

The Challenge of Postmodernism--- Spring 2018

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Course Objective: In this course, students may assess the multi-faceted objections raised to the Enlightenment paradigm. Challenges will include those raised by historicists, existentialists, proponents of the sociology of knowledge, and others who hold that claims and the criteria by which they are justified are not derived from objective, universal reason but, rather from distinctive psycho-socio-historical perspectives. Authors to be considered may include Nietzsche, Freud, Gadamer, Wittgenstein, representative feminist thinkers, Husserl, Nietzsche, Foucault, Derrida, and others. In conjunction with *The Rise of the Modern Spirit*, this course will enable students to appreciate the methodological complexity of the cultural world in which they wish to pursue their studies.

Reading List: (where a specific translator, publisher or edition is given, please obtain that one.)

- *Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche; trans. M. Clark; Hackett
- *The Denial of Death*, Ernest Becker
- *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, J.F. Lyotard
- *Irrational Man*, William Barrett
- *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, T. Kuhn
- *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism: Science, Hermeneutics and Praxis*, R.J. Bernstein
- *Philosophy, Religion and the Meaning of Life* [PRML], Ambrosio, available in electronic format on Canvas, in the Files section of this course.

N.B. **Be sure to take note of reading assignment for the first class meeting.**

Requirements:

All students are expected to attend class regularly, to read the assignments carefully and critically. Students will be asked to submit 5 short written reaction papers to the reading material. Students may choose the reading material about which they write papers. These assignments will account for 50% of the course grade. An additional portion of the grade (40%) will be based on a research project on a topic selected by the student in consultation with the instructor, culminating in a paper of 20- 25 pages. The remaining 10% will be based on consistent and effective contribution to the communal learning process both through participation in live class discussion and postings to the Discussion

Board before or after each class based on questions about or reactions to the assigned reading material and/or to class presentations by the instructor as well as class discussion.

Guidelines for Reaction Papers

1. Each student will be required to submit reaction statements to five of the assigned readings of his or her choice. All statements should be submitted via hard copy at the beginning of the class session for which the selected is assigned. The reaction papers, together with other contributions to the class learning process including in class discussions or voluntary postings to Canvas after class meetings, will constitute 50% of the final grade. Each reaction should be approximately 1200 - 1500 words in length.
2. Reaction papers should address the primary reading material for that class in a critical and reflective manner. They should not be primarily descriptive summaries of the content of the reading. Quotation from the text should be kept to a minimum. In addition, papers should address the relevance of the reading to the principal issues and themes of the course and should indicate what contribution the author of the reaction sees the reading as making to the developing understanding of postmodernism which the group is seeking to achieve.

Tentative Schedule

- Jan. 11 Introduction; Prior to first class meeting, read *Read Barrett I & II*; also *Ambrosio, Philosophy, Religion and the Meaning of Life* [PRML], Lectures 1- 17. Come to class having actively digested the readings and prepared to discuss them critically.
- Jan. 18 Bernstein, Part One; PRML 18-19
- Jan. 25 Nietzsche, selections, and Barrett on Nietzsche; PRML, 20, 21.
- Feb. 1 *The Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche (Essays One and Two) PRML, 22.
- Feb. 8 *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Kuhn; PRML, 23.
- Feb. 15 Bernstein, Part Two; PRML, 26 and 28.
- Feb. 22 *The Denial of Death*, Becker (required: chapters 1-5, 7-8, 11); PRML, 27 and 29, 34.

- March 1** **Husserl and Phenomenology; read Bernstein, Part Three, PRML, 33.**
- March 15** **Simone Weil and Politics (handout); also read Bernstein, Part Four. PRML, 30-31.**
- March 22** **French Existentialism; read selections for Sartre, pp. 310 - 323, and Barrett on Sartre; De Beauvoir, 343-356; Camus, 357-369. PRML, 24-25..**
- April 5** ***The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, J.F. Lyotard. PRML, 35-36.**
- April 12** **TBA**
- April 19** **Capstone discussion with Foundation Course Professors**

DLS students are responsible for upholding the Georgetown University Honor System and adhering to the academic standards included in the Honor Code Pledge stated below: *In the pursuit of the high ideals and rigorous standards of academic life, I commit myself to respect and uphold the Georgetown University Honor System: To be honest in any academic endeavor; and to conduct myself honorably, as a responsible member of the Georgetown community, as we live and work together.*

DISABILITIES STATEMENT: If you believe you have a disability, then you should contact the Academic Resource Center (arc@georgetown.edu) for further information. The Center is located in the Leavey Center, Suite 335. The Academic Resource Center is the campus office responsible for reviewing documentation provided by students with disabilities and for determining reasonable accommodations in accordance with the American with Disabilities Act (ADA) and University policies.