

Western Culture and Counterculture

Prof. dr. Wouter J. Hanegraaff

BA Program, 1th Semester, Block 1-2, 2020-2021

Tuesdays 9.00-13.00

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 Spirituality and Religion. 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 18th Century to the Present” (Dr. M. Pasi).

Teaching format

Online lectures with Powerpoints (the Powerpoint for each lecture is made available as a PDF on Blackboard).

Attention! The course consists of fourteen lectures. The first lecture of each block will not be provided “live” but in pre-recorded form. You will have to watch this lecture during the first (non-teaching) week of each semester block.

Credits

12 ECTS

Entry requirements

None

Assessment

Two written “take-home” examinations, at the end of each block, about the contents of the lectures & powerpoints, and the reading materials for the preceding seven weeks. Each examination consists of seven open questions, and the resulting grade counts for 50% of the final grade.

Resit

If the final grade is insufficient (= below 5.5), then there is an opportunity at the end of the semester for a resit of *one* of the two examinations. In case both examinations were insufficient, you can choose which one you wish to do again (a resit for both examinations is not possible). The resit has the same format as the standard written examinations: seven open questions, with the result counting for 50% of the final grade. Only in exceptional cases (based on a specific request with convincing motivation, or in case of a very low number of participants) the resits may take the form of an oral examination.

Program

1. 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).

2. Monotheism

Genesis 1-9.
Exodus 19-20, 32-34.
Gospel according to John.
(*New International Version*, 2001/2005).

3. 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).

4. Nature

Plotinus, *Ennead* IV.8 (KcKenna transl.).
Zosimos, *Visions* (Sherwood Taylor transl.).
Suhrawardi and ibn ‘Arabi, fragments on imagination (ed. Henry Corbin).

5. Mythologies

Fragment from pupil of Abulafia, in Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, ch. 4
(focus on section 8).
John of Morigny, Prologue to *Liber Florum Celestis* (formerly known as *Liber Visionum*).

6. 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. Reformations

The Chymical Wedding of Christian Rosenkreutz.

[Examination Week 1]

8. Science

Giordano Bruno, *The Heroic Frenzies* (fragm.).
Wouter J. Hanegraaff, “Under the Mantle of Love: The Mystical Eroticism of Marsilio Ficino and Giordano Bruno”

9. Enlightenment

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

Immanuel Kant, *Dreams of a Spirit Seer*, Preface & Part II.

10. Romanticism

Novalis, *Christendom or Europe*.

11. Disenchantment

Helena P. Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine* (fragm.).

William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, Lectures XVI/XVII ("Mysticism").

12. Modernity

Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Prologue.

Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, nr 125 ("The Madman").

Carl Gustav Jung, *Liber Novus* (fragm.).

13. Postmodernity

Allen Ginsberg, *Howl*.

François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, Ch. 1.

14. Now

Sayyid Qutb ash-Shaheed, "The America I have Seen".

Friedrich Hayek, "The End of Truth".

[Examination Week 2]