

Graduate Course Description 2013-2014

PHL 577 & 578 Derrida/Cixous – Michael Naas, Autumn & Winter

In this twenty-week, two-quarter seminar on Derrida/Cixous, we will try to provide an introduction to the very different but nonetheless closely related projects of Jacques Derrida and Hélène Cixous. We will read both Derrida and Cixous with an eye to such shared themes as sexual difference, writing (and especially “feminine writing”), life, survival, literature, the archive, and so on. We will also attempt to understand how the respective projects of these two great thinker/writers intersected and informed one another for over thirty years. We will thus look at Derrida texts with no apparent relationship to Cixous, works of Cixous with little explicit relation to Derrida, but then at Derrida texts devoted to Cixous, Cixous texts on Derrida, and the one work signed by both Derrida and Cixous.

We will spend the first few weeks of the first quarter reading in great detail Part I of Derrida’s important 1967 work *De la grammatologie*. We will consider especially Derrida’s understanding of writing, the trace, life, and survival as these themes were developed in this early work. We will then shift gears rather dramatically in the middle of this first quarter by reading two or three relatively short and recent (post 2000) “novels” of Cixous (*Reveries of the Wild Woman*, *The Day I Wasn’t There*, *So Close*). Toward the end of the quarter, we will try to draw some parallels—and establish some substantial differences—between Derrida’s work and Cixous’s on questions of writing, sexual difference, the nature of literature (as opposed to photography), and so on.

During the winter break, we will all offer ourselves the pleasure of reading George Du Maurier’s (English) novel *Peter Ibbetson* and we will watch the movie *Peter Ibbetson* (with Gary Cooper). All this will prepare us for Cixous’s brilliant novel *Philippines*. We will then read Derrida’s two book-length works on Cixous, paying special attention to the themes of life, survival, sexual difference, power, and the archive that Derrida develops in those works. We will then return to Cixous and read two more novels (*Hemlock* and *Eve Escapes*) that Derrida did not and could not comment on since they were written after his death—an event that resonates throughout both works. These novels will allow us to ask questions about Derrida’s and Cixous’s respective understanding of the trace, autobiography, haunting, death, and the power of literature.

In the final weeks of the seminar we will turn to the one text written by both Derrida and Cixous, *Veils*, a text that combines a brief story by Cixous and an extended commentary on that story by Derrida. We will conclude with Cixous’s work *Insister of Jacques Derrida*, a very powerful work written in the wake of Derrida’s death in 2004 that might be considered the final installment of *Veils* and, in some sense, the end of their decades-long engagement with one another’s work.

PHL 515 & 516–Hegel’s Science of Logic I &II – Kevin Thompson, Autumn & Winter

This course examines the central issues and ideas of Hegel’s Science of Logic [1812/13, 1816]. In this work, Hegel presents the fundamental categories and structures of the post-critical metaphysics that serves as the foundations of his entire philosophical system. Accordingly, we will explore the major topics of the work—being, essence, and concept—through a close reading of the text, with an underlying concern to set out and evaluate its overarching argumentative structure.

PHL 550 & PHL 551 - Heidegger, *Being and Time* I & II – Will McNeill – Autumn & Winter

This two-quarter sequence will offer a close reading of what is indisputably the single most important text of twentieth century European philosophy: Heidegger’s 1927 magnum opus, *Being and Time*. Students will become conversant with the difficult terminology and conceptuality of Heidegger’s thought, and gain an appreciation of the radicality of Heidegger’s phenomenological project by situating it in relation to the history of the Western philosophical tradition, showing how and why a “destructuring” of the history of ontology is integral to Heidegger’s undertaking. The course will incorporate reference to Heidegger’s Marburg and early Freiburg lecture courses from the same period to help illuminate the larger project and to inquire concerning its potential difficulties and limitations.

PHL 415 - Aristotle and the Philosophy of Time – Sean Kirkland - Autumn

We will begin the quarter with a very brief discussion of some major moments in the philosophy of time in the Western tradition, primarily in an effort to indicate what a radically different approach to this question we find in Aristotle. That is, the history of Western philosophy has approached time *either as objective or as subjective, either* (ala Descartes or Newton) as a vessel (like space) in which external objects are situated and real events occur *or* (ala Kant or Husserl) as a structure that consciousness imposes on the content of experience. However, a discussion of Aristotle’s philosophical method, *dialektikē*, will indicate that his thinking does not unfold in terms of the subject-object relation, but is rather a thinking of phenomenal being. Given this we must approach his thinking of time otherwise than as objective or subjective, and indeed we will use a quite unorthodox heuristic device to lay bare an unfamiliar conception of time, one according to which temporal beings are fundamentally tragic (in a very specific Aristotelian sense). Rather than beginning from Aristotle’s metaphysics and working our way up through the physics and then tracing the implications of the physics for ethics, politics, and poetics, we will begin from the fundamentally tragic experience of time Aristotle sets out in the *Poetics*. We will then see how this illuminates the temporality of ethical and political life and, ultimately, how all natural beings (i.e. all beings in time) are fundamentally tragic for Aristotle. One virtue of this unorthodox approach is that it reveals something extremely compelling, and otherwise quite hidden, about Aristotle’s thinking of time. Another virtue is that it amounts to addressing Aristotle as the aporetic or problem-based (rather than systematizing) thinker that he is.

PHL 656 Seminar: Deleuze & Adorno on Capitalism – Joe Weiss - Autumn

Very little scholarship has addressed the similarities between the works of Theodor W. Adorno and Gilles Deleuze. This is despite the fact that, in contrast to many of the most celebrated thinkers of the 20th Century, both repeatedly attempt to overcome Freudian psychoanalysis in and through a historico-philosophical presentation that stretches the Marxist critique of political economy to its outermost limits. While our task will in part consist of investigating the manner in which Adorno and Deleuze both, in other words, situate the tenets of psychoanalysis in relationship to the *social* production of advanced capitalism, e.g., in *Aesthetic Theory* and *Anti-Oedipus*, we will also more generally try to highlight specific points of convergence or disjunction, i.e., grasp whether what Deleuze calls “lines of flight” or connections between the flows of their conceptual “styles” exist. More specifically, our working hypothesis will be that the idea of *mimesis* in particular helps to bring to the fore many of the similarities and possible incommensurabilities between Adorno and Deleuze. This is why we will begin our investigation with Walter Benjamin’s “Doctrine of the Similar,” a text that, on the one hand, influenced everything Adorno wrote from 1942 onward, and, on the other hand, a text that undoubtedly echoes with Deleuze and Guittari’s attempt to institute a practice of becoming-other than oneself. With this initial reading, some of the following problems will begin to surface and guide the course of our investigation: in light of the capitalist mode of production, what is the (expressive/ideological) relationship between concept and nature, history and pre-history, sign and image? How can we best conceive of the problem of immanence or the “plane of consistency” versus transcendence, without descending into positivism or mere vitalism? Does the ontology of becoming, of possibility as such, neglect the static element of capitalist productive circuits? Are dialectics and the representations of the “subject” mere hold-overs from the idealist tradition that stifles desire and revolutionary potential? What is the relationship between Adorno’s conception of constellations and Deleuze’s conception of assemblages or the rhizome, both of which appear to be guided by the refusal to reinscribe hierarchy into the conceptual ordering of phenomena? Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, does aesthetic comportment in general and the musicality of *mimesis* or “the refrain” in particular generate a special sensitivity for the latent possibility of a world beyond the barbarism of the capitalist mode of production?

PHL 400: William of Ockham - Rick Lee - Winter

In *The Future Lasts a Long Time*, Louis Althusser calls nominalism "the royal road to materialism." In fact, for a great many contemporary thinkers, nominalism presents alternatively an opportunity, a challenge, a disaster, and a salvation for a critique of metaphysics. In this course, we will be primarily interested in the ways in which Ockham's logic preempts metaphysics and addresses what traditionally were considered metaphysical issues as logical ones. At the end of the course, we will turn to Ockham's shorter work on the Eucharist to see how he applies his thought to a particularly thorny question for medieval thinkers.

PHL 557 – French Phenomenology: Michel Henry’s Phen. of Life – Frédéric Seyler - Spring

Michel Henry’s (1922-2002) phenomenology of life represents one of the most important developments in post-husserlian philosophy and has become a major reference in the contemporary French debate on phenomenology (and on philosophy *tout court...*).

As a radicalization of Husserl’s project, it is the first to have developed a phenomenological concept of life, which Henry identifies as immanent affectivity. But what is affectivity? And in what respect is this idea phenomenological? Furthermore: What are the implications of this phenomenology of life, for instance with regard to ethics or cultural critique?

The aim of the seminar will be to understand Henry’s radical move, how it is relevant to specific fields of philosophical inquiry and how it affects our reading of the philosophical tradition, for instance in Husserl, Heidegger, but also in Descartes, Marx or Freud, which are important references – and sometimes opponents – in Henry’s attempt to renew phenomenology.

To achieve this we will read some of Henry’s major works and, if time, a selection of articles in French. A first tentative book-selection for this seminar includes: *Material Phenomenology* (1990), *Genealogy of Psychoanalysis* (1985), *Barbarism* (1987), which all have been translated into English.

PHL 520 – Karl Marx and the Logic of Capital – Bill Martin - Spring

Dear Illustrious Graduate Students,

My seminar in the spring will be on Marx. I have two different ideas for the seminar, though I am leaning toward the first one. But I wanted to circulate this and hear what you would prefer. Let’s go ahead and figure this out in this term, and I’ll let everyone know what we come up with.

1. Focusing entirely on Capital, vol. 1, though perhaps with some commentary from Althusser and others inserted along the way. Capital, as you know, is a very long and complex text, so we will do the best we can to achieve the most depth with the time that we have.

or

2. A course on Marx’s "A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right," which would also involve reading the Hegel first, and preferably some of Kant's "post-Critical" essays before that.

Either course links well, I think, with the Hegel seminars that will precede the spring term, but, as it has been said so often that Hegel's Logic is important for the reading of Capital, again it might make more sense to pursue the first option.

Thank you, and I hope that your quarter and year get off to a brilliant start.

PHL 590 – The Political Philosophy of Jacques Rancière – Peg Birmingham - Spring

My spring course on Ranciere will concentrate on his understanding of the relation between aesthetics, politics, and philosophy and, further, how this relation informs his conception of radical democracy. Regarding the last, we will be spending some time on his notion of the "people." Main texts: *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*, *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy*; *Staging the People: The Proletarian and His Double*.

PHL 500 Affect and Autonomy in Chinese Philosophy – Frank Perkins – Spring

The course will explore models of (or alternatives to) self-control and autonomy as they arise in classical Chinese Philosophy, particularly Confucianism. Early Chinese cosmologies were based on immanent, interconnected patterns of force, and human motivation was seen as ultimately grounded in spontaneous affective responses to events in the world, not in a self-determining will or in reason. This leaves human beings necessarily subject to the world around them, making them unsteady, out of control, and frequently upset. One of the main concerns of early Chinese philosophers was how to avoid this condition by cultivating a kind of autonomy that incorporated rather than denied affective sensitivity and relationships. We will begin by examining basic models of motivation and then turn to various ways of cultivating self-control and autonomy, ranging from attentiveness and anxious concern to the importance of music. We will focus on one of the most important Confucian texts, the *Mengzi* (Mencius) but we will read parts of other Confucian texts, and we will set these in the broader context of other early Chinese philosophies, particularly Daoism. No prior familiarity with Chinese Philosophy is required.