

PHL C09 H3S

Topics in Continental Philosophy

Syllabus

*UTSC online:
asynchronous and synchronous elements*

M & W 2-5

Instructor: Natalie Helberg

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Office Hours: Monday 11-1 and by appointment

Course Description

We will engage in a detailed study of Catherine Malabou's work on 'plasticity.' For Malabou, 'plasticity' names any form's ability to receive, bestow, or annihilate form. Plasticity is a figure of *transformation*, in other words. It can name the transformation of selves, of brains, and even of philosophical systems. We will preoccupy ourselves with both the philosophical and the political stakes of plasticity. What are the politics surrounding the way transformation is conceptualized? If we think of change in terms of Malabou's 'plasticity' instead of in terms of Derrida's 'autoimmunity,' for instance, what happens? What could the implications of how transformation is conceived be for philosophy itself? What, moreover, could the philosophical implications of how transformation is conceived be for people who have been influenced by cultural forms of power? Can transformation serve the end of political resistance? Must it be conceived in a certain way in order to do this? What is the relationship between our discourse and our very capacity to change?

In order to engage with Malabou's thought in a thorough way, we must understand its relationship to deconstruction, psychoanalysis, and Foucaultian theory. I will introduce students to each of these streams of continental philosophy over the course of the term, situating Malabou's texts with respect to them. The course will be a wonderful opportunity for those students who are interested in continental philosophy to track a single theme (i.e., that of transformation) across various zones of the subdiscipline.

Texts:

*I will post electronic versions of most readings on Quercus. Catherine Malabou's *What Should We Do With Our Brain?*, *Changing Difference*, and *The Ontology of the Accident* will be available through the UofT Bookstore.

Lectures and Course-structure:

I will be pre-recording between 3 ½ and 4 hours of lecture per week. Students will be able to access the lecture material for a topic listed on the syllabus by 2pm on the day the topic is supposed to be covered (see our 'modules' section on Quercus for video lectures). *ON WEDNESDAYS at 2pm we will meet via Blackboard Collaborate for approximately 1 and ½ hours. Our discussions during that time will count toward students' participation grades. Our Wednesday discussions will cover the material presented on Monday of the same week, and on the previous Wednesday (that is: I will be posting lectures on Wednesday, but we won't be talking about them until the following week; the Wednesday lectures will be posted by class time on Wednesday, but students should prioritize attending our virtual class and contributing to discussion).

The course will proceed rather quickly, as everything has been condensed for the summer, so I highly recommend watching lecture material during the week it is posted. I also highly recommend keeping up with the readings.

Evaluation:

First short, critical summary (650-700 words): 25%
DUE: July 20th

Second short, critical summary (650-700 words): 25%
DUE: August 4th

Participation: 15%

Final essay (2500 words): 35%
Date: questions distributed August 12th (via Quercus); due August 26th

Assignment Submission: All assignments should be submitted through Quercus by midnight on the day they are due.

Extensions: Extensions may be permitted, but please request them *before* any given assignment is due.

Late Policy: Late assignments for which an extension has not been granted will be penalized (2% of the grade will be subtracted each day after the deadline until the assignment is submitted).

Plagiarism and Academic Dishonesty: Plagiarism (misrepresenting the work of others as one's own, or failing to cite one's sources properly) and other forms of academic dishonesty are serious offenses and will not be tolerated. Offenses of this kind run counter to the aims of education and evaluation: Skill acquisition (one becomes a better reader, writer and thinker because one does the work) and fair assessment (one's grades should reflect one's actual capacities). In order to avoid inadvertent acts of plagiarism, students should familiarize themselves with the resources found here:

<http://www.artsci.utoronto.ca/newstudents/transition/academic/plagiarism>.

Accessibility: Students with diverse learning styles and needs are welcome in this course. Accommodations will be provided for those students who require them. Accessibility-related concerns should be communicated to me. Depending on the nature of the accommodation, students requiring accommodations may also need to contact accessibility services:

www.accessibility.utoronto.ca

E-mail Policy: Feel free to come talk to me during my office hours (via Blackboard Collaborate) about the philosophical ideas and questions we're entertaining in the course. That is, it's better to deal with these things in person. If you have questions about extensions, meetings, and other practical matters, I will be happy to respond to these questions by email.

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Reading Schedule

Week 1:

July 6th: Introduction.

Franz Kafka: "A Report to An Academy."

(Recommended: Start reading Catherine Malabou: *What Should We Do With Our Brain?*)

July 8th: Catherine Malabou: *What Should We Do With Our Brain?*

Week 2:

July 13th: Jacques Derrida: “Différance” and selections from “The Ends of Man” (from *Margins of Philosophy*)

July 15th: Jacques Derrida: Selections from *Acts of Religion* (pages 43-48, 56, 65, 71, 79-82, 98) and *Rogues* (pages 118-24). Short selections from “The Ends of Man” (from *Margins of Philosophy*).

Week 3:

July 20th: Catherine Malabou: “Grammatology and Plasticity,” “The Phoenix, the Spider, and the Salamander” (from *Changing Difference*).

July 22nd: Sigmund Freud: “Beyond the Pleasure Principle”

Week 4:

July 27th: Sigmund Freud: “Mourning and Melancholia”

Catherine Malabou: Short selections from *The New Wounded* and *The Ontology of the Accident*.

Slavoy Žižek: “Descartes and the Post-traumatic Subject”

July 29th: Michel Foucault: “What is Enlightenment?” (from *Ethics, Subjectivity, and Truth*) and “Truth and Power” (from *Power*) [see Quercus ‘files’ section]

Week 5:

August 3rd: Civic Holiday. University Closed.

August 5th: Jacques Lacan: Short selections from *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis* (Seminar VII)

Judith Butler: “Arguing with the Real” (from *Bodies that Matter*)

Catherine Malabou: “Will Sovereignty Ever Be Deconstructed?”

Week 6:

August 10th: Catherine Malabou: *Morphing Intelligence* (pages 13-16 and Chapter 3)

August 12th: “Interview with Catherine Malabou” (from *Plastic Materialities*)

*Final essay topics distributed

***THURSDAY August 13th** (*Make up for Aug. 3rd; last day of class): No new reading.