Introduction to Continental Philosophy: Reason, Language, and Subjectivity

Spring Semester 2023/5783

Tuesday 2-5pm

Instructor

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Office hours schedule: Tuesday 12:30-2pm, (and) by email appointment

Please sign up for office hours using one of the following links

<https://calendly.com/abolafia/15min>

https://calendly.com/abolafia/30min

Course Description

In this course, we will examine the development of what is often called continental philosophy, from its origins in the critique of Kant and Hegel, through the development of German and French existentialism, and on to post-structuralism. We will try to understand what makes “continental” philosophy different from other contemporary approaches to philosophy, and we will cover topics including the critique of Cartesian and Kantian theories of subjectivity, philosphical methods like genealogy and phenomenology, aesthetic theory, feminist theory, and moral and political philosophy. We will read texts by Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Benjamin, Adorno, Merleau-Ponty, Fanon, de Beauvoir, Derrida, Foucault, and Butler, among others.

Keywords: Continental philosophy, existentialism, aesthetics, feminism, post-structuralism

בקורס הזה נתמקד בהיסטוריה ובהתפתחות של פילוסופיה קונטיננטלית - כלומר, פילוסופיה אירופאית (בעיקר גרמנית וצרפתית) של מאה ה19 וה-20. נתחיל עם ראשית המסורת הזאת בביקורות על התאוריות של קאנט והגל, נמשיך להתפתחותם של אקזיסטנציאליזם ופנומנולוגיה הגרמנית והצרפתית, ונסיים בסקירה של זרמים מרכזיים באסכולת ה"בתר-מבניות" (פוסט-סטרוקטורליזם). לאורך הקורס, ננסה להבין מה מבדיל בין פילוסופיה קונטיננטלית לבין גישות פילוסופיות אחרות (בעיקר פילוסופיה אנליטית). מהנושאים המרכזיים של הקורס יהיו: הביקורת על הסובייקט הקרטיזיאני/קאנטיאני, מתודות פילוסופיות כגון גנאולוגיה ופנומנולוגיה, תיאוריה אסתטית, תיאוריה פמיניסטית, ופילוסופיה פוליטית ומוסר. נקרא טקסטים של ניטשה, היידגר, בנימין, אדורנו, פנון, פוקו, ובאטלר. מילות מפתח :- : פילוסופיה קונטיננטלית, אקזיסטנציאליזם, אסתטיקה, פמיניזם, פוסט-סטרוקטורליזם

Expectations

Attendance & Participation: This is a discussion-based class, and so regular attendance and participation are important. Participation can take a variety of forms: asking questions as well as answering them, responding to and furthering your classmates’ points in constructive ways. Bringing in ideas from outside class, like insights from other courses, articles you’ve read, and your own experience, can also be excellent ways to contribute to our discussions. To prepare to participate, consider the title of the class and the key concepts in the syllabus. Jot down some of the points made in the reading about those ideas.

If you miss a session, you may be expected to do additional make-up work as well. Insufficient attendance will result in not passing the class.

Accommodations: If you find yourself facing challenges that make it difficult for you to keep up with the coursework, please me us know and we can figure out a way to support you.

## Class norms on discussion

* Treat the ideas of our readings and discussions as open to debate, scrutiny, and new, potentially contradictory evidence;
* Be intentional in your use of language, especially on highly personal topics;
* Assume good intentions on the part of others.
* YOU MUST BRING THE READINGS TO CLASS

Course Materials

All readings will be available as links to PDFs on the MOODLE. Do the readings in advance of class on the day they’re listed.

Assignments

The written assignments for the course are as follows (detailed instructions for each assignment can be found in the “files” section of Canvas):

* Midterm paper of 4 pages.
  + Due in Class on May 9, 2023
* Final exam: 27/06/2023

## Grading Policies

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| --- | --- |
| Participation / Attendance | 20% |
| Homework assignments |  |
| Midterm paper | 30% |
| Final Exam | 50% |

Late work policy: There is a built-in two-day grace period on all deadlines. If you need more time to complete an assignment, please let me know in advance by email. Work turned in late without an extension may be marked down, and very late work may not receive credit.

## Plagiarism

Plagiarism is the copying of sentences, ideas, or direct phrases from a source (book, internet, another student's work, ChatGPT etc.) without proper citation and attribution (i.e. footnotes/parenthetical citation. It is viewed very seriously by the university, because the purpose of the course and your degree is to give you the skills to analyze, interpret, and criticize ideas and texts. Using the work of others defeats the very purpose of why we're all here, which is to learn how to think. All work submitted in this class must be yours and yours alone. If there is a case of plagiarism, I will have to turn it over to the Disciplinary Committee of the University for investigation, a process which may result in failing the course.

In an example of proper citation, I have taken the following explanation of plagiarism from Dr. Andy German, the Chair of the philosophy department:

פלגיאט, כלומר העתקה של משפטים, ורעיונות, ו/או קטעים שלמים ממקור כלשהו (מספר, מהאינטרנט, מעבודתו של מישהו אחר) מבלי לציין זאת ומבלי הפניה כדין לאותו מקור בהערת שוליים, הינה העבירה החמורה ביותר באוניברסיטה. כנ"ל לגבי הגשת עבודה שנכתבה כולה או חלקה ע"י מישהו אחר (או נרכשה בכסף) כאילו היתה שלכם. אציין גם שלמרות שאינני מתנגד, כמובן, לסיעור מוחות ודיונים בצוותא, ***את הכתיבה עליכם לעשות לבד***. כל חשד לפלגיאט יטופל במסגרת וועדת המשמעת של האוניברסיטה והרשעה בעבירה כזו גוררת עונשים כבדים ביותר שעשויים להשפיע על כל עתידכם האקדמי ואף מעבר לו.

**Course Calendar**

**March 14**: Introduction (Subjectivity, Reason, Language – Lecture on Descartes, Kant, Hegel)

**March 21**: Nietzsche (1) – The limits of pure reason and the rational subject

(Pdf on Course site): *Human, All Too Human* para. 2*; The Gay Science* para. 333*; Twilight of the Idols*: "Reason in Philosophy" para. 6, "How the 'True World' Finally Became a Fiction"

**March 28**: Nietzsche (2) – Beyond Good and Evil

*On the Genealogy of Morals*, Preface.1, First Essay

**April 4** (Online): Nietzsche (3) – The Death of God and The Will to Truth

Gay Science 208, 343-4; *Genealogy of Morals* Third Essay 15-28.

**April 18**: Heidegger (1) –The Critique of Subjectivity

(Excerpts from *Being and Time*)

**April 25**: Heidegger (2) – Reason, Language, and Truth

(Excerpts from *Being and Time*)

**May 2**: Heidegger (3) – "The Question Concerning Technology"

**May 9**: Interlude: Freud and Marx – Lecture on the unconscious and the dialectic **(Midterm due)**

**May 16**: FS (1) – Critical Theory and Knowledge

Theodore Adorno, "The Actuality of Philosophy"; "Natural History"

**May 23**: FS (2): Subjectivity and Instrumental Rationality: *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*

(Excerpts from Preface and Ch. 1)

**May 30**: Foucault (1): Power/knowledge

*Discipline and Punish* (Excerpts)

**June 6:** Foucault (2): Subjectivity, body, self

*Discipline and Punish* (Excerpts)

**June 13**: Fanon – Colonized subjectivity

*Black Skin, White Masks*, Ch. 5

**June 20**: Butler – Gender and subjectivity

*Gender Trouble*, Ch. 1