

**Instructional Syllabus (Fall 2025)**  
**HIST 340: 20<sup>th</sup> C. European Intellectual History**  
**Colgate University**

**Time and Place:** MW 2:45 – 4:00 PM in Alumni 107  
**Instructor:** Xan Karn  
**Office Hours:** T 10:00 – 11:30 AM; R 2:45 – 4:00 PM; or by appointment  
**Office Location:** Alumni 327  
**Phone:** X-7514  
**E-mail:** akarn@colgate.edu

## **I. Description and Objectives**

This course traces the major intellectual currents which shaped European society during the tumultuous twentieth century. Although we cannot exhaust the topic in one semester, students should emerge with an understanding of the big issues and ideas that Europe's intellectual class wrestled with during this era. The ideas we encounter in this course are grounded in a particular time and place, but they also manage, in some cases, to transcend their historical contexts, too. One of the chief arguments of the course is that our age is deeply imprinted by the intellectual currents of the previous century. We still wrestle with many of the questions and topics that occupied earlier thinkers. Identifying a single, unifying theme that ties together all the readings is difficult (impossible?), yet the course material speaks to topics and questions of ongoing concern: Is there such a thing as Truth, and if so, how might it be ascertained? How can we prepare ourselves for principled action where the validity of our knowledge is uncertain? Which intellectual traditions ought to guide us as we move into the future? Can humans put the world right, or are we doomed to make the same mistakes repeatedly? Is democracy the best political system available, and, if so, what are the challenges to realizing it fully? To what extent are science and technology liberating forces, and what are the limits of a purely rational approach to life? Europe's philosophers, writers, artists, and critics attempted to work out answers to these problems in the twentieth century, and now we can learn from them as we seek our own pathways.

## **II. Expectations and Evaluation**

Students are expected to contribute thoughtfully to the direction of each class meeting. To do this, it is essential that you complete the assigned readings according to the schedule outlined below. Students will also be tasked with leading certain portions of our classroom discussion.

Given that we meet just twice per week, a strong record of attendance and preparation for each session is of the utmost importance. Please arrive on time for our class meetings and expect to remain engaged for the full session.

Your grade for the course will be based on the following: class participation (including in-class presentations); in-class writing exercises; an oral midterm exam; an essay assignment (~15 pps.); and an in-class final exam.

### **IN-CLASS WRITING (POP QUIZZES)**

There will be a handful of pop quizzes throughout the semester. These will be short (10-15 mins.) in-class writing exercises based on the reading assigned for that day. Make-up quizzes are not offered except in the case of a pre-excused absence, e.g., travel for athletic competition. I will drop the lowest quiz score when I tally your final grades for this component. The quizzes should be relatively easy for students who have completed their daily reading assignments.

### **EXAMS**

There are two exams for this class, an oral midterm and an in-class final. Both exercises cover material derived from our readings and class discussions. The exams are not cumulative, although we will build in the second half of the class on the materials and themes introduced in first half. The oral midterm (~30 mins.) will be scheduled during the week of Oct. 6-10. You will sit for the two-hour final exam from 3-5 PM on December 18.

### **ESSAY**

You will complete a medium-length paper (~15 pps.) on a topic related to our course materials. The instructor will circulate a list of questions which you can choose from, or you may propose a topic of your own. In either case, you will be required to seek out 5-7 scholarly (i.e., peer-reviewed) articles, which you will incorporate into your project. Your paper is due in-class on Nov. 19. Our session on Nov. 12 will be devoted to peer-editing, so you should plan to have a working draft of the paper ready by then.

### **PARTICIPATION AND ATTENDANCE**

All students are expected to abide by the class absence guidelines published in the Colgate University Catalogue. You may accrue two absences during the semester without penalty. Subsequent absences will negatively affect your participation grade. Student-athletes and others with co-curricular commitments should communicate with the instructor as soon as possible regarding scheduling conflicts.

Each student will be asked to make a brief presentation and/or lead class discussion at some point during the semester. I understand that some students find it easier than others to speak up in class, but this is an important skill and useful way for the instructor to gauge your engagement the material.

### **ACADEMIC SUPPORT AND DISABILITY SERVICES**

Students who require an accommodation based on the impact of a disability should contact the instructor privately, as soon as possible, to discuss specific needs. If you have not done so, please contact Evelyn Lester (elester@colgate.edu) at the Office of Academic Support

and Disability Services so that reasonable and appropriate accommodations can be clearly defined.

### **ASSESSMENT AND GRADING**

Grades for all assignments will be based on the following scale: A: 90-100%; B: 80-89%; C: 70-79%; D: 60-69%; F: 0-59%. A plus/minus (+/-) system will be used to differentiate student progress further. Your grade for the course will be based on the formula below:

|                      |            |
|----------------------|------------|
| Quizzes              | 10%        |
| Oral Midterm         | 15%        |
| Essay                | 30%        |
| In-Class Final       | 20%        |
| <u>Participation</u> | <u>25%</u> |
| TOTAL                | 100%       |

### **ACADEMIC HONOR CODE**

The instructor will enforce all aspects of Colgate's Academic Honor Code. Plagiarism and other forms of cheating will be adjudicated in accordance with the Code. Note on Artificial Intelligence: Students in HIST 340 are not permitted to take assistance from ChatGPT or any other generative AI tool. Spell check = OK. Grammarly (or any software that generates or substantially edits/revises your writing) = NOT OK. The writing you submit for this course should be 100% your own from start to finish.

### **LAPTOPS AND OTHER ELECTRONIC DEVICES**

Except for students with an approved accommodation, the use of laptops and other electronic devices is not permitted in the classroom. You should plan to take hand-written notes, and any notes you bring to class should be printed in hard-copy or hand-written.

### **III. Reading and Required Texts**

The texts listed here are required reading for this course. These titles are available for purchase at the Colgate bookstore. Other required readings will be made available on the Moodle course web site.

For purchase:

FREUD, Sigmund. *Civilization and its Discontents*. W. W. Norton. ISBN: 9780393301588.

FRITZSCHE, Peter. *Nietzsche and the Death of God*. Bedford/St. Martin's. ISBN: 9780312450229.

HAVEL, Vaclav. *Open Letters*. Vintage. ISBN: 978-0679738114.

MARCUSE, Herbert. *One-Dimensional Man*. Beacon Press. ISBN: 9780807014172.

ORTEGA Y GASSET, Jose. *The Revolt of the Masses*. W.W. Norton. ISBN: 9780393310955.

SARTRE, Jean-Paul. *No Exit and Three Other Plays*. Vintage. ISBN: 9780679725169.

#### **IV. Course Outline**

##### **Week 1      Introduction**

Aug 28      Course Overview

##### **Week 2      *Fin-de-Siècle* Europe**

Sept. 1      Before Times

Reading:      Zweig, "The Age of Security"

Sept. 3      Intro. to Nietzsche

Reading:      Fritzsche, pps. 1-36

##### **Week 3      Philosophy with a Hammer**

Sept. 8      Nietzsche and the *Übermensch*

Reading:      Fritzsche, pps. 79-121

Sept. 10      The Death of God?

Reading:      Fritzsche, pps. 121-169

##### **Week 4      Breaking Away?**

Sept. 15      Youth and Anti-Art

Reading:      Marinetti, "Futurist Manifesto" and Dada Packet (V/A)

Sept. 17      Pacifist Anarchism

Reading:      Apel, "Weimar Photographic Narratives of War"

**Week 5      Cultural Pessimism**

Sept. 22      Excavating the Unconscious

Reading:      Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*, pps. 23-88

Sept. 24      *Homo Homini Lupus*

Reading:      Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*, pps. 89-147

**Week 6      Rise of the Masses**

Sept. 29      Dissecting the Mass-Man

Reading:      Ortega y Gasset, *Revolt of the Masses*, pp. 11-60

Oct. 1      Modernity and Vulgarly?

Reading:      Ortega y Gasset, *Revolt of the Masses*, pp. 125-190

**Week 7      Midterm and Paper Prospectus**

Oct. 6      No Class (Oral Midterm)

Oct. 8      No Class (Oral Midterm)

Oct. 10      **PROSPECTUS DUE**

**Week 8      Darkness Visible**

Oct. 13      **FALL BREAK**

Oct. 15      Totalitarian Politics and Violence

Reading:      Arendt, "Total Domination"

**Week 9      Thought into Action**

Oct. 20      The Engaged Intellectual

Reading:      Sartre, "Existentialism is a Humanism"

Oct. 22      A Question of Judgment

Reading:      Sartre, *No Exit*, pps. 3-46

**Week 10      Civilization or Barbarism?**

Oct. 27      Guilt and Responsibility

Reading:      Jaspers, "The Question of German Guilt"

Oct. 29      Wounds of the Spirit

Reading Adorno, *Can One Live After Auschwitz?* (chaps. 1 and 2)

**Week 11      Democratic Unfreedom**

Nov. 3      A Paralyzed Society?

Reading:      Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, pps. 1-55

Nov. 5      Alternative Culture?

Reading:      Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, pps. 203-257

**Week 12      Living in Truth**

Nov. 10      The Power of the Powerless

Reading:      Havel, *Open Letters*, pps. 125-175

Nov. 12      **ESSAY DRAFT DUE (PEER-EDITING)**

**Week 13      Inner Emancipation**

Nov. 17      "Parallel Structures"

Reading:      Havel, *Open Letters*, pps. 175-214

Nov. 19      **ESSAY DUE**

**THANKSGIVING BREAK (Nov. 22-30)**

**Week 14      The Struggle is Real**

Dec. 1      Second Wave Feminism

Reading:      de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (selections)

|                |                                                |
|----------------|------------------------------------------------|
| Dec. 3         | Unburdening the White Man                      |
|                | Reading: Césaire, “Discourse on Colonialism”   |
| <b>Week 15</b> | <b>Revolutionary Thoughts?</b>                 |
| Dec. 8         | Structuralism and Poststructuralism            |
|                | Reading: Lévi-Strauss and Derrida (Selections) |
| Dec. 10        | Postmodern Philosophy                          |
|                | Reading: Deleuze and Lyotard (Selections)      |
| <b>FINAL</b>   | <b>Thursday, December 18, 3-5 PM</b>           |