

PHL 322 HIS

Contemporary Continental Philosophy

St. George Campus
(online-asynchronous delivery)
July-August
Thursday & Friday 3-6

Instructor: Natalie Helberg

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Office Hours: Friday 12-2:30pm and by appointment

Course Description

In this course, we will explore continental theory that emerged in the second half of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first century as a response to specific forms of violence and power. We will begin by examining Heidegger's post-war re-articulation of humanism and the critiques that it inspired. Next, we will consider frameworks for understanding power, particularly forms of biopower which target and attempt to normalize the social body as a whole. Structuralist and poststructuralist discourses (work on Foucaultian theory, Lacan's work, and Lyotard's thinking) will make it possible to reflect on modes of opposing these novel forms of power. Our final week will be devoted to Catherine Malabou's work, in which continental philosophy and neuroscientific thinking interface in new and interesting ways. We will consider the following questions. To what extent do the neuroscientific concepts which are central to her discourse participate in the forms of power explored in the earlier weeks of the course? How might her philosophical discourse nevertheless serve the end of political insubordination?

Lectures:

*I will prerecord approximately 4 hours of lecture per week. I will post links to all of my lectures on Quercus ('modules' page) by the date and time each lecture is scheduled to occur (e.g., the lecture on Heidegger will be available to view by Thursday, July 9th at 3pm, the lecture on Arendt and Levinas by Friday, July 10th at 3pm, and so on). Students are, of course, welcome to watch these lectures at times that are convenient for them. Note that to successfully engage with the course, students will have to view all lectures and keep up with our readings. I recommend watching lectures within a week of when they are posted and preferably right away. Because the course is a compressed, 6-week course, it will be difficult to 'catch up' if you fall behind.

Texts:

*I will post electronic versions of most readings on Quercus. Jean-François Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition* and Catherine Malabou's *What Should We Do With Our Brain?* are available through the UofT Bookstore.

Evaluation:

2 (600-650 word) critical summaries (20% each):
DUE: July 22nd (returned July 30th) and August 2nd

Essay (1500 words): 30%
DUE: August 14th

Final Exam (take-home essay): 30%
DUE: August 26th (questions distributed on August 14th).

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. I will do my best to accommodate those who require accommodations. 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 talk to me during my office hours (via Blackboard Collaborate) about the philosophical ideas and questions we're entertaining in the course. If you have questions about extensions, meetings, and other practical matters, I will be happy to respond to these questions by email. We do have a TA for the course, but she has a limited number of hours in her contract for student-contact time, so please do address your questions to me.

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Reading Schedule

Week 1:

Heidegger, Humanism and Responses to Heidegger

July 9: Martin Heidegger: "Letter on Humanism"

July 10: Hannah Arendt: "Mankind and Terror" and "Understanding Politics (The Difficulties of Understanding)"

Week 2:

Derrida on Heidegger and Humanism

July 16: Hannah Arendt: wrapping up.

Emmanuel Levinas: selections from *Totality and Infinity*

Jacques Derrida: "Différance" and selections from "The Ends of Man"

July 17: ***OPTIONAL:*** Derrida: "*Ousia and Grammē: Note on a Note from Being and Time*"

Week 3:

Biopower

July 23: Derrida: Finish up.

Giorgio Agamben: "The Camp as Biopolitical Paradigm of the Modern"

July 24: Michel Foucault: "What is Enlightenment?" (from *Ethics, Subjectivity, and Truth*) and "Truth and Power" (from *Power*)

Week 4:
Foucault versus Lacan's Structuralism

July 30: Jacques Lacan: Selections from *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis* (Seminar VII)

Joan Copjec: "Introduction" for *Read My Desire: Lacan Against the Historicists*)

July 31: Judith Butler: "Subjection, Resistance, Resignification: Between Freud and Foucault" (in *The Psychic Life of Power*) and "Arguing with the Real" (in *Bodies that Matter*)

Week 5:
Postmodernism

August 6: Jean-François Lyotard: *The Postmodern Condition* (pp. xxiii-37)

August 7: Lyotard: *The Postmodern Condition* (pp. 37-70)

Week 6:
Catherine Malabou's Plasticity in Light of Critiques of Contemporary Power

August 13: Catherine Malabou: *What Should We Do With Our Brain?*

August 14: Malabou: "Interview with Catherine Malabou" and "Will Sovereignty Ever Be Deconstructed?"

Optional: Selections from *Morphing Intelligence* (pages 13-16 and Chapter 3)