Continental Philosophy

This course provides a survey of major figures and themes in continental philosophy. Following brief consideration of Kant’s “critical idealism,” we will investigate key nineteenth-century developments as evidenced by the work of G. W. F. Hegel, Søren Kierkegaard, and Friedrich Nietzsche. Topics to be addressed include conceptions of human history; views of human flourishing; and human nature and the nature of morality. In what follows, we will turn to existentialism and the work of the twentieth-century philosophers Martin Heidegger, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Simone de Beauvoir. We will consider their reactions to influential conceptions of human nature and agency; in addition, we will address their reflections on the character of individuals’ obligations to themselves and individuals’ relationship to society at large in the flourishing human life. In the final section of the course, we will expand our examination of individuals’ roles in societal contexts and the pertinence of those roles to individuals’ capacity to flourish. In this unit, we will consider the ideas of Karl Marx, Martin Heidegger, Karl Jaspers, Hans-Georg Gadamer, and Jürgen Habermas, addressing issues that include the basis of societal hierarchies and human beings’ relationship to technology.

Required Texts (Available at the College Bookstore)


Additional readings will be available on e-reserve.

Calendar

I. Introduction (Sept. 10)

II. Background: Kant (Sept. 12-17)

Kant, Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics

III. Post-Kantian Idealism: Hegel (Sept. 19-24)

Hegel, Introduction to the Philosophy of History

IV. A Critical Reaction: Kierkegaard (Sept. 26-Oct. 1)

Kierkegaard: material in Existentialism: Basic Writings, Guignon and Pereboom, eds., pp. 19-77 (Background Reading from Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit; Kierkegaard, Fear and Trembling)

Kierkegaard, The Sickness unto Death and Concluding Unscientific Postscript (in Existentialism: Basic Writings, Guignon and Pereboom, eds., pp. 78-92)

V. “Reason,” “Objectivity” and “Morality” Evaluated: Nietzsche (Oct. 3-17—Autumn Recess: Oct. 6-9)

Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil

Nietzsche, On the Genealogy of Morality
VI. Existentialism (including the question of the extent to which Heidegger is legitimately called an “existentialist”): Heidegger, Sartre, Beauvoir (Oct. 22-Nov. 12)


Heidegger, “Letter on Humanism” (in *Basic Writings*—on e-reserve)

Beauvoir, *All Men Are Mortal*


Marx, material from *Selected Writings*

Heidegger, “The Question Concerning Technology” and “The Turning” (in Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*)

Jaspers, selections from *The Atom Bomb and the Future of Man* (on e-reserve)

Gadamer, selections from *Reason in the Age of Science* (on e-reserve)

Habermas, selections from *Knowledge and Human Interests; The Hermeneutics Reader: Texts of the German Tradition from the Enlightenment to the Present* (ed. K. Mueller-Vollmer); and *Communication and the Evolution of Society* (on e-reserve)

Requirements

1) Regular and spirited attendance! Everyone should come to each class meeting prepared to discuss and assess the views presented in the readings. Consistent attendance and thoughtful participation will make up 20% of the final grade. As the use of laptops and other electronic devices in class can pose a distraction, I would ask that they not be employed.

2) One in-class presentation—15%. (Date: Depends on when you sign up to do one.)

3) Two 5-page papers, due by noon on Friday, October 26 and Monday, November 19 in the Philosophy Department office (Dewey II)—20% each.

4) One 6-8 page paper, due by noon on Friday, December 21 in the Philosophy Department office (Dewey II)—25%.

• Grades on late papers (i.e., those turned in at any point after they are due) will be lowered one step (e.g., from A- to B+) each day.
Items on Reserve in Neilson Library


