

Syllabus
PH 307: 20th Century Philosophy

TU-TH 9:10-11:00
Fall, 2007

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Ladd 106

One could write an excellent book on how the 20th century was a century in which differences emerged (in philosophy and in other fields) that were irreconcilable because the terms that seemed to have been common were no longer understood in a common way. Such is the case with philosophy, which found itself split between what came to be known as analytic philosophy, pragmatism, and so-called continental philosophy. The history of 20th continental philosophy is itself a complex affair, with its German, French, Italian and American strains.

20th century continental philosophy is thoroughly conditioned by the German philosophical heritage of Kant, Hegel, Nietzsche. Early 20th-century continental philosophy was dominated by the Germans (specially Husserl and Heidegger). But if 20th century continental philosophy began German, argueably it ended French – with such figures as Merleau-Ponty, Sartre, Althusser, Foucault, Lyotard, Derrida, Levinas and a host of others. This means that a one-semester survey of 20th century philosophy is impossible (it also means that if you have not studied at least Descartes and Kant, and possibly Hegel, your looking at a daunting task here), but even a survey of 20th-century continental philosophy is unwieldy.

The plan of this seminar is to focus on a tradition of 20th-century French philosophy that has its roots in German Idealism, Nietzsche and phenomenology (especially Heidegger); this will require that we orient ourselves by recalling the opening of the modern era with Descartes. After an all-too brief discussion of Descartes, we will turn to a few works of Heidegger who may be seen as the first figure (after Nietzsche) to question the assumptions of modernity and prepared what has since come to be called the ‘postmodern era.’ For the remainder of the semester we will read works by French philosophers who, each in their own way have grappled with the Cartesian and German Idealist traditions.

REQUIRED TEXTS

Descartes, *Meditations*
Heidegger, *Basic Writings*
Descombes, *Modern French Philosophy*
Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*
Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*
Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*
Handouts

READING ASSIGNMENTS

9/6: Introduction
9/11: Descartes, *Meditations* One and Two
9/13: Heidegger, “Modern Science, Metaphysics, Mathematics”

9/18: Heidegger, "Modern Science, Metaphysics, Mathematics"
 9/20: Heidegger, "Letter on Humanism"
 9/25: Heidegger, "Letter on Humanism"
 9/27: Heidegger Articles (handouts)
 10/2: Descombes, 1-54
 10/4: Descombes, 55-74; 110-135
 10/9: Descombes, pp.137-169
 10/11: Descombes, pp.168-190; Lyotard, pp. vii-xxv
 10/16: Lyotard, pp. 3-37
 10/18: Lyotard, 37-67
 10/23: Lyotard, 71-82; Fry, Cohen
 10/25: Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 3-69.
 10/30: Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*: 73-131
 11/1: Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*: 135-194
 11/6: Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*: 195-228
 11/8: Foucault Articles, TBA
 11/13: Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, pp. 30-58 (handout)
 11/15: Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, pp. 30-58 (handout)
 11/20: Derrida, "Signature, Event, Context"

Thanksgiving

11/27: Derrida, "Signature, Event, Context (cont.)"
 11/29: Derrida, "White Mythology" **Term paper proposal due**
 12/4: Derrida, "White Mythology" (cont.)
 12/6: Derrida, "Différance"
 12/11: Derrida, "The Ends of Man"

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

- 1) A 15 page term paper is required on a subject to be determined in consultation with the instructor. **Term paper due December 17 at 12:00pm**
- 2) Two 'précis': Each student will prepare a 3-page 'précis' of the reading that is to be discussed in the class that day. Each précis will be photocopied and distributed to the other students; it will be presented by the student, and will form the point of departure for our discussions.
- 3) Reading and reflecting on the material prior to class is imperative; as a seminar, participation in class discussion is not option, but expected.

ASSESSMENT:

Term paper: 40 points
 Each précis: 15 points each
 Class participation: 10 points

OFFICE HOURS TU-TH 11:00-12:00, 2:00-3:00; W 2:00-3:00 and by appointment

*A **précis** is a short exegetical account of the main points of a longer text. A précis should be:

- * concise (be as brief and succinct as possible, and certainly remain within the limits of the assignment – three pages)
- * accurate (don't distort or misrepresent the key ideas; try to stick to what is actually said and avoid drawing too many conclusions)
- * focused (you present the author's main argument or points without going into any detail)
- * fair and balance (your précis should reproduce the relative emphasis given to each main idea in the original text)