

Metaphysics and the rise of Continental Philosophy

Fall 2013

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Course location: TBA

Course Syllabus:

- a) Description
- b) Course dates and assignments
- c) Course outline
- d) YSGS information to be distributed.

a) **Course Description:** All philosophy starts with metaphysics in that some presumptions about the nature of what exists must be made before any claim about what does exist can be put forth. The effort to determine the essences behind the appearances that inspire communication or, the medium of expression (the mind, the body, consciousness, language etc.) that makes communication possible gave rise to metaphysics, or theories about the nature of existence.

We shall explore several theories and authors, which preceded the rise of Continental philosophy to understand the metaphysical commitments some 'continentalists' presume. We shall also consider some metaphysical theories that preceded their writings. Four philosophers that are key to the rise of Continental are Plato, Kant, Hegel and Nietzsche. What concepts evolved to be the roots and genesis of the writings of mainly European philosophers who resisted the analytic traditions of the 20th century?

Metaphysical perspectives are materialism, realism, idealism, analytic, and nihilism. We cannot cover everything but we can become familiar with methods, key figures, and a small selection of writings by Canadian philosophers also living on a continent.

b) Suggested Requirements:

One in-class presentation @ 25%.

One short critique, approximately 4-5 pages @ 25%.

One paper, approximately 15 pages (ball-park) due one week after classes end @ 50%.

There will be student choice on the assignments. You can do a) two in-class presentations, (part of a chapter or part of an article summary. Usually the summary is of 10-12 pages of reading material, @ 25% each, b) one in-class, and one short written piece @ 25% each, same kind of assignment and amount covered as described above), c) two short written pieces @ 25% each; (see above) and an essay approximately 15 pages @ 50%. You can also increase the essay to 75% (18-20 pages) and do one of the two above 25% assignments.

The *timing* of the assignments. We will set times and plans by the end of the second week. Because you will choose your assignment load, there will be no need for extensions. It is hoped that all in-class presentations and short summaries will be finished by no later than November 13. This will leave approximately 5 weeks to write the paper. The final paper will not require extended research but only familiarity with the course material. Your short assignments can contribute to your final essay.

Texts: A **READER with explanatory selections; Plato's Republic**, Simon Critchley, *Continental Philosophy, a short introduction*. Check Amazon.com for second hand and paperback copies. We shall rely on **Roger Scruton's A Short History of Modern Philosophy**, to help fill in the big picture of the major players in this narrative of ideas, as we cannot read original works in only 12 weeks. But you can learn enough and know where to look in original works for points that you want to pursue. *The Ryerson library has Scruton's book available as an ebook*. Relevant selections are now on Blackboard. You can look for a second hand copy, but buying one on Amazon is slow and expensive.

Week 1 Introduction to metaphysics, course requirements, readings, discussion of assignments and expectations. **the Republic**. Please have read Book II, IV, and VII. I will assume that you have read and made a few notes on these Books when you come to class. Book means chapter. There is only one text. [There are lots of "Republics" out there. **Make sure** the one you find has **the numerical annotations in the margins**. This way we can work with different translations and know where we are.] **Reader:** Glossary; Hakim, *Plato*, 47-57

Week 2 From **Plato to Kant**: Idealism, formalism, and deception.

Summary question: To communicate is to assume that something exists. What are the concepts we use to make claims about existence?

Readings: Critchley chapter 1, Scruton, *Descartes*, Chapter 3, 29-40.

Week 3 **Pascal's Wager, Kant and dualisms**,

1) **Pascal**, Critchley chapter 2, note pages 43,45. **Reader**, Gould, 100-104.

2) **Kant**, Scruton, *The Cartesian Revolution*, chapter 4, 40-48; **Kant**, Scruton, Chapter 10, 139-150, **Reader**, Gould, 305-314, Hakim, *Kant*, 407-431.

Week 4 **Hegel and dialectics**

Readings: **Hegel**, **Reader**, Brown, 7, 8, 9, 12. Scruton, *Hegel*, Chapter 12, 169-185. **Reader**, Stepelovich, 1-29, Hakim, *Hegel*, 433-444.

Week 5 Critchley, chapter 3, **J. S. Mill**, (who first identified "the continental tradition" we read about the two philosophical cultures, analytic and continental.

Reader: from *Mill on Bentham and Coleridge*, (Bentham) 7-9, 48-74, (Coleridge) 109-133; C.P. Snow, *The two cultures and the scientific revolution*, 1-22. You will now find very brief summary notes of the first three chapters of Critchley in the **Reader**.

Week 6 Critchley chapter 4 **The idea of crisis, and Husserl**. Hakim, *Husserl*, 467-470. There are a few summary notes of chapter 4 in the **Reader**.

Recommend Scruton, chapter 13, 185-199, chapter 18, 263-280 for the rest of the course (on ebook on Blackboard).

Week 7 No classes: **Study week and Thanksgiving** BREAK.

Week 8 Critchley chapter 5 **Nietzsche and nihilism**, 76-89.

Week 9 Critchley chapter 6 **Heidegger vs Carnap** 90-110.

Week 10 Critchley, chapter 7, **Scientism vs Obscurantism**, 8 **The exhaustion of theory** and **Appendix**. 111-131.

Week 11 and 12 The big picture, science, and the universe. Some Canadians

weigh in. John Leslie, "Fine Tuning and Divine Design," (3-13); Leslie Armour, "Science and Our Reading of the World," (57-73); Elizabeth Trott, "Order, Chaos and the Role of Reason," (115-126). These three papers are from *Maritain Studies*, Vol. XVIII, 2002.

Week 13 Guest, *Robert Mann*, physicist, University of Waterloo.

Final Papers will be Due, December 20

They can be collected after the winter term begins.

The readings on the course should be all you need. I do not expect your assignments to be major research papers. Textual exegesis and analysis is sufficient.