



History 600: Emerson, Nietzsche, and American Culture

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Office Hours: T 1:15-2:00; R 12:30-1:30
Course Schedule: R 3:30-5:30 p.m.
Room: Humanities 5255

This course is designed for students interested in exploring the history of nineteenth- and twentieth-century American thought and culture from transnational and comparative perspectives. We will begin by studying the central texts of two major nineteenth-century thinkers, Ralph Waldo Emerson and Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche. We will analyze Emerson's writings in the broader context of mid nineteenth-century American culture, and then shift our attention across the Atlantic to examine Nietzsche's works from the perspective of late nineteenth-century German culture. After situating these writers' philosophies each in their own time and place, we will examine how their ideas went on to shape American intellectual and cultural life in the twentieth century.

By pairing Emerson and Nietzsche, two iconic thinkers from two very different national contexts, and analyzing their intertwined receptions in twentieth-century American thought and culture, students will gain insight into a range of issues involved in interpreting the history of ideas and their diverse cultural meanings. Reading Emerson, often regarded as the innovator of a distinctly "American" democratic mode of thinking, and Nietzsche, long considered to be the author of a distinctly "German" romantic and anti-democratic philosophy of power, will enable students to investigate how philosophical ideas are products of culture, as well as agents in the formation of competing narratives of national identity.

In this course, students will employ a number of methods for studying the production and reception of texts in different intellectual and cultural contexts. During the first half of the course, we will do historicized, close readings of Emerson's and Nietzsche's writings, comparing and contrasting their ideas about individual freedom and self-sovereignty, democracy, equality, power, nature, the body, ethics, and Christianity, among others. In the second half of the course, we will examine the manifold uses of Emerson's and

Nietzsche's ideas in twentieth-century American culture. By investigating their presence in political theory, continental and analytic philosophy, and cultural and literary criticism, we will consider how a variety of late nineteenth- and twentieth-century interpreters utilized Emerson's and Nietzsche's thought to address political, moral, and social problems in American life.

Assignments and Grading

Reading assignments will include books, book chapters, and articles. You will be expected to write paragraph-length questions based on the reading for the week. Paragraph-length questions are due by 8 p.m. Wednesday night (before Thursday's class meeting). You are to post your questions to the discussion log on our Learn@UW website. Writing your weekly questions will prove to be a very useful strategy for synthesizing the reading and focusing your thoughts before coming to class.

Attendance is mandatory. If for any reason you are unable to come to class, please email me in advance to let me know. Punctuality is also mandatory. Unexcused absences and/or tardiness will result in a poor participation grade.

Critical essays are due at the beginning of class meetings. Please note that written assignments will be marked down ½ of a letter grade for every day that they are late.

Grading will be based on class participation, weekly paragraph-length questions, critical essays, and a final paper, with the breakdown as follows:

- 1. Participation.** Informed and engaged contribution to weekly class discussion. 20%
- 2. Weekly Questions.** Paragraph-length questions. Note: You are required to submit questions only on the weeks that you do not write a critical essay. 20%
- 3. Critical Essays (2 out of 3).** You will write 3 (5 page) papers and your lowest grade will be dropped; if you are happy with the grades on your first two papers, you do not need to write a third one. (15% each). 30%
- 4. 1-Page proposal and bibliography for final paper.** No grade.
- 5. Final Paper.** 12-15 page final paper on a theme from the course. 30%

Students with Disabilities: Please notify me early in the semester if you have a documented requirement for accommodation in this course. If you have any questions about this or require any assistance, feel free to contact me or the McBurney Disability Resource Center at 263-2741.

Readings

The following books are available for purchase at the University bookstore:

Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Selected Essays, Lectures, and Poems*, ed. Robert Richardson (1990)

Friedrich Nietzsche, *Untimely Meditations*, ed. Daniel Breazeale (1873-73; 1997)

Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (1882; 1974)

Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (1883-85; 1954/1995)

Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (1887; 1967/1989)

Walt Whitman, *Song of Myself* (1855; 2001)

Kahlil Gibran, *The Prophet* (1923)

All of the books are available on 3-hour reserve at the College Library. All additional readings (essays, articles) are available on E-Reserve.

Course Schedule

Week 1 (1/22): Introduction

Part I: Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882)

Week 2 (1/29): Emerson I

Nature (1836)

“American Scholar” (1837)

“Divinity School Address” (1838)

Week 3 (2/5): Emerson II

“Self-Reliance” (1841)

“Over-Soul” (1841)

“Circles” (1841)

“Experience” (1844)

Week 4 (2/12): Emerson III

“Uses of Great Men” from *Representative Men* (1850)

“Fate” and “Power” from *Conduct of Life* (1860)

Critical Essay #1 due at the beginning of class today (2/12)

Part II: Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900)

Week 5 (2/19): Nietzsche I

“David Strauss, the Confessor and the Writer,” “On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life,” and “Schopenhauer as Educator,” from *Untimely Meditations* (1873-74)

Week 6 (2/26): Nietzsche II

The Gay Science (1882)

Week 7 (3/5): Nietzsche III

Thus Spoke Zarathustra (1883-85)

Week 8 (3/12): Nietzsche IV

Genealogy of Morals (1887)

Critical Essay #2 due at the beginning of class today (3/12)

Week 9 (3/19): No class, SPRING BREAK (3/14-3/22)

Part III: Emerson and Nietzsche in American Culture

Week 10 (3/26): The Intellectual as Cultural Star

Mary Kupiec Cayton, "The Making of an American Prophet: Emerson, His Audiences, and the Rise of the Culture Industry in Nineteenth-Century America," *American Historical Review*, 92 (Jun., 1987), 597-620.

R.J. Hollingdale, "The Hero as Outsider," from *Cambridge Companion to Nietzsche* (1996), 71-89.

Steven E. Aschheim, "Germany and the Battle over Nietzsche, 1890-1914," from *The Nietzsche Legacy in Germany, 1890-1900* (1992).

David L. Smith, "Representative Emersons: Versions of American Identity," *Religion and American Culture*, 2 (1992), 159-180.

Week 11 (4/2): The Self

Walt Whitman, *Song of Myself* (1855) & letter from R.W.E. to W.W.

Fredrick Douglass, "Self-Made Men" (1893) from *Frederick Douglass Papers* (1979, 1992).

George Burman Foster, "Personality," *The Little Review*, 1 (1914), 40-45.

Ayn Rand, "Roark's Speech" from *The Fountainhead* (1943)

Alexander Nehamas, "How One Becomes What One Is," from *Nietzsche: Life as Literature* (1985)

Camille Paglia, on Emerson, from *Sexual Personae* (1991)

Week 12 (4/9): Passover

Week 13 (4/16): Morality: Might and Right, Good and Evil

H.L. Mencken, selections from *Friedrich Nietzsche* (1908)

Felix Adler, "Emerson," from *An Ethical Philosophy of Life* (1918)

Walter Kaufmann, "Nietzsche's Philosophy of Power," from *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist* (1950)

Newton Arvin, "The House of Pain" (1959) from *Emerson: A Collection of Critical Essays* (1962)

1-page proposal and bibliography for final paper due at the beginning of class today (4/16)

Week 14 (4/23): Religion

Ralph Waldo Trine, selection from *In Tune with the Infinite* (1897)

Kahlil Gibran, *The Prophet* (1923)

Christopher Lasch, on Emerson from *The True and Only Heaven: Progress and Its Critics* (1991)

J.J. Altizer, "Eternal Recurrence and the Kingdom of God" (n.d.) from *The New Nietzsche* (1977)

Week 15 (4/30): Politics

Thomas Mann, *Nietzsche's Philosophy in Light of Contemporary Events* (1947)

Crane Brinton, "The National Socialists' Use of Nietzsche," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 1 (1940), 131-150.

Ralph Ellison, "Address to the Harvard College Alumni, Class of 1949" from *Collected Essays of Ralph Ellison* (1974)

A. Bartlett Giamatti, "Power, Politics, and a Sense of History: The Baccalaureate Address" from *The University and the Public Interest* (1981)

George Kateb, "Democratic Individuality and the Claims of Politics," from *The Inner Ocean: Individualism and Democratic Culture* (1992)

Critical Essay #3 due no later than the beginning of class today (4/30)

Week 16 (5/7): The Making of a National Tradition

Kuno Francke, "Emerson and German Personality," *International Quarterly* 6-7 (1903), 1-15.

George Santayana, "The Genteel Tradition in American Philosophy" (1911) from *Santayana on America* (1968)

George Santayana, selection from *Egotism in German Philosophy* (1916)

Benjamin DeCasseres, *The Superman in America* (1929)

Quentin Anderson, selection from *Imperial Self: An Essay in American Literary and Cultural History* (1971)

Final Papers due in my office by 5 p.m. Friday, May 15th