

# Western Culture and Counterculture

BA Program, 1<sup>th</sup> Semester, Block 1-2, 2019-2020

Oude Manhuispoort 4-6

Tuesdays 9.00-12.00

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## Objectives

Having completed this course, students will have acquired a solid overview of (1) the main general currents of Western intellectual and cultural history from late antiquity to the present, (2) their relation to those currents, ideas, practices, and organizations that have tended to be suppressed, marginalized, or discredited in traditional academic scholarship, and (3) the polemical and apologetic discourses that have produced and regulated the relation between these two.

## Contents

This lecture course provides a bird's-eye overview of the main currents of Western intellectual and cultural history from Late Antiquity to the present, with an emphasis on the interwoven histories of philosophy, religion, the natural sciences, and the arts, and with due attention to their political and social context. At the same time, it problematizes the hegemonic agendas and implicit ideological assumptions that have driven traditional historical narratives of Western culture, by giving systematic attention to a range of currents, ideas, practices, and organizations that have tended to be rejected, suppressed, marginalized, or discredited in traditional academic scholarship. By giving equal attention to normative ideas of "Western Culture" and to the various kinds of "Counter Culture" against which it defines its own identity, the module both describes *and* questions the "grand narratives" that have dominated our understanding of Western Culture in the academy. Against this background, special attention will go to the basic polemical and apologetic discourses that inform current intellectual as well as public debates about religion and its relation to modernity.

## Relation to Western esotericism

The module "Western Culture and Counter Culture" is part of the Bachelor program Study of Religion and the more specialized Bachelor Minor "Western esotericism". While it provides a general overview of "mainstream" Western culture, its special focus on "counterculture" (broadly equivalent, in this context, to the types of rejected knowledge studied under the label "Western esotericism") means that it also provides an ideal historical and theoretical background for those students who are interested in following the seminars

“Western Esotericism in the Early Modern Period” (Dr. P.J. Forshaw) and  
“Western Esotericism from the 18<sup>th</sup> Century to the Present” (Dr. M. Pasi).

### **Credits**

12 ECTS

### **Canvas**

Please make sure that you are properly registered as student in this course on Canvas. This is crucial because study materials will be made available there, and messages with important information are sent only through this system. Moreover, the syllabus may undergo modifications as we progress in the semester, so in order to stay up to date on these changes, you must monitor the Canvas site.

### **Entry requirements**

None

### **Assessment**

Two in-class examinations, at the end of each block, about the reading materials for the preceding seven weeks. Each examination consists of two questions, and the resulting grade counts for 50% of the final grade.

### **Computer Policy**

The use of cell-phones in class are strictly prohibited. Furthermore, there is to be absolutely no recording- audio or visual- at any time. Students that fail to comply with this policy will be penalized a full letter grade on their final marks.

### **Disability-Related Student Accommodations**

If you are in need of a disability-related accommodation, please be in contact with me as soon as possible. Like all of the faculty at University of Amsterdam, I am committed to making every reasonable effort to facilitate learning among students. If you should have any questions, do not hesitate to contact the [Resource Office on Disabilities](#). Needless to say, discussion of these matters will be totally confidential.

# Program

1. (3 September): Introduction to the Course

2. (10 September): Paganism

Plato, *Phaedrus* (Cooper transl.). Focus on 244-266.

*Corpus Hermeticum* (Salaman et al. transl.). Focus on Bk. I (here pp. 17-24), Bk. XI (52-58) and especially Bk. XIII (65-71).

3. (17 September): Monotheism

Genesis 1-9.

Exodus 19-20, 32-34.

Gospel according to John.

(*New International Version*, 2001/2005).

4. (24 September): Entanglement

"The Song of the Pearl" (with commentary; Hans Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion*, 113-129).

Augustine, *The City of God*, Bk VIII (Dyson transl.). Focus on pars. 19-27 (pp. 339-358).

5. (1 October): Nature

Plotinus, *Ennead* IV.8 (KcKenna transl.). Zosimos, *Visions* (Sherwood Taylor transl.).

Suhrawardi and ibn 'Arabi, fragments on imagination (ed. Henry Corbin).

6. (8 October): Renaissance

Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, Oratio "On the Dignity of Man".

Lodovico Lazzarelli, Three Prefaces addressed to Giovanni "Mercurio" da Correggio (Hanegraaff / Bouthoorn ed.).

7. (15 October): Reformations

**[First Examination Distributed]**

*The Chymical Wedding of Christian Rosenkreutz.*

X~~~~~(Oct. 22: No Class)~~~~~X  
**[First Examination Due]**

8. (29 October): Enlightenment

Emanuel Swedenborg, *Heaven and Its Wonders and Hell*, #366-444.

9. (5 November) Paganism, revisited

Dickinson, *The Greek View of Life*. (1907)

Aldous Huxley, "What are you going to do about it?"

Aldous Huxley, *The Perennial Philosophy*. (1945)

10. (12 November): The Conquest of Cool

Norman Mailer, "The White Negro." (1957)

Lawrence Lipton, *The Holy Barbarians*. 7-57.

Allen Ginsberg, *Howl*. (1955)

11. (19 November): The Psychedelic Experience

Timothy Leary, *Start Your Own Religion*, (1967).

[Listen: Timothy Leary, Richard Alpert, et.al., *The Psychedelic Experience*]

Art Kleps, *The Boo-Hoo Bible of the Neo-American Church*, (1971).

12. (26 November): Paganism, yet again

Robin Morgan (ed.), *Sisterhood is Powerful*, selected essays.

13. (3 December): Conclusion

**[~Second Examination Distributed~]**

14. (10 December): No Class

**[~Second Examination Due~]**