

**MAS 598/REL/PHI 494 - Studies in Critical Theory**

**Topic: Redemptive Critical Theory**

**Spring 2009, ASUW - SANDS 221**

**TUESDAYS – 6:00 - 8:55 PM**

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Kant denied that one could ever act diabolically — commit evil for the sake of evil; that human beings might act freely in demonic ways to destroy the moral law itself. Yet we have witnessed the willed destruction of hope in oneself and others. We know from our contemporary experience that hope can become radically scarce. Yet while the intentional annihilation of hope is what Schelling named an “inverted God” and what Kierkegaard revealed as the demonic will of a despairing and defiant self; the persistent state of hopelessness is also what Judaism repels as the ultimate form of idolatry. On both counts, however otherwise audacious, hope is at once scarce and uncanny: We must admit that hope does not lie in our power to get or give. Yet we must hope against hope and for the sake of those without hope.

The purpose of this seminar is to give students an opportunity to pursue their independent and creative study at the intersection of critical theory and Continental philosophy of religion — what I call “redemptive critical theory.” The course is structured by a series of postsecular meditations: *Starting in the first class* with the Book of Job and Kant’s critique of theodicy, we will follow with Part I of Kant’s critique of religion. The bulk of the course will take up other responses to Kant’s view of radical evil, from Schelling’s treatise on freedom to early critical theory to post-Holocaust ethics. Students will be responsible for one in-semester workshop (select one area of response to Kant, e.g., Heidegger & Schelling, Benjamin, Marcuse, Arendt, Habermas, Lévinas, Derrida, Kierkegaard, Jonas, Fackenheim) and a final research paper on the same or a related area. Registered students may consult the “blackboard” for the syllabus and research (article) resources.

**READ FOR THE FIRST CLASS MEETING on January 20, 2009:**

*The Book of Job* (Blackboard or your Scripture) &

Kant’s critique of theodicy (Kant, pp. 15-30) &

Matušík, *Radical Evil*, 1-28

**REQUIRED TEXTS:**

Kant, *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason and Other Writings*. Cambridge UP, 1998. 0-521-59964-4

Matušík, *Radical Evil and the Scarcity of Hope: Postsecular Meditations*. Indiana UP, 2008. 978-0-253-21968-8

Additional essays assigned on the syllabus or by the student workshop leaders.