SENIOR SEMNAR 2016/2017

The Linguistic Turn in 19th- and 20th-Century Philosophy:
Recognition, Rationality, Desire, and Freedom

PROFESSOR: Chris Latiolais
Philosophy Department
Kalamazoo College
Humphrey House #202
Telephone # 337-7076
Offices Hours:
- Tuesday: 11:00 – 12:30
- Wednesday: 4:00 – 5:00
- Tuesday: 11:00 – 12:30
- By Appointment.

COURSE DESCRIPTION:
At the close of the 19th Century – amidst the New Colonialism, its rapacious “grab for Africa,” and, paradoxically, it’s apparent “home audience” nationalist motivation – at just this turning point, European society was beset and embattled by advancing self-doubt about the legacy of the Enlightenment, “from within,” and, by nationalist friction along political, economic, ethnic, and racial strata, “from without.” The modern nation state at the fin de siècle confronted crises in multiple forms, crises identified and analyzed by the sociological “greats” Marx, Durkheim, and Weber, with emerging social theorists refining and deepening their diagnoses. The political atmosphere at the turn of the century was laden with the “isms” – e.g. liberalism, conservatism, socialism, communism, and nationalism – the economic outlook was rattled with transnational economic anomalies – e.g. protectionism, capitalist imperatives, and imperial colonial expansion – the social weather was overcast with the “liberal crisis” and its socialist/communist rejoining outrage – and the cultural forecast offered only a growing schism between defenders and defectors from the Enlightenment promise of “progress.” The “dark thinkers of the Enlightenment” – Marx, Darwin, Nietzsche, and Freud – continued to “pour poison” into the regal ear of European pride, and, the philosophical options at the fin de siècle were, simply put, Hegel or Nietzsche – that is, the call to complete or to crush Enlightenment aspirations. “Who are we, how did we get here, and what have we become” seemed to be the question that rattled Europe, England, and the United States.

This course begins by examining contemporary scholarship that enacts, so to speak, a probate court hearing on the inheritance of Hegel’s phenomenology and logic – Hegel being, in this regard, the most sophisticated defense of Enlightenment rationality. Drawing upon the ground-breaking work of Robert Pippin’s Hegel’s Practical
Philosophy: Rational Agency as Ethical Life, we critically examine Hegel’s emphatic and uncompromising insistence that rationality and recognition are conceptual complements, each the inside and outside of the other. Long recognized as the core of Hegel’s philosophy, social recognition emerges under Pippin’s pen as a distinctive historical variant of the Linguistic Turn in philosophy, a turn to social-symbolic nature of intersubjectivity. Although a retrospective upon Hegel, Pippin’s work is also a sort of prospective upon Axel Honneth’s “third-generation,” Neo-Hegelian critical social theory, which champions the rational ideal of “undamaged identities” as the normative foundation of critical social theory. I am casting the recognitions-theoretic model of rationality as a defense of Enlightenment reason, as a call to complete, not to discard, the legacy of the Enlightenment. Pippin’s offers the most sustained and sophisticated interpretation and defense of Hegel’s account of how social integration through mutual recognition, along one axis, and the formation of individual identity, along another, graph the same space of rationality: the “space of reason” or “place” for proffering and demanding reasons. Slavoj Žižek places Pippin on the precarious pedestal of “defender of bourgeois ideals,” and, in an acrobatic 180 twist that only a Lacanian psychoanalyst can conjure, at once topples him, pointing downward to prostrate disillusionment, to the illusion of rational control and to the tonic release of erotic – and, indeed, political – energies.

The next phase of the course offers a slow motion, frame-by-frame examination of this turning of German Bourgeois – Biedermeier – fortunes along the quite different French line of post-structuralist critical social theory. Mindful of the Linguistic Turn in 19th- and 20th-century philosophy, Peter Dews examines the Francophone Venunftkritik – that is, the criticism of reason (objective genitive) – critically examining the Neo-Nietzschean line of thought, the “dark” thought of extinguishing Enlightenment ideals as dangerous, deranged delusions. The light-hearted farewell to “bourgeois” ideals likewise turns on the analysis of language, now however, in French territory, the critical reception and critique of structuralism – more specifically, its initial positivist phase. Dew insightfully begins at the beginning of French post-structuralist philosophy, with the psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, who sets the stage for radically different intuitions about the conceptual or “symbolic” nature of social recognition, self-identification, and rationality. In a brilliant and incisive critique – not without, however, abiding sympathy – Dew examines Lacanian psychoanalysis, Derridian deconstruction, Lyotardian discourse analysis, and Foucault’s archaeology of knowledge and genealogy of power.

Vehement opponent of Anglo-American analytic object-relations and ego psychology (Klein, Abrams, Erikson, Winnicott), Lacan conceptualizes the “strength” of the rational ego, guided as it is by the reality principle, as a symbolic or conceptual continuation of the imaginary delusions of successful self-identification and social recognition. Eros, not logos, is the psychoanalyst’s ideal, who listens away and looks askance at “reason” as a largely evasive, defensive, and delusional symbolic rationalization. Derrida even more vehemently decries self-identification as delusional, insisting upon the hermetically self-contained linguistic or textual circuit of self-identification that, like Tantalus, reaches for what repeatedly recedes: namely any reference whatsoever to self, other, or world. Dews painstakingly expose the conceptual cul-de-sacs of Lacan’s and Derrida’s residual structuralist positivism, turning to Francois
Lyotard and Michel Foucault, who more thoroughly and consistently parse out the structuralist insight into the primacy of differentially structured language systems. As theorists of social power, Lyotard and Foucault emphasize the mundane or worldly nature of language, exposing language or “discourse” as functionally deployed in power relations that – or so they claim – venally sell self-identity as, so to speak, vacuous titles of nobility, so that social standing and political disenfranchisement emerge as the same coin and commerce of social recognition and self-identification. Lyotard’s inaugural work, Discours, Figure, offers a suggestive account of how language (“discourse”) and perception (“figure”) hang together, rejecting Derrida’s apparent vaporization of reference as such into the play of differentially (i.e. syntactically) constituted senses, refashioning Lacan’s account of the symbolic (language) and the imaginary domains (perception), all with the intention of identifying a potential agent of revolutionary change. The conceptual difficulties Lyotard encounters in his early work meld with his disappointment in the ‘68 student uprisings, which were summarily quashed, and the resulting manuscript, Economie Libinale, reframes emancipatory energies as desire that escapes “total” accommodation to existing social power. His failure, however, to adequately account for such a desire begins to resemble the naïve romantic invocation of pre-social, even “natural” desire uncontaminated by social-psyodynamic engineering.

Dews demonstrates that such conceptual impasses are reworked in Foucault’s historiographic and sociological analyses of modern power. The core of Foucault’s emerging work, from the early works of Madness and Civilization and Birth of the Clinic to the later works The Order of Things and Discipline and Punish, is a linkage between anonymous state administrative power, along one polarity, and institutional and social practices that forms psychological control mechanism, along another. Administration control of populations and the praxeological formation of psychological structures forms the braided core of “Bio-power,” a power that does not repress and prohibit but, instead, creates and sustains “strong” egos. Although similar in some respects to Horkheimer and Adorno’s critique of instrumental rationality, Foucault’s genealogical historiography differs by showcasing functional rationality, a rationality that accrues to social systems, systems that work behind the backs and amidst benighted individual agents. Dews carefully demonstrates the poetic and philosophical centrality of Foucault’s use of Jeremy Bentham’s panopticon as allegory for “productive power.”

Unlike the first-generation of CST – Horkheimer, Adorno, Benjamin, Marcuse, etc. – who conceive of knowledge as instrumental or ends-means rationality, Foucault links (rational) knowledge more intimately into the social, institutional, architectural, and instrumentally mediated social systems of power. Foucault emphatically rejects the idea that power uses knowledge that might otherwise be deployed, insisting, instead, upon an intricate and inextricable conceptual interdependence of the very formation of knowledge and social control, surveillance, and manipulation. Unlike the epochal history to western rationality on offer from either Heidegger’s history-of-being account of enframing (Gestell) or the Frankfurt School theorists’ historiography of instrumental reason, Foucault focuses upon the transition from feudal and absolute monarchical structures of social power in ‘Europe’ to modernity, the way in which the 17th, 18th, and 19th Centuries solidified the natural and social sciences, not so much as cultural bodies of knowledge but, more comprehensively still, as ways of organizing and controlling social commerce.
Addressing difficulties in his earlier historiography – *Madness and Civilization*, *Birth of the Clinic*, and *The Order of Things* – Foucault turns to Nietzsche’s genealogical methodology, a conceptual orientation that so closely links knowledge and power that any questions of normativity evaporate. Dews exposes this conceptual deficit of Foucault’s social theory, demonstrating that the wholesale dismissal of questions of truth in Nietzsche’s Bacchanalian vortex of Bio-power simply undermines the very idea of critical social theorizing.

Taking stock of this Francophone branch of critical social theory, Dews highlights their incisive demonstrations of how psyches can be subordinate to social order, how self-identification and social recognition form toxic compounds neutralized of political agency and neutered of true eroticism. Nevertheless, Dews argues that such demonstrations fall below an adequate conceptualization of modernity as rationalization, and he points to the emerging “Communicative Turn” in the ‘80s by Juergen Habermas. Modernization cannot, Habermas claims, be cashed out as “subjectification as reification,” and he makes conceptual room for forms of social integration and formation of personal identities that is both politically capable and erotically enhanced. Despite shortcoming and blind spots, Habermas’ intersubjectivist paradigm of critical social theory provides more adequate resources than those of offer from the French tradition.

The critical thrust of Dew’s *The Logics of Disintegration* is a lucid, sober, and sound assessment of how social recognition and symbolic self-identification can be disenabling, an assessment, however, that makes room for a corresponding alternative ideal of language as enabling. Seven years later, in *The Limits of Disenchantment*, Dew skillfully balances the two central accounts of social commerce emerging at the end of the 20th Century: German critical social theory (Habermas, Wellmer, and Honneth), a heavily qualified defense of Enlightenment reason – the Neo-Hegelian branch of the linguistic turn – and French post-structuralist critical theory, a largely unqualified rejection of the Enlightenment ideals of reason – the Neo-Nietzschean branch of the linguistic turn.

In the last tract of the course, we examine an alternate revitalization of Hegel’s philosophy from Pippin’s, a revitalization channeled through Lacanian psychoanalysis. At the helm of the Slovenian school of German idealism, Zizek appropriates Hegelian phenomenology and logic as, indeed, committed to “absolute knowledge” – a consummation of knowledge that is as far removed from the standard interpretation as could be, the standard line rendering absolution as a self-enclosed, smug, and narcissistic megalomania of an ideal logic that masticates, consumes and digests – without remainder – the real world. According to Zizek, absolute knowing is affiliated with the outcome of successful psychoanalytic intervention: namely, subjective devastation, a disillusionment so thorough and radical that, although one returns to where one started, what one recognizes is the absolute alterity of what one was and is – a sort of raw, unprotected, and yet novel exposure to the world and therein openness to oneself. The central problem of this particular psychoanalytic appropriation of Hegel – itself only one among many – is that such absolute changes have absolutely nothing to do with knowledge or reason. They are the conclusion of thought, not in the sense of an inferential outcome but, instead, the cessation of thinking altogether – the acephalic alternative to rationally motivated ego alternations! They are “abyssal acts” (Ruediger Bubner’s phrase used by Zizek) that, “belong in the Hegelian zoo,” as Pippin put it, alongside “purity of heart” and
the “noble soul” – all alike romantic, ungrounded, heroic farewells to a presumably constraining reason. At the close of the course, we read Pippin’s review of Zizek’s Less than Nothing, if only to breath again the fresh air of open questions.

The course provides, I believe, the historical-philosophical resources to raise fundamental questions about the conception and pedagogical delivery of the social sciences, fine arts, and Humanities within the liberal arts context.

**REQUIRED TEXTS:**

  - “Fichte’s Choice”
  - “Not Only as Substance, but also as Subject”
  - “Suture and Pure Difference”
  - “Objects, Object Everywhere”

**BACKGROUND TEXTS:**

- Fink, Bruce. Lacan to the Letter: Reading Écrits Closely.


READING SCHEDULE FALL TERM

HEGEL’S CONCEPTION OF IDENTITY, SOCIALITY, AND REASON:
ROBERT PIPPIN’S HEGEL’S PRACTICAL PHILOSOPHY: RATIONAL AGENCY AS ETHICAL LIFE:

• Week One:
  o Pippin: Part One Spirit:
    ▪ “Introduction: Leading a free life”
    ▪ “Naturalness and mindedness: Hegel Compatibalism”
    ▪ “On giving oneself the law”
    ▪ “The actualization of freedom”

• Week Two:
  o Pippin: Part Two Freedom:
    ▪ “The freedom of the will: psychological dimensions”
    ▪ “The freedom on the will: social dimensions”

• Week Three:
  o Pippin: Sociality:
    ▪ “Hegelian sociality: recognitive status”
    ▪ “Recognition and politics”
    ▪ “Institutional rationality”
    ▪ “Concluding remarks”

CONTEMPORARY “CONTINENTAL” PHILOSOPHY: PETER DEW’S CRITIQUE OF FRANCOPHONE POST-STRUCTURALIST PHILOSOPHY:

• Week Four:
  o Dews:
- *Introduction*
- “Jacques Derrida: The Transcendental and Difference”
- “Jacques Lacan: A Philosophical Rethinking of Freud”

- **Week Five:**
  - Dews:
    - “Jean-Francois Lyotard: From Perception to Desire”

- **Week Six:**
  - Dews:
    - “Michel Foucault: Power and Subjectivity”
    - “Michel Foucault: Power and Knowledge”

- **Week Seven:**
  - Dews:
    - “Foucault and Lyotard: The Politics of Truth”
    - “Conclusion: Intersubjectivity and the Logic Distintegration”

**CONTEMPORARY PSYCHOANALYTIC CONCEPTIONS OF SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS: SLAVOJ ZIZEK’S LACANIAN READING OF HEGEL’S CONCEPTION OF SUBJECTIVITY AND ABSOLUTE KNOWING: SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS AND DESIRE**

- **Week Eight:** Fichte and Hegel on Self-consciousness:
  - Zizek:
    - “Fichte’s Choice”
    - “Not Only as Substance, but also as Subject”

- **Week Nine:** Lacan on self-consciousness, the unconscious, and Subjectivity:
  - Zizek:
    - “Suture and Pure Difference”
    - “Objects, Object Everywhere”

- **Week Ten:**
  - Dinner and Discussion