



**PHIL 1047 Contemporary Political Philosophy & Aesthetics**

**Core Course: 30 Credits**

**Level: MASTERS +**

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**SEMINAR: Mondays 5.30-8.30pm**

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We are immersed in a radically strange time where "all that is solid melts into air" -- where technology and the competitive edge seem to go hand in hand with the changing landscape of power, sexuality and democratic rights. It's a strange time which puts into question not only the very stability of what it is we may want (both as individuals and as a society in general), but also, the very meaning of truth, and therewith, ethics morality, aesthetics, play. From 'right-wing politics' to that of the 'left', from 'high art' to 'pulp fiction' and 'virtual', 'hyper-linked' matrixes/worlds, assertions are made that democracy is all but impossible; that the individual must take the blame for what goes wrong with his/her life; that equal rights, health care, and justice for all is too 'expensive' or too 'trendy' for our post-industrial age. Questions around the rise of fascism, racism, homophobia, ethnic cleansing, honour killings, misogyny -- not to mention the attraction/repulsion of 'the seven deadly sins' -- are never very far from this changing landscape of power and politics. The question remains: how to figure a way to analyse these aspects of contemporary life, without resorting to 'received opinion', 'ideological rigidity' or sterile 'expert' testimonials.

The Frankfurt School of social change consisted of a radical group of artists, philosophers and political militants whose lives/writings/experiments directly attacked the rising problem of racism, fascism and general right-wing shifts in body/identity politics (especially regarding ethnicity, religion, sexual diversity and reproductive rights) from the mid-30s onward. To this end, this course examines the leading exponents of the Frankfurt School (and their critics); in the main: Benjamin, Marcuse, Adorno and their incorporation of some of the more resonant aspects of Freud's psychoanalytic propositions. With later detailed focus on Adorno, one comes to understand their triple attack on orthodox Marxism, Enlightenment reasoning (of Kant et al) and of burgeoning phenomenology, especially via the work of Heidegger. Here one begins to unravel 'why' and 'how' concepts such as 'time', 'dialectic', 'negative dialectic', 'art' are a part and parcel of the politics of emancipation and hope. Whether or not the moves they make 'work' will also be investigated -- as indeed, will the very notion of 'work' itself (and what constitutes a 'work' of, say, art or love).

**Format and Assessment of the course:**

- Book review [2500 words max] 35% Due Nov 12, 2007
  - This is an **analytic essay, not one's opinion.**
  - Book to review: Spiegelman, A. **Maus: A Survivor's Tale (Vol 1: My Father Bleeds History; Vol 2: And here my troubles began).**
- Research paper [3,000-5,000 words max] 65% Due Jan 21, 2008
  - Questions will be handed out November 26.
  - This may be either a written piece and/or a written and art-practice based piece. To do the latter, please see me with your project ideas before Dec 10, 2007.

**Reading (\*\*required and in Reader; \*recommended; blank: of interest)**

- Acker, Kathy "Lust: A Sailor's Slight Identity"  
\*\* Adorno, T. **Aesthetic Theory** (2000)  
\*\* \_\_\_\_\_ **Negative Dialectics** (1973)
- \*\*Adorno, Benjamin,  
Bloch, Brecht, Lukacs **Aesthetics and Politics**(1986).  
\*\*Adorno & Horkheimer **Dialectic of Enlightenment** (1944/1979)  
\*Agamben, G. **Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Pure Life** (1998)  
\*\*Arendt, Hannah **The Human Condition** (1974);  
**The Banality of Evil: Eichmann in Jerusalem**  
**The Confessions**  
**Illuminations**  
**One Way Street**  
**The Arcades Project**  
**The Meditations**  
**The Gift of Death**  
*'What is Enlightenment?'* (reader)  
\*Augustin **Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis** (1920)  
\*\*Benjamin, W. **On Dreams and the Unconscious** (1979)  
\* \_\_\_\_\_ *Curiosity in S.Golding, **The Eight Technologies of Otherness***  
\*\*Descartes, R. **Phenomenology of Spirit** (Miller Translation) (1977)  
\*\*Derrida, J. **Things Beyond Resemblance: collected essays on Adorno**  
\*\*Foucault, M. **Fear and Trembling** (1978)  
\*\*Freud, S. **Five Lectures; Negations; Essays in Critical Theory**  
\* \_\_\_\_\_ **Essays in Liberation; The Aesthetic Dimension**  
\*Golding, S. *Theses on Feuerbach;*  
\*\*Hegel, GWF *Preface to **The Critique of Political Economy***  
Hullot-Kentor, R. **Hegel: The Restlessness of the Negative** (2002)  
(2006)  
\*\*Sorel Kierkegaard **The Attack of the Blob**  
\*\*Marcuse, H. **The Melancholy Science**  
\* \_\_\_\_\_ **Love's Work**  
\*Marx, K. **Maus: A Survivor's Tale (My Father Bleeds History and Here My Troubles Began)**  
**Genealogies of Difference.**(2002)
- \*Nancy, Jean-Luc  
\*\*Pitkin, Hannah  
\*Rose, Gillian  
\*Rose, Gillian  
\*\*Spiegelman & F. Jordan  
\*Widder, Nathan
- Background Source Material:**  
T. Adorno  
\_\_\_\_\_ **Philosophy of Modern Music**  
D. Agamben **Lectures on Kant's Critique of Pure Reason**  
S Benhabib **Infancy and History**  
Henri Bergson, **Critique, Norm, Utopia** (1986)  
*"Concerning the Nature of Time," and "Final Note," in his Duration and Simultaneity, pp. 30-48 and pp. 122-24.*
- Susan Buck-Morss **The Origin of Negative Dialectics**  
Eduardo Cadava **Words of Light: Theses on the Photography of History**  
Nadezda Caciovic *"And Next to Nature" and "More than Meets the Eye" in **The Issues, vols 1-3 A. Danto*** **After the End of Art:**  
Contem. Art & the Pale of History (1997)
- M Foucault **The Essential Works of Foucault** [selections only]: *Ethics, v. I; Aesthetics, v. II; Power, v. III.* (1997, 1998, 2000); *The Order of Things*  
P Gay **The Freud Reader** (1989)  
Hardt and Negri **Empire**  
S. Golding **Gramsci's Democratic Theory** (1992)  
David Held **Introduction to Critical Theory** (1980)  
Kant *'What is Enlightenment' in Critique of Judgment; Critique of Pure Reason* (N. Kemp translation)  
C. Taylor **Hegel**

**Please note:** We are always interested in your questions – nothing is too 'vague' or simplistic a question, so don't hesitate to ask. This is a difficult course and requires a certain kind of 'calm' mixed with pleasure and focus. If you get lost, this may not be the worst thing; not only are you 'not alone' but much can be gained out of a 'being lost'. Remember, also, as University of Greenwich students you are entitled access to *all* London University Libraries. For those wishing to use the British Library Reading Room, please see me for 'letter of introduction' [should you require the Reader's pass].

## Lecture Schedule

**Summer Pre-reading [Please be familiar with the following reading before the seminar begins; otherwise puruse for first weeks]**

1. Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (1974);
2. Hanna Pitkin, *The Attack of the Blob* (1998), especially chapters 1, 5, 6, 8, 9 12 ["The Problem of the Blob," pp. 1-19; "The Birth of the Blob," pp. 69-97; "Writing *The Human Condition*," pp. 98-114; "Abstraction, Authority, Gender," pp. 145-177; "The Social in *The Human Condition*," pp. 177-203; "Re-Thinking 'the Social'," pp. 251-285.
3. (and for the really obsessed: Films: *The Night Porter*; *The Battle of Algiers*; *Confession*; *Triumph of the Will*)

**Oct 1: Registration and general introductions all around**

**Oct 8 Introduction: *Floating, Transgression, Blob: tools of the Trade.***

*Consider:*

- §629: "Conviction is the belief that in some point of knowledge one possesses absolute truth. Such a belief presumes, then, that absolute truth exists; likewise, that the perfect methods for arriving at them have been found; finally, that every man who has convictions makes use of these perfect methods. [...] The countless people who sacrificed themselves for their convictions thought they were doing it for absolute truth. All of them were wrong [...] It is not the struggle of opinions that has made history so violent, but rather the struggle of *belief in* opinions, that is, the struggle of convictions. If only all those people who thought so highly of their conviction, who sacrificed all sorts of things to it and spared neither their honour, body nor life in its service, had devoted only half of their strength to investigation by what right they clung to this or that conviction, how they had arrived at it, then how peaceable the history of mankind would appear! How much more would be known!" Nietzsche, *Human all too human*, p. 261-62.
- Doubt is the humility of the intellect.  
*The Torah*

Seminar: How does 'conviction' relate to 'doubt'?

Reading:

1. Foucault, 'What is Enlightenment?' (in reader) alongside Kant's *Enlightenment*
2. Hannah Arendt, "The Rise of Cartesian Doubt," in her *The Human Condition*, intro by Margaret Canovan (University of Chicago Press:, 1998 [1958], pp. 273-280;
3. "Important Arguments from Descartes Meditations On Doubt,"  
<http://www.anselm.edu/homepage/dbanach/dcarg.htm>
4. Descartes, 'Meditation 1,' in his *The Meditations*, edited by Manley and Taylor with an HTML trilingual translation available on: <http://www.wright.edu/cola/descartes/>
5. Film: *The Trap* (BBC, part 3) by Adam Curtis (see on YouTube)

**Oct 15 Friend/Enemy (or the Bifurcation of truth)**

Seminar: What is a binary? And how does a binaric divide 'matter' to aesthetics, philosophy, politics, ethics?

Reading

1. Hannah Pitkin, "The Problem of the Blob," "The Birth of the Blob", "Excising the Blob"; "Why the Blob?"; Chs 1, 5, 10,11 respectively in her *Attack of the Blob*, (University of Chicago Press, 1998).
2. Spiegelberg, *Art. Maus: A Survivor's Tale* (selections)
3. K. Marx, *The Theses On Feuerbach*.
4. Viewing: A. Curtis, *The Trap, part 3*.

**Oct 22 Translating The Difference (between 0/1; Either/Or; Self-Other; Friend/Enemy)**

Seminar: What is the difference between translation, opinion and interpretation? (a small foray into the question of 'subjective', 'objective')

Reading:

1. Benjamin, W. "The Translator's Task"
2. Benjamin, W. "The Story Teller" and 'Theses on Philosophy
3. C. Jacobs, 'Benjamin: And the question of Translation' (photocopy)
4. Adorno, "Letter to Walter Benjamin", (pp. 110-133); Benjamin: "Reply", in Adorno, Benjamin et al, *Politics and Aesthetics* [photocopies avail]

**Oct 29 Diving into the Dialectic (via Hegel, head first) [I]**

Seminar: Textual reading of 'sublation' and the 'this' of truth: (what is subjectivity and what does 'negation' have to do with the 'this'?).

Reading:

1. GWF Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*: Please concentrate on the following fragments. From the "Preface," pp. 1-45: sections: 2, 3, 16-25; 26-7; 30-42; 46-54; 61;
2. (if time) Hegel, From the "Introduction," pp. 46-57: sections 80-81; From "A. Consciousness," sections: 90-99; 126, 128, 130, 142-147, 161-162

**Nov 5 Diving into the Dialectic (via Hegel, head first) [II]**

Seminar: We've got the 'this', now where is the 'there'? And how did negation turn into 'becoming'/immanence?

Reading:

1. GWF Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*: Please concentrate on the following fragments: From "B. Self-Consciousness, pp. 104-38, sections: 166-76; and [Lordship & Bondage]: sections 178-196.
2. Hegel, *The Phenomenology*, sections 360, 367-75.
3. [optional]: S Golding, "Setting the Problem," in *Gramsci's Democratic Theory*, pp. 1-18.

**Nov 12 The importance of the Tremble: Two Views about Reason and Necessity, having little to do with Logic or Feelings {per se}**

Seminar: Kierkegaard argues that trembling and 'compelling' are related. Let's explore their link, especially in relation to concealment. Where would ethics, decision making, and faith come into play? Or to put this slightly differently, if the secret/ the concealing is 'objective' does that make it more ethical or less so?

Reading:

1. S. Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*. Read as much as you can, but concentrate on Problema III: "Was it ethically defensible of Abraham to conceal his purpose from Sarah, from Eleazar, from Isaac?", pp. 109-45.
2. [optional] Derrida, "Whom to Give To [knowing not to know]," in *his The Gift of Death*, pp. 53-81.

**NOTE: BOOK REVIEW DUE IN SCHOOL OFFICE NOVEMBER 12 2007  
NO EXTENSIONS**

**Nov 19**                    **Dialectics: Clarifying the old problem between “ Objectivity” and “Subjectivity”, “Trembling and Faith”, and “Negation as political practice”.**

Seminar:                To whom or what does it matter if something is ‘objective’ or ‘subjective’? The ethical/aesthetic/political tug-of-war

Reading:

1. S. Kierkegaard, “Attunement”, “Problemata 1: Is there a teleological suspension of the ethical?”, and “Is there an absolute duty to God?”, in *Fear and Trembling*, pp. 44-48; 83-95; 96-108.
2. (optional) Derrida, *The Gift of Death* (in reader)
3. RE-VISIT Marx, *Theses on Feuerbach* and his Preface to *The Critique*

**Nov 26**                    **From concealment to ‘nothingness’ (as ‘drive’, ‘compulsion,’ ‘neurosis,’ ‘psychosis’) [I]**

Seminar:                Let us discuss neurosis, psychosis, paranoia and the notion of the ego-sexual self.

Reading:

1. Freud, “Condensation & Displacement’ in his **Dreams and the Unconscious**
2. Freud, “The Ego and the Id,” and “The Dependent Relationships of the Ego,” in his *The Ego and The Id*, pp. 9-18 and 38-50 (photocopy).

**Dec 03**                    **That Indissoluble ‘something’: Intro to Adorno’s *Negative Dialectics* [I]**

Seminar:                Textual analysis of “That Indissoluble Something,” with the view that we begin to link back to Hegel, Kierkegaard, Freud, where appropriate.

Reading:

1. Adorno, “Preface,” and “Introduction,” in *Negative Dialectics*, pp. xix – xxi, and 3-57;
2. EB Ashton (trans) “Translator’s Note,” in Adorno’s *Negative Dialectics*, p. ix-xv
3. [optional] Buck-Morss, “A logic of Disintegration: The Object” in her *The Origin of Negative Dialectics*, pp. 63-77.

**Dec 10**                    **The Continuing Problem of Identity/Negation [II]**

Seminar:                Focus on The Ontological Need and The Child’s Question.

Reading:

1. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics* [selections, Part I], pp. 61-96
2. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, pp. 97-131
3. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics* [selections, Part II], pp. 135-207.
4. [optional] Buck-Morse, “A logic of Disintegration: The Role of the Subject,” [chapter 5],” in her *The Origin of Negative Dialectics*, pp. 82-95 (photocopy)

**Dec 17 Mediations on Metaphysics: is there an 'after' Auschwitz?**

**\*\*\*Seminar held at the Kennington Studio\*\*\***

Seminar: In what way or ways does epistemology-politics-philosophy link with (and against) the problem of racism and fascism?

Reading:

1. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics* selections, Part III, pp. 361-408.
2. S Golding, "Curiosity", in her *eight technologies of otherness* pp.10-26

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**WINTER BREAK**

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**Jan 7 Prelude To a Theory of Aesthetics**

Seminar: Assuming one can 'write poetry after Auschwitz', what does this actually mean?

Reading: Adorno, "Art, Society, Aesthetics," and "Situation," in his *Aesthetic Theory*, pp. 1-15 and 16-44.

**Jan 14 A Theory of Aesthetics**

Seminar: What is 'aesthetics'? Does it matter in which historical epoch this question is asked?

Reading:

1. Adorno, "Semblance and Expression," and "Enigmaticalness, Truth Content, Metaphysics," in his *Aesthetic Theory*, pp. 100-117 and 118-135.
2. Adorno, "Toward a Theory of the Artwork: intensity", pp. 187 in his *Aesthetic Theory*

**Jan 22 Modern Philosophical Method meets Contemporary Violence & Change (from Auschwitz to Darfour and back again)**

Consider:

"I don't know what weapons World War Three will be fought with, but World War Four will be fought with sticks and stones."-- Albert Einstein

Reading:

1. Swarming on <http://www.deepspace4.com/pages/answers/swarming/swarming.htm>
2. Adorno, **Minima Moralia (selections)**

**RESEARCH PAPERS DUE IN REGISTRY – JAN 30**

Please limit the paper to approximately 3,000 typed words or 12 typed pages [double space]; proper footnoting/endnoting is required. No extensions