open discussions based on texts and videos/documentaries. The emphasis is on discussing primary sources.

We adopt a problem-solving approach based on understanding why and how new philosophical ideas - from the ideas of God and the State to the ideas of Gender and Artificial Intelligence - are the result of different new material realities and answer different types of challenges and queries – ethical, political, and scientific.

The methodological approach is based on the importance of interdisciplinarity, namely, on approaching societal phenomena from the pluralist perspective of scientific and humanistic disciplines.

Visit We will visit the Centre de Cultura Contemporània de Barcelona (CCCB)

Invited Guest The course will also benefit from an invited scientist.

Assessment criteria:

Projects: 30% of the final grade. Students will be encouraged to propose original projects by creatively using the background knowledge of 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 work). The project can take a written or video form.

Students will also be provided with an optional list of project themes that may help to guide them. The tutor will provide part of the materials necessary for the projects.

Exams: 50% final exam. The exam format and questions will be announced and discussed in class. Critical reasoning will be encouraged.

Participation: 20%. Students will be encouraged to raise critical questions and participate in class by making short presentations.

Evaluation: English.

1. The Idea of God**Compulsory:**

Aristotle, *Metaphysics*

Aquinas, Thomas, *Summa Theologica*

Optional:

Averroes, *The Incoherence of the Incoherence*

Dawkins, R., *The God Delusion*. Black Swan

Kant, I. *Religion within the Bounds of Bare Reason*

Ovid, *Metamorphosis*

The Bible

The Quran

2. The Idea of the Sovereign State**Compulsory:**

Machiavelli, Niccolò *The Prince*

Hobbes, Thomas, *Leviathan*

Optional:

Augustine of Hippo, *The City of God*

Bodin, Jean, *Six Books of the Republic*

Botero, Giovanni, *The Reason of the State*

Pettit, Philip, *The State*

Schmitt, Carl, *Political Theology*

Weber, Max, "Politics as a Vocation"

4

3. The Idea of Scientific Truth

Compulsory:

Descartes, René, *Discourse on the Method*

Galilei, Galileo, *Dialogues Concerning Two New Sciences*

Optional:

Aristotle, *Prior Analytics*

Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics*

Bacon, Francis, *Novum Organum*

Chalmers, Adam, *What Is This Thing Called Science?*

Galilei, Galileo, *Dialogue Concerning the Two Chief World Systems*

Kuhn, Thomas, *The Copernican Revolution*

Kuhn, Thomas, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*

Newton, Isaac, *Principia Mathematica*

4. The Idea of the Subject

Compulsory:

Descartes, René, *Meditations on First Philosophy*

Kant, Immanuel, *Critique of Pure Reason*

Optional:

Butler, Judith, *Subjects of Desire*. Columbia University Press.

Butler, Judith, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories of Subjection*

Derrida, Jacques, "Cogito and the History of Madness"

Foucault, Michel, *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*

Foucault, Michel, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of Human Sciences*

Freud, Sigmund, *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*

Freud, Sigmund, *The Ego and the Id*

Lacan, Jacques, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*

Hume, David, *A Treatise of Human Nature*

5. The Ideas of the Mind and Consciousness

Compulsory:

Descartes, René, *Meditations on First Philosophy*

Optional:

Chalmers, David, *The Conscious Mind: In Search of a Fundamental Theory*

Dennett, Daniel, *Consciousness Explained*

Hume, David, *A Treatise of Human Nature*

Nagel, Thomas, *Mind and Cosmos*

Pinker, Steven, *How the Mind Works*

6. The Idea of Revolution

Compulsory:

Tocqueville, Alexis, *The Old Regime and the Revolution*

Engels, Friedrich & Marx, Karl, *The Communist Manifesto*

Optional:

Arendt, Hannah, *On Revolution*

Copernicus, Nicolas, *On the Revolutions of Heavenly Spheres*

Engels, Friedrich & Marx, Karl, *The German Ideology*

Lenin, Vladimir, *The State and Revolution*

Luxemburg, *Reform or Revolution*

7. The Ideas of Progress

Compulsory:

De Condorcet, Marquis, *Sketch for a Historical Picture of the Progress of the Human Mind*

Optional:

Benjamin, Walter, "Thesis on the Philosophy of History"

Comte, Auguste, *The Positive Philosophy of Auguste Comte*

Engels, Friedrich & Marx, Karl, *The German Ideology*

Fukuyama, Francis, *The End of History and the Last Man*
 Harari, Yuval Noah, *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind*
 Hegel, George, *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*
 Kant, Immanuel, "Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose"
 Pinker, Steven, *Enlightenment Now: The Case for Reason, Science, Humanism, and Progress*
 Sherman, Michael, *The Moral Arc: How Science Leads Humanity Toward Truth, Justice, and Freedom.*

8. The Idea of Evolution

Compulsory:

Darwin, Charles, *On the Origin of Species*
 Spencer, Herbert

Optional:

Dawkins, Richard, *The Selfish Gene*
 Dawkins, Richard, *The Blind Watchmaker: Why the Evidence of Evolution Reveals a Universe Without Design*
 Diamond, Jared, *The Third Chimpanzee: The Evolution and Future of the Human Animal*
 Dennet, Daniel, *Darwin's Dangerous Idea: Evolution and the Meanings of Life*
 Hitler, Adolph, *Mein Kampf*
 Nagel, Thomas, *Mind & Cosmos: Why the Materialist Neo-Darwinian Conception of Nature is Almost Certainly False*
 Paley, Richard, *Natural Theology or Evidence of the Existence and Attributes of the Deity*

9. The Ideas of Nature and Culture

Compulsory:

Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, Book I
 Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*

Optional:

Rousseau, Jean-Jacques, *Discourse on the Origin and Basis of Inequality Among Men*
[Emerson](#), Ralph Waldo, "Nature"
 Geertz, Clifford, *The Interpretation of Cultures*
 Humboldt, Alexander von, *Political essay on the kingdom of New Spain containing researches relative to the geography of Mexico*
 Cassirer, Ernst, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*

10. The ideas of Beauty and Sublime

Compulsory:

Plato, *Symposium*
 Kant, Immanuel, *Critique of Judgement*

Optional:

Baudelaire, Charles, *The Painter of Modern Life*

Scruton, Roger, *Beauty*

Lyotard, Jean-François, *Lessons on the Analytic of the Sublime: Kant's Critique of Judgment*

Danto, Arthur C., *The Abuse of Beauty*

11. The Ideas of Art

Compulsory:

Plato, *Republic*, Book X

Aristotle, *Poetics*

Gombrich, *The Art of Illusion*

Optional:

Danto, Arthur C., *After the End of Art*

Benjamin, Walter, *The Work of Art in the Age of its Technical Reproduction*

Tatarkiewicz, Wladislaw, *A History of Six Ideas*

Baudrillard, *The Conspiracy of Art*

Graham Harman, *Art and Objects*

12. The Ideas of Space and Time

Compulsory:

Einstein, Albert, *Relativity: The Special and the General Theory*

Optional:

Ariew, Roger, *The Leibniz-Clarke Correspondence*. Hackett Publishing Co, Inc.

Hawkins, Stephen, *A Brief History of Time*. Batam Books.

Kant, Immanuel, *The Critique of Pure Reason*

Newton, Isaac, *The Principia: Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy*

13. The Idea of Patriarchy

Compulsory:

Lerner, Gerda, *The Creation of Patriarchy*

Pateman, Carole, *The Sexual Contract*

Optional:

Aristotle, *Politics*

Engels, Friedrich, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*

Filmer, Robert, *Patriarcha*

Levi-Strauss, Claude, *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*

Locke, John, *First Treatise of Government*

Mackinnon, Catherine, *Towards a Feminist Theory of the State*

14. The Ideas of Sex and Gender

Compulsory:

De Beauvoir, Simone, *The Second Sex*

Butler, Judith, *Undoing Gender*

Optional:

Butler, Judith, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. Routledge

Butler, Judith, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"*. Routledge

Harvey, David, *Manliness*

Preciado, B. Paul, *Can the Monster Speak?* Fitzcarraldo Editions.

Preciado, B. Paul, *Disphoria Mundi*. Greasset.

Young, Iris Marion, *On Female Body Experience: "Throwing Like a Girl" and Other Essays*

15. The Idea of the Anthropocene and Climate Crisis

Compulsory:

Crutzen, Paul, "Geology of Mankind"

Crutzen, Paul et al, "The New World of the Anthropocene"

Optional:

Connolly, William, *Facing the Planetary: Entangled Humanism and the Politics of Swarming*

Crutzen, Paul et al, "The Anthropocene: Conceptual and Historical Perspectives"

Gardiner, *A Perfect Moral Storm: The Ethical Tragedy of Climate Change*

Latour, Bruno, *Down to Earth: Politics in the New Climate Regime*

16. The Idea of Human Nature and the Post-Human

Compulsory:

Huxley, Julian, "Transhumanism"

Habermas, Jürgen, *The Future of Human Nature*

Harari, Yuval Noah, *Homo Deus: A Brief History of Tomorrow*
World

Optional:

Breaking Away (Film)

FM-2023, *Are You Transhuman?*

Fukuyama, Francis, "The World's Most Dangerous Ideas: Transhumanism"

Drexler, Eric, *Engines of Creation: The Coming Era of Nanotechnology*

Fukuyama, Francis, *Our Posthuman Future*

Humanity+, "What is Transhumanism?"

Gattaca (Film)

International Theological Commission, "Communion and Stewardship: Human Persons Created in the Image of God"

Nietzsche, Friedrich, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*

Sandel, Michael, *The Case Against Perfection: Ethics in the Age of Genetic Engineering*

Savulescu, Julian, *Unfit for the Future: The Need for Moral Enhancement*

Sloterdijk, Peter, "Rules for the Human Park"

17. The Idea of AI and Technological Singularity

Compulsory:

Turing, Alan, "Computing Machinery and Intelligence"

Searle, John, "Minds, Brains, and Programs"

Vinge, Vernor, "The Coming Technological Singularity: How to Survive in the Post-Human"

Transcendent Man (Documentary)

Optional:

Bostrom, Nick, *Superintelligence: Paths, Dangers, and Strategies*

Ex-Machina (Film)

Goog, J, Irvin, "Speculations Concerning the First Ultraintelligent Machine"

Kurzweil, Ray, *The Age of Intelligent Machines*

Kurzweil, Ray, *The Age of Spiritual Machines*

Kurzweil, Ray, *The Singularity of Near*

Norvig, Peter & Russell, Stuart, *Artificial Intelligence: A Modern Approach*

Russell, Stuart, *Human Compatible: Artificial Intelligence and the Problem of Control*

Absence policy

After the add/drop, all registrations are considered final and **BaPIS Absence Policy** begins to apply. For the academic year 2023-2024, such policy is as follows:

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

Absences	Penalization
<i>Up to two (2) absences</i>	<i>No penalization</i>

<i>Three (3) absences</i>	<i>1 point subtracted from final grade (on a 10 point scale)</i>
<i>Four (4) absences</i>	<i>2 points subtracted from final grade (on a 10 point scale)</i>
<i>Five (5) absences or more</i>	<i>The student receives an INCOMPLETE (“NO PRESENTADO”) for the course</i>

*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 asap by email without any delay.