

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) & 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.

WEEK	SUGGESTED TOPIC	AND/OR READING	ASSIGNMENTS
I 1/20	What's "critical" and what's "redemptive" about <i>redemptive critical theory</i> ?	<i>The Book of Job</i> (blackboard or your own biblical source) & Kant's critique of theodicy (Kant, <i>Religion</i> , pp. 15-30) Matušík, <i>Radical Evil</i> , 1-28	Get the Blackboard essays: print, read, bring to class
II 1/27	Kant on radical evil	Kant, <i>Religion, Parts I & II</i> Kant-Dictionary on Evil (blackboard)	
III 2/3	With Kant against Kant	Silber, Greene & Bernstein on Kant's critical theory of religion & Matušík, <i>Radical Evil</i> , 29-32, 88-98	Get the Blackboard essays: print, read, bring to class
IV 2/10	Radical evil positively willed	Schelling's essay on freedom Matušík, <i>Radical Evil</i> , 83-87, 127-135	Get the Blackboard essay: print, read, bring to class
V 2/17	In-despair to will to be oneself: demonic agency	Kierkegaard's "The Sickness Unto Death" Kierkegaard's "Works of Love" Kierkegaard's stages of existence (chart) Matušík, <i>Radical Evil</i> , 135-144	Get the Blackboard essays: print, read, bring to class
VI 2/24	Progress-as-disaster: Early critical and existential theory of hope	Benjamin's Theses and Arcades Project Matušík, <i>Radical Evil</i> , 32-51, 98-105	Get the Blackboard essays: print, read, bring to class
VII 3/4	Religion without religion: Post/secular redemptive critical theory	Habermas on Faith and Knowing and Derrida's "Two sources of religion at the limits of mere reason" Matušík, <i>Radical Evil</i> , 52-79, 144-162	Get the Blackboard essays: print, read, bring to class
VIII 3/8-15	SPRING BREAK	No class	
IX 3/17	Meditations on the uncanny	Matušík, <i>Radical Evil</i> , Part 3: 163-254	Get the Blackboard essays: print, read, bring to class
X 3/24	ARENDT	Student in-semester workshop: Readings and presentation paper assigned by student leaders	Upload reading and paper: print, read, bring to class
XI 3/31	ADORNO	Student in-semester workshop: Readings and presentation paper assigned by student leaders	Upload reading and paper: print, read, bring to class
XII 4/7	MARCUSE OR SARTRE OR HABERMAS ON DoE	Student in-semester workshop: Readings and presentation paper assigned by student leaders	Upload reading and paper: print, read, bring to class
XIII 4/14	HEIDEGGER	Student in-semester workshop: Readings and presentation paper assigned by student leaders	Upload reading and paper: print, read, bring to class
XIV 4/21	JONAS OR FACKENHEIM	Student in-semester workshop: Readings and presentation paper assigned by student leaders	Upload reading and paper: print, read, bring to class
XV 4/28	DERRIDA	Student in-semester workshop: Readings and presentation paper assigned by student leaders	Upload reading and paper: print, read, bring to class
XVI 5/5	LEVINAS OR DOSTOYEVSKY END OF CLASSES	Student in-semester workshop: Readings and presentation paper assigned by student leaders	Upload reading and paper: print, read, bring to class
..... 5/6	READING DAY	Final papers are due on <u>May 7, noon.</u>	Submit electronically in Blackboard-assignments drop off

ASSIGNMENTS

Six (6) short in-semester weekly reflections during weeks II-VII: Write weekly no less than 1, no more than 2 double-spaced pages of response-reflection-meditation on a scheduled portion of the readings. Class will have 3 groups (marked as *, #, + on the syllabus), each group will write its weekly meditation on one portion of the assignment (*,#,+). Some students from each group will read their reflection during our weekly classes.

One (1) in-semester workshop and one (1) brief commentary during weeks X-XVI: Consulting the list of topics for in-semester workshops, a *student leader* selects one significant response to Kant's critical theory of religion and prepares an in-class presentation. *Student commentator* prepares a brief question (about 1-2 pages) addressed to the student workshop-leader. This question will open our discussion of the chosen topic or text.

In the class period prior to your workshop, provide everyone with a supplementary text for your topic (one or more selections of no more than 30 pages). If your text is not available on the Blackboard, please make a copy for everyone in class or upload it by this time into the Blackboard discussion board as a pdf file.

By Sunday 6 pm prior to your workshop, the student workshop-leader needs to upload into the Blackboard discussion board a draft of the presentation. Recommended length is equal to a conference paper: *between 8-10 pages*.

Final writing is due for grading on May 7 at noon: It is expected that final papers will expand the topic of your in-semester workshop and incorporate both in-class discussion and my comments on the presentation draft. You should become familiar with at least some relevant secondary literature related to your question. All papers should be in 10-12 font with one inch margins, double-spaced, with all but first page numbered. Final papers should be 15-20 pages of text plus the bibliographical apparatus. Undergraduates may limit the final project to the recommended maximum length of the presentation draft - 10 pages.

Note on workshops, supplementary readings, and commentaries: Your presentation work, commentary on your work by your peers, and the supplementary reading accompanying your work will be discussed in the latter weeks of the course. All these texts are required readings for everyone. Please be generous in preparing some feedback for your student-colleagues. You can provide your reflections even outside of class or on the discussion board. It is for your own benefit to give us as much of your paper to read as you can, so that you get a timely feedback; however it is not absolutely necessary that you have completed your draft by the time of the presentation. Whatever you do is your free choice, but *you may not be late with a presentation draft. We will discuss your chosen supplementary reading alone if you have no discussion draft ready by Sunday before your workshop. The assigned student commentator does not need to provide any text prior to the class session, just bring copies for everyone in class. More than one student may sign up for one topic-area. Topic-substitutions in each area are possible with prior permission.*

Note on grading: With upper division and graduate grades pivoting between A and B, what matters is "quality," not the expected numerical score B or better. Demands of profession and requirements of existence are often at odds with each other: More time or even skill does not guarantee that one has something to say or that one can say anything in a timely fashion, creatively, and well. Weekly meditations form a portfolio of exploratory sketches from which you may draw an inspiration for the final canvas. While required to pass the course, they will only receive comments, but no grades.

I will read your final work at least once before the grade is final (this is your presentation draft), and so the more you can give me initially, the more evaluation you will receive. All final work is due electronically; my comments will appear in the margins as your "marked up" text in MS-Word, and the marked version of the draft will be sent back to you. You are kindly requested to respond to my comments by "tracking" your own changes (additions, deletions) you make after I have marked your first draft. Tracked changes are editor-and-reader-friendly, as they appear in a different color than the original text. This is how most professional editing & publishing is done these days; I am introducing it for your benefit.

TOPIC Select one the topics for your in-semester workshop & sign up to comment on <u>another</u> class	STUDENT WORKSHOP-LEADER	STUDENT COMMENTATOR
Week X: Hannah Arendt's two responses to Kant's notion of radical evil (cf. with Karl Jaspers)	1. 2.	
Week XI: Theodor Adorno's critical theory after Auschwitz	1. 2.	
Week XII: Herbert Marcuse's critical theory of one-dimensionality and/or Jean-Paul Sartre's critique of "bad faith" and/or Jürgen Habermas's treatment of dialectic of enlightenment in Adorno, Benjamin or Marcuse (cf. with Ernst Bloch's principle of hope)	1. 2.	
Week XIII: Martin Heidegger's work on Schelling's <i>Treatise on the Essence of Human Freedom</i>	1. 2.	
Week XIV: Hans Jonas's God after Auschwitz and/or Emil Fackenheim's post-Holocaust ethics	1. 2.	
Week XV: Jacques Derrida on forgiving the unforgivable (cf. with Vladimir Jankelevitch)	1. 2.	
Week XVI: Emmanuel Lévinas's critique of all theodicy and of useless suffering and/or Fyodor Dostoyevsky's <i>Brothers Karamazov</i>	1. 2.	