

Contemporary Continental Philosophy
PHIL 6090
Syllabus
Fall, 2007

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Hours: 2:30-3:15 M, F
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Objective and Theme: Most of this course will center on understanding Heidegger's *Being and Time*, one of the most important and difficult works of contemporary philosophy. To help us put this book in perspective, we will also read Levinas's *Totality and Infinity*, a kind of critical assessment of Heidegger's book that also propounds the author's philosophy.

Reading Heidegger is very demanding. He invents a new vocabulary, and he addresses an unfamiliar set of problems. His arguments are often hard to find or non-existent. Most of all, he is, in effect, teaching us a different way to think. Heidegger's thinking has been very influential for Continental philosophy and, more recently, for Anglo-American philosophy. Levinas is an example of a philosopher whose thinking is deeply influenced by Heidegger, and he presents his philosophy as a meditation on *Being and Time*.

Students are expected to understand the philosophical problems posed by the course readings and the particular ways that they address them. We are concerned not only with articulating conclusions, but also with understanding and evaluating arguments for these conclusions. You are invited to enter into ways of thinking that are likely to be new and challenging. The value of your critical reflection on these ideas will likely depend on the depth with which you understand them.

The focus of our attention will be on understanding and assessing the texts. As a graduate student, you are expected to become familiar with at least some of the secondary literature.

Readings: Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*
Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*

Grading:	Critiques	Sept. 10, 24	20%
	Mid-Term	October 12	15%
	Major Paper (8-10 pages)	November 21	35%
	Final Exam	December 14 (12:00-3:00)	30%

Study: Most of your work for this course should lie in the preparation of the daily assignments. You are expected to come to class prepared to ask and answer questions about the readings. As you know, reading philosophy is not like reading other material. You will undoubtedly need to read the assignment more than once. As a minimum, I suggest three readings. Begin by reading a large portion of text quickly; then, carefully prepare the section that will be discussed in class; third, read the material again after class. Read the text critically. Ask yourself questions as you read; try to anticipate questions that I might ask.

Assignments: It is not easy to think about continental philosophy. You will find it helpful to try to formulate these arguments in your own terms as you read. Accordingly, I shall ask you to turn in a two to four page textual explication and critique twice during the semester. While this assignment may seem formidable, it only makes formal what you should do anyway to keep up with the course. Each explication should express in your own words an argument that appears in the text and your critical reflection on that argument. Be sure to present the argument as an argument, rather than summarizing the general point of position. The conclusion should follow or seem to follow, and your initial presentation should aim to convince. You can criticize the argument by arguing that one of its premises is false or that, even if all premises were true, the conclusion would not follow. You will, of course, want to give the author of the argument you have chosen an opportunity to respond by formulating his own critical argument against your critical argument. Continue this exchange as far as you can. This will be a challenging assignment, but it will help you both to understand the philosophy and to reflect on it.

You can use a critique as the starting point for your major paper; but the latter ought to address an issue rather than a text. This course paper should be a substantial piece of work that shows careful reflection on a substantial issue. It *must* make some significant use of the *secondary literature*. Any work you look at should be included your bibliography and any idea used in any way, whether quoted or not, *must* be footnoted. Do not use the course paper as an occasion to summarize your class notes. Whereas the course paper will allow you to pursue a particular problem deeply, the final exam will give you the opportunity to display your knowledge of all the issues covered in the course.

Selected Bibliography

Heidegger

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Levinas

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