PHIL 490

SENIOR SEMINAR 2017/2018

The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity:
Critical Social Theory as Postmetaphysical Thinking

KALAMAZOO COLLEGE

PROFESSOR: Chris Latiolais
Philosophy Department
Kalamazoo College
Humphrey House #202
Telephone # 337-7076
Offices Hours:
• Monday: 11:00 – 11:55
• Wednesday: 11:00 – 11:55
• Friday: 11:00– 11:55
• By Appointment

COURSE DESCRIPTION:
“Philosophy,” Hegel writes, “is its own time comprehended in thought” (Elements of the Philosophy of Right, 21), a startling thesis that not only accelerates our sense of time and history with the imperative to, as Kierkegaard puts it, “catch up to ourselves,” but also turns philosophy around, from front to back, from prospect to retrospect, demanding that it refrain from pronouncements about what ought to be in order to focus upon what is actual (wirklich) and real (real). Hegel’s provocation simmers in his paradoxical combination of a sober and modest restriction of philosophy to actuality, on the one hand, and a hubristic and triumphal invocation of “absolute knowledge” (absolutes Wissen), on the other – a paradoxical bifocal “corrective vision” that trains philosophy to look backward, not forward, for absolution. Contemporary circumstances press in upon us with ever-accelerating urgency, demanding that we solve basic global survival problems – ecological, political, economic, social, cultural, religious, and existential – all of which require foresight, rendering Hegel’s retrospective understanding of philosophy immediately suspect. How are we, then, to understand our western philosophical inheritance as in any way useful to us, orienting us to our tasks and trials? In asking this question, it’s important to remember that Hegel finalized his Phenomenology of Spirit (1807) in Jena while listening to Napoleon’s canon besiege the city – their booming report being, for Hegel, the Napoleonic code: the demise of the ancient regime, the birth of constitutional republican politics, the cry of the occasion.

In this course, we will explore Jürgen Habermas’ claims, first, that philosophy must understand itself as “post-metaphysical” and, second, that modernity must correct and consummate, not discard and demean, our Enlightenment inheritance. More specifically, we will study third-generation CST: namely, Habermas’ communications-theoretic grounding of CST theory, the central normative ideal of which is undistorted communication. We will, however, not study his magnum opus, Theory of Communicative Action, but, instead his account of the basic philosophical issue of modernity, which is given in The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity, Postmetaphysical Thinking, and Postmetaphysical Thinking 11. In the second part of this seminar, we will explore critics of Habermas, both sympathetic and antipathetic. Axel Honneth, a sympathetic critic, articulates one strand of fourth-generation CST, which rests upon his proposed normative ideal of undamaged identities, itself an response to Habermas’ ideal of undistorted communication. We will also explore a recent call for a fifth-generation CST – one, however, that focuses so heavily upon radical difference that it becomes dubious whether the basic project of CST is therein abandoned. Habermas’ stanch defense of modernity exercises, exacerbates, and infuriates critics who call for a “post-modern,” “anti-Enlightenment,” or “post-colonial” orientation to global crises. We will follow
this this debate by examining Habermas’s claim that philosophy is post-metaphysical and then evaluating the merits of his critics.

REQUIRED TEXTS:

- **Excerpts:**
READING SCHEDULE FALL TERM

HABERMAS’ ACCOUNT OF THE PHILOSOPHICAL DISCOURSE OF MODERNITY:

- Week One: Hegel
  - *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity:*
    - Introduction
    - Preface.
    - Modernity’s Consciousness of Time and Its Need for Self-Reassurance
    - Hegel’s Concept of Modernity
    - *Excursus on Schiller’s “Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man”*

- Week Two: Hegel and Nietzsche
  - *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity:*
    - Three Perspective: Left Hegelians, Right Hegelians, and Nietzsche
    - *Excursus on the Obsolescence of the Production Paradigm*
    - The Entry into Postmodernity: Nietzsche as a Turning Point

- Week Three: The Critique of Technology and Instrumental Reason
  - *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity:*
    - The Entwinement of Myth and Enlightenment: Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno
    - The Undermining of Western Rationalism through the Critique of Metaphysics: Martin Heidegger

- Week Four: Deconstruction and Eroticism
  - *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity:*
    - Beyond a Temporalized Philosophy of Origins: Jacques Derrida Critique of Phonocentrism
    - *Excursus on Leveling the Genre Distinction between Philosophy and Literature*
    - Between Eroticism and General Economics: George Bataille

- Week Five: Michel Foucault and Bio-Power:
  - *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity:*
    - The Critique of Reason as an unmasking of the Human Sciences: Michel Foucault
    - Some Questions Concerning the Theory of Power: Foucault Again

- Week Six: Habermas’s Intersubjectivist Alternative to the Philosophy of the Subject:
  - *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity:*
    - An Alternative Way out of the Philosophy of the Subject: Communicative versus Subject-Centered Philosophy.
    - *Excursus on Cornelius Castoriadis: The Imaginary Institution*
    - The Normative Content of Modernity
    - *Excursus on Luhmann’s Appropriation of the Philosophy of the Subject through Systems Theory.*

HABERMAS’ ACCOUNT OF POSTMETAPHYSICAL THINKING

- Week Seven: Modernity’s Experience of Time
  - *Postmetaphysical Thinking:*
    - Translator’s Introduction
    - The Horizon of Modernity is Shifting
    - Themes in Postmetaphysical Thinking

- Week Eight: Formal Pragmatics in the Philosophy of Language and Habermas’ Critique of Western Logocentrism:
  - *Postmetaphysical Thinking:*
    - Toward a Critique of the Theory of Meaning
• The Unity of Reason in the Diversity of its Voices.

• Week Nine: Habermas’ Conception of Individuation and Critique of Deconstructive Aesthetics
  o Postmetaphysical Thinking:
    ▪ Individuation through Socialization: On George Herbert Mead’s Theory of Subjectivity
    ▪ Philosophy and Science as Literature.

• Week Ten: Dinner and Discussion

WINTER TERM

Week One:
  o Postmetaphysical Thinking Two: From Mythical to Modern Worldviews:
    ▪ Linguistification of the Sacred: In Place of a Preface
    ▪ From Worldviews to the Lifeworld

Week Two:
  o Postmetaphysical Thinking Two: Embodied Reason and the Lifeworld:
    ▪ The Lifeworld as a Space of Symbolically Embodied Reasons

Week Three:
  o Postmetaphysical Thinking Two: Our Contemporary Post-secular Society:
    ▪ A new Interest of Philosophy in Religion: A Conversation with Eduardo Mendieta
    ▪ Religion and Postmetaphysical Thinking: A Reply

Week Four:
  o Postmetaphysical Thinking Two: Justice and Solidarity:
    ▪ “The Political” – The Reasonable Meaning of a Questionable Inheritance of Political Theology
    ▪ The “Good Life” as a “Detestable Phrase”: The Significance of Young Rawl’s Religious Ethics for his Political Theory

Axel Honneth’s Neo-Hegelian Conception of Critical Social Theory: The Normative Ideal of Undamaged Identities:

• Week Five:
  o The Fragmented World of the Social: Essays in Social and Political Philosophy:
    ▪ Author’s Introduction
    ▪ Integrity and Disrespect: Principles of a Conception of Morality Based on a Theory of Recognition
    ▪ Pluralization and Recognition: on the Self-Misunderstanding of Postmodern Social Theories

• Week Six:
  o The Fragmented World of the Social: Essays in Social and Political Philosophy:
    ▪ Decentered Autonomy: The Subject after the Fall
  o Disrespect: The Normative Foundations of Critical Theory:
    ▪ Pathologies of the Social: The Past and Present of Social Philosophy

• Week Seven:
  o Disrespect: The Normative Foundations of Critical Theory:
    ▪ The Other of Justice: Habermas and the Ethical Challenge of Postmodernism
    ▪ The Social Dynamics of Disrespect: On the Location of Critical Theory Today

AMY ALLEN’S PROPOSAL FOR THE DE-COLONIALIZATION OF CRITICAL SOCIAL THEORY: FROM A CRITIQUE OF REASON TO A CRITICISM OF REASON:
- Week Eight.
  - *The End of Progress: Decolonializing the Normative Foundations of Critical Theory.*
    - Critical Theory and the Idea of Critical Theory
    - From Social Evolution to Multiple Modernities: History and Normativity in Habermas

- Week Nine:
    - “The Ineliminability of Progress? Honneth’s Hegelianism” *Introduction*

- Week Ten:
  - Dinner and Discussion