

Syllabus  
PH 307: 20<sup>th</sup> Century Philosophy

WF 12:20-2:10  
Fall, 2011

R. Lilly  
Ladd 106

**COURSE DESCRIPTION:**

This course offers one of several possible surveys of 20<sup>th</sup> century philosophy. 20<sup>th</sup> century philosophy has undergone a splintering into disparate traditions far more profound than the previous philosophical battles between what one could call schools of thought. Analytic philosophy, pragmatism, and so-called continental philosophy are often separated by irreconcilable premises, such as the very nature of philosophy and philosophical knowledge.

This course will focus on 20<sup>th</sup> century ‘continental’ or ‘European’ philosophy. Early 20<sup>th</sup> century philosophy was dominated by the Germans – phenomenology, critical theory, existentialism – the latter part of the century was dominated by the French.

20<sup>th</sup> century continental philosophy understands itself against the background of German Idealism Kant, Hegel, and by those critics of it: Nietzsche and Kierkegaard. German philosophers such as Husserl Early 20<sup>th</sup>-century continental philosophy was dominated by the Germans (especially Husserl and Heidegger). But if 20<sup>th</sup> century continental philosophy began German, arguably it ended French – with such figures as Merleau-Ponty, Sartre, Althusser, Foucault, Lyotard, Derrida, Levinas, Kristeva, Nancy and others. A comprehensive one-semester survey of 20<sup>th</sup> 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 20<sup>th</sup>-century continental philosophy is unwieldy.

The plan of this seminar is to focus on later 20<sup>th</sup>-century French philosophy. After an all-too brief discussion of Descartes and phenomenology, we will turn to a few works of Heidegger who is the first figure (after Nietzsche) to question the assumptions of modern philosophy and German Idealism, 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.

**LEARNING GOALS**

- To think critically, creatively, and independently
- To become familiar with concepts fundamental to of contemporary European philosophy.
- To read, analyze, and apply philosophical texts and their concepts
- To communicate effectively
- To become aware of the contemporary condition of philosophical thinking

## REQUIRED TEXTS

Descartes, *Meditations*  
Heidegger, *Basic Writings*  
Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*  
Foucault, *The Foucault Reader*  
Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*  
Handouts

## READING ASSIGNMENTS

9/7: Introduction  
9/9: Descartes, *Meditations One and Two*, and *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy* Phenomenological Movement” (especially ‘Constitutive Phenomenology’), <http://www.rep.routledge.com/article/DD075SECT1>  
9/14: Heidegger, “Modern Science, Metaphysics, Mathematics”  
9/16: Heidegger, “Letter on Humanism”  
9/21: Heidegger, “Letter on Humanism”  
9/23: Heidegger, “The Question Concerning Technology”  
9/28: Heidegger, (handouts)  
9/30: Lyotard, pp. 3-37.  
10/5: Lyotard, 37-67.  
10/7: Lyotard, 71-82; Fry, Cohen (handouts)  
10/12: Foucault, ”Introduction,” “What is Enlightenment?,” pp. 3-50.  
10/14: Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,” “What is an Author?,” pp. 76-120.  
10/19: Foucault, “The Body of the Condemned, “Docile Bodies,” “The Means of Correct Training,” pp. 170-205”

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10/21: **Study Day – No Class**

10/26: Foucault, “We ‘Other Victorians’,” “The Repressive Hypothesis,” “Preface to *HS II*” pp. 292-338.

10/28: **TBA**

11/2: Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, pp. 6-55 (handout)

11/4: Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, pp. 30-58

11/9: Derrida, “Signature, Event, Context”

11/11: Derrida, “Signature, Event, Context (cont.)”

11/16: Derrida, “White Mythology” (cont.)

11/18: Derrida, “White Mythology”

### **Thanksgiving**

11/30: Derrida, “Différance”

12/2: Derrida, “The Ends of Man ”**Term paper proposal due**

12/7: Kristeva, (selections, handout)

12/9 : Butler, *Gender Trouble*, (selections, handout)

## 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 15 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 seminar participants; 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: 20 points

**OFFICE HOURS** WF 10:00-11:30, TUTH 9-10:30, and by appointment Ladd 218

\*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)