

PHIL 4960
University of North Texas
SPRING 2009
M/W 3:00-4:20 pm

Dr. Wilkerson
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Hrs. Friday Noon-1 pm
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NIETZSCHE AND THE END OF PHILOSOPHY

Course Description:

What calls for thinking (and what is called thinking) with Nietzsche and does Nietzsche, in fact, announce the end of philosophy? Students in this course will consider problems related to the interpretation and transmission of the thought of Friedrich Nietzsche, one of the most important philosophical inheritances of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. During the first part of the course, we will be reading from the texts of Nietzsche himself, attempting to situate Nietzsche in the history of Western philosophy, considering issues characteristic of early and late Modern philosophy and the Enlightenment as well as Nietzsche's penchant for engaging in dialogue across millennia reaching back to the Greeks. Of particular importance during this part of the semester will be the problem of Nietzsche's enthusiastic critique of philosophical systems and his own thought-path through apparent philosophical concepts such as the social exception, the re-valuation of values, the will to power, eternal recurrence, and historical nihilism. Is Nietzsche's self-avowed "mistrust" of philosophical systems his final word on philosophy? And, does this mistrust, when appropriated by some of the twentieth century's most influential thinkers, bring about the "end" of philosophy? What, then, would be the meaning of this idea—"the end of philosophy"? Does it imply the "rejection" of such? Or, the mistrust and suspicion of the aims of philosophy? The "working out" of the possibility of philosophy in its fullest implications? How should we think about this "end" and the one who thinks? What remains for thinking after this end? Who remains for thinking? One of the most influential philosophers of the twentieth century is Martin Heidegger, and his insightful but problematic interpretation of Nietzsche as Western philosophy's "last metaphysician" has drawn (and continues to draw) the interest of many readers, pro and con. We will consider Heidegger's reading, both on its own terms, for its plausibility and its power, and in the respect that it has transmitted Nietzsche's thought into crucial philosophical discourses for the last 80 years. We will also hear from voices that lament the dominance of such a transmission. By the close of the semester, we will consider the possibility of "overcoming" metaphysics, along with various issues implied with thinking such a possibility.

Required Texts:

Students are assigned seven texts: Nietzsche's *Gay Science* and *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Heidegger's *The End of Philosophy*, Derrida's *Margins of Philosophy*, Habermas' *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, Vattimo's *The End of Modernity*, and Caputo's and Vattimo's *After the Death of God*. In addition, we will read a number of important essays to be handed out in class. All assigned selections are required reading. Students should bring the day's assigned text(s) to class, for we will attempt to read and discuss these texts closely.

Attendance Policy:

Regular attendance is required. To help promote attendance and generate a vibrant atmosphere for class discussion, the following policy will be implemented: 5 absences may (at the discretion of the instructor) lead to the loss of ½ letter on the student's final grade. In addition, ½ letter may be taken off the final grade for every two absences after the first 5 (*viz.* 7 absences will lead to the loss of a full letter grade, while 9 absences will lead to the loss of 1&1/2 letter grades and so on).

Course Requirements:

This class is designed to be reading and writing intensive. Students will be asked to produce either two Interpretive Essays (a Mid-Term and a Final, 5-7pp) or a longer writing project (12-15 pp, due at the end of the semester). Students choosing to write a longer project will need to develop their own thesis and submit a paper proposal by April 27. **Late papers will not be accepted.** Papers are due at the beginning of class on the given date *unless* we make other arrangements *before* the assignment is due. Students who fail to produce an Interpretive Essay should not expect to pass the class. During the semester, all students will also be expected to produce two short (2-3 pp) Summary Papers. Each Summary Paper should survey one day's assigned readings. The readings to be summarized will be determined by the dates chosen by each student for completion of the two summary papers. That is, each Summary Paper should address the particular reading assigned for the day the paper is due. One of these summaries will be presented orally in class. Each student is responsible for setting his/her own schedule for the writing and oral presentation of the summary papers and shall notify the instructor of his/her intentions no later than February 2. (Students should attempt to schedule one summary paper by March 6 and one thereafter.) The Mid-Term and Final Interpretive Essays will each count 30% towards the final grade (or, the longer interpretive project will count 60%); each of the Summary Papers and the Oral Presentation will count 10% (30% total). Class participation will constitute the remaining 10% of the final grade. A good participation grade presumes, but is not reduced to, regular class attendance. Contributions to class discussions must be informed by close readings of the assigned texts.

SCHEDULE

Part I. A Mistrust of Systems, or a System of Mistrust?

January

W/21

Introduction to Course; Discuss: *Human, All Too Human's* "Chemistry of concepts and sensations" (aphorism 1) and *Twilight of the Idols'* "Maxims and Arrows" and "How the 'Real World' at last became a myth"

M/26 Discuss: *Human, All Too Human's* "Of First and Last Things" and "Tokens of Higher and Lower Culture" (handout)

W/28 Discuss: Nietzsche, *The Gay Science* (Book One)

February

M/2 SUMMARY PAPER SCHEDULE DUE; Discuss: Nietzsche, *The Gay Science* (Book Three)

W/4 Discuss: Nietzsche, *The Gay Science* (Book Four)

M/9 Discuss: Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (Part One)

W/11 Discuss: Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (Part Two)

M/16 Discuss: Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (Part Three)

W/18 Discuss: Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (Part Four)

Part II: Nietzsche as/and the "Last Metaphysician"

M/23 Discuss: Heidegger, "Nietzsche's Word: 'God is Dead'" (handout)

W/25 Discuss: Heidegger, "Nietzsche's Word: 'God is Dead'" (cont.)

March

M/2 Discuss: Heidegger, "Metaphysics as History of Being" from *The End of Philosophy*

W/4 Discuss: "Metaphysics as History of Being" (cont.) and Eugen Fink's "Nietzsche's Relationship to Metaphysics as Imprisonment and Liberation" (Chapter Five of Fink's *Nietzsche's Philosophy*)

M/9 Discuss: Richard Schacht's "Nietzsche's Kind of Philosophy" (handout from *The Cambridge Companion to Nietzsche*) and Maudemarie Clark's "Interpreting Nietzsche on truth" (handout, Chapter One of Clark's *Nietzsche on Truth and Philosophy*)

W/11 MID-TERM ESSAY DUE. Discuss: “The Gadamer-Derrida Encounter: Paris, 1981” (handout from *Dialogue and Deconstruction: The Gadamer-Derrida Encounter*)

MARCH 16-22 SPRING BREAK (NO CLASSES)

Part III. The wake of Nietzsche and philosophy

M/23 Discuss: Derrida, “*Différance*” (from *Margins of Philosophy*)

W/25 Discuss: Derrida, “*Différance*” (cont.)

M/30 Discuss: Derrida, “The Ends of Man” (from *Margins*)

April

W/1 Discuss: Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality* (Third Essay)

M/6 Discuss: Nietzsche (cont.) and Michel Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History” (handout)

W/8 Discuss: Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*

M/13 Discuss: Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*

W/15 Discuss: Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*

Part IV. On the im/possible convalescence of philosophy

M/20 Discuss: Heidegger, “Overcoming Metaphysics”

W/22 Discuss: Vattimo, *The End of Modernity*

M/27 Discuss: Vattimo, *The End of Modernity*

W/29 Discuss: Vattimo, *The End of Modernity*

May

M/4 Discuss: Caputo and Vattimo, *After the Death of God*

W/6 Discuss: Caputo and Vattimo, *After the Death of God*

WEDNESDAY, MAY 13 AT 1:30 PM: FINAL PAPER DUE

