

# From Structuralism to Event Philosophy Philosophy and Social Science in Postwar France

PHI 5000-002

SPRING 2008

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TEACHING ASSISTANT: MICHAEL KIM

**Time:** MW 4:30-5:45

**Location:** Vasey 203

**Office Hours:** MW 12:30-1:30 p.m. in SAC 171

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## Overview

The primary goal of this course will be to understand the major developments in postwar French philosophy by situating them in their larger cultural, social and political context. In order to delimit this vast subject, we will take as our *fil conducteur* (guiding thread) the important relationship between philosophy and the social sciences—most notably anthropology, sociology, and history—in the postwar era. We will begin by looking at a “control group” from an entirely different historical context: the work of the supposed father of French philosophy, René Descartes. After an examination of a series of key issues in Cartesian philosophy (including subjectivity, truth, science, language and the delimitation of human beings from the animal world), we will turn to the role Descartes played in the Foucault/Derrida debate, which clearly illustrates what was at stake in the supposed shift from Structuralism to Poststructuralism. We will explore most notably the way in which Foucault’s break with the hagiographic elevation of philosophic figures beyond their historical contexts was seen as a problem by Derrida, who claimed that Foucault—his former philosophy professor—was unable to truly read philosophic texts. In other words, we will situate the Foucault/Derrida debate in the larger cultural context of the struggle between philosophy and the social sciences by examining how Structuralism was, in part, an attempt to merge philosophy with the social sciences (history, in the case of Foucault), whereas the Poststructuralist break consisted in rejecting such an undertaking. Against this backdrop, we will then turn to the most recent developments on the French intellectual scene by concentrating on the work of two living philosophers: Alain Badiou and Jacques Rancière. By focusing on their common attempt to break with their Poststructuralist predecessors in the name of a certain form of “Event Philosophy,” we will also have the opportunity to probe into the ways in which the relationship between philosophy and the social sciences has evolved over the last 20 or 30 years. More specifically, we will look into how their debate on aesthetics can partially be interpreted as a renewal of the Foucault/Derrida controversy, insofar as Rancière’s work on aesthetics is clearly situated in the wake of Foucault and Badiou’s rejection of “historicism” has numerous parallels in Derrida’s work. However, we will also discuss the limitations of such comparisons, most notably by exploring the ground shared by the “philosophers

of the event" in the field of politics. This historical overview of contemporary French philosophy from Foucault to Rancière will go hand in hand with an ongoing methodological investigation into the relationship between philosophy and the social sciences in an attempt to hone tools for a critical theory of society.

### REQUIRED MATERIAL AND VISITS

1. Books available in the bookstore (you can use other editions, but the page references I will use in class are to the editions listed here):
  - a. René Descartes' *Meditations on First Philosophy* in *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*. Vol. 2. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, Dugald Murdoch, trans. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999 (first published 1984).
  - b. François Dosse. *History of Structuralism: The Rising Sign 1945-1966*. Deborah Glassman, trans. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998.
  - c. Michel Foucault. *History of Madness*. New York: Routledge, 2006.
  - d. Alain Badiou. *Manifesto for Philosophy*. Norman Madarasz, trans. State University of New York Press, 1999.
  - e. Jacques Rancière. *The Politics of Aesthetics*. Gabriel Rockhill, trans. London: Continuum Books, 2004.
2. Essays and articles will be made available to you electronically via WebCT. **It is required that you print them so that you can bring them to every class.** It is highly recommended that you collect them all together in a binder so that you have all of the course readings in one place.

### REQUIREMENTS

1. **Attendance and Participation – 15%.** The class will be conducted as a seminar so it will be very important for you to come to class having engaged with the required material. This means taking notes on the readings, preparing informed questions and comments, and re-reading the material after class discussion. A cursory, passive overview of the material will prove insufficient. In addition, you should make sure that you organize your time wisely since some sessions will require more out-of-class work than others.
2. **Response Papers – 30%.** You will be required to write a **single one-page paper per class** (1 or 1 ½ spaced) that concisely presents and critically responds to the material. You should spend approximately one paragraph outlining the core of the argument, one paragraph engaging in more detail with key issues that relate to the seminar, and a final paragraph raising questions or highlighting passages for discussion. These response papers will act as the foundation for our class discussions. I will ask you to **orally present three of them to the class, and they will be graded.** Since you will not know the date on which you are presenting, it is highly recommended that you prepare each response paper as if you were going to present it. It is also recommended that you make use of the Villanova Writing Center, particularly at the beginning of the semester (please turn in your Writing Center form with your paper).
3. **Research Presentation – 20%.** You will prepare a 5-minute presentation

- of your final research paper during the last few weeks of class. You should outline your argument and explain what sources you will use to support your thesis. The research presentations will provide us with an opportunity to critically reflect on one another's ongoing research projects.
4. **Final Take-Home Exam – 35%**. You will be required to write one 8-10 page double-spaced research paper. You will be free to choose the topic based on the material covered, and I recommend that you develop and explore one of the themes that act as headings for our class sessions. It is **highly recommended** that you make an **early appointment** to take advantage of the Villanova Writing Center for your paper (please turn in your Writing Center form with your paper).

### **POLICY ON PLAGIARISM AND RESEARCH RESOURCES**

Any form of plagiarism is unacceptable. This includes, but is not limited to, referencing or paraphrasing someone else's ideas without proper citation as well as handing in someone else's work as your own. This also includes using any part of an Internet resource without proper citation. Any assignment that is at all plagiarized will automatically receive an F and, depending on the circumstances, may constitute grounds for failing the course. Moreover, every incident will be reported to the university and could constitute grounds for expulsion. For a good list of resources on what counts as plagiarism and how to avoid plagiarizing see <http://directory.google.com/Top/Reference/Education/Educators/Plagiarism/Prevention/>

You should be aware of the fact that not all of the information on the Internet is equally accurate. This is why I strongly encourage library research over Internet research and require that you do most of your work in the library. Of course, you should also be wary of the quality of published sources and try to get a feel for what is reliable (based on the author's name, the publisher, journals' reputations, etc.). If you have any questions regarding the quality of Internet or published resources, please contact me.

### **POLICY ON E-MAILS AND COMPUTER USE**

1. I will try to respond to all e-mails in a reasonable time-frame. As a general rule of thumb, this means that you will get a response within 24 to 48 hours. If you send an email over the weekend or late at night, do not expect to receive a response back immediately, even if you deem it to be an emergency.
2. I will not grant extensions via e-mail.
3. In general, I will not provide my lecture notes or other material that you could have obtained in class. If you miss class, it is your responsibility to obtain this material.
4. **No computers** will be allowed in the classroom unless you obtain explicit consent.

### **POLICY ON GRADE CHANGES, LATE WORK AND ABSENCES**

1. I will not change grades based on oral negotiation. If you feel that I have overlooked something in my grading policy, please submit a detailed written explanation of what has been overlooked along with the graded copy of your work.
2. **No late work will be accepted.** Rather than looking behind in class, you should plan on looking ahead and catching up on future assignments any points you may have lost on past assignments. You will only be able to make up for late work in the most extreme cases, and preferably when you have let me know ahead of time that you have a serious extra-curricular problem. Since a "lost paper" does not constitute a valid excuse in the computer age, **always back up your work.**
3. If you absolutely have to miss class for an excusable reason, please let me know ahead of time.

PROGRAM (subject to change)

### INTRODUCTION

**January 14** Introduction: Mapping Postwar French Thought  
François Dosse. *History of Structuralism* (Introduction, Chapters 1, 2).

### SECTION I

#### CARTESIANSIM IN CONTEXT

**January 16** Albert William Levi. *Philosophy as Social Expression* (selection).

**January 21** *Martin Luther King Day: No Class*

**January 23** Descartes. *Meditations* (translator's preface-First Meditation).

**January 28** Descartes. *Meditations* (Second and Third Meditations).

### SECTION II: STRUCTURALISM AND POSTSTRUCTURALISM

#### "STRUCTURALISM" A LA FOUCAULT

**January 30** François Dosse. *History of Structuralism* (Chapters 6, 7, 12, 18).

**February 4** Michel Foucault. *History of Madness* (selection).

**February 6** Michel Foucault. *History of Madness* (selection).

#### DERRIDA'S "POSTSTRUCTURALIST" CRITIQUE

**February 11** Jacques Derrida. "Cogito and the History of Madness."  
*Optional Reading:* Gabriel Rockhill. "Le Droit de la philosophie et les faits de l'histoire." *Le Portique* (e-portique 5 - 2007, Recherches) URL:

<http://leportique.revues.org/document1473.html>.

**February 13** Jacques Derrida. "Cogito and the History of Madness."

**February 18** Jacques Derrida. "Cogito and the History of Madness." *No response paper.*

**February 20** François Dosse. *History of Structuralism* (Chapters 34, 36, 37, 38).

## FOUCAULT'S AMBIGUOUS RESPONSE

- February 25 Michel Foucault. *History of Madness* (1<sup>st</sup> response to Derrida).  
February 27 Michel Foucault. *History of Madness* (2<sup>nd</sup> response to Derrida).  
March 1-9 *Semester Recess*  
March 10 Pierre Bourdieu. "The Philosophical Institution."  
March 12 Jacques Derrida. "'To Do Justice to Freud': The History of Madness in the Age of Psychoanalysis."

## SECTION III: EVENT PHILOSOPHY

- March 17 Gabriel Rockhill. "Recent Developments in Aesthetics: Badiou, Rancière and Their Interlocutors."  
March 19 *No Class (Professor Absent for Lecture)*  
If you are interested in attending the anti-war demonstration for the 5<sup>th</sup>-year anniversary of the war in Iraq, see:  
<http://www.5yearstoomany.org/article.php?list=type&type=4>  
March 20-24 *Easter Recess*  
March 26 Alain Badiou. *Manifesto for Philosophy* (chapters 1-3).  
*Optional Reading:* Alain Badiou. *Manifesto for Philosophy* (chapter 4).  
March 31 Alain Badiou. *Manifesto for Philosophy* (chapters 5-7).  
*Research presentations will begin on April 2<sup>nd</sup>, and no more response papers will be required.*  
April 2 Alain Badiou. *Manifesto for Philosophy* (chapters 8-9).  
April 7 Alain Badiou. *Manifesto for Philosophy* (chapters 10-11).  
April 9 Jacques Rancière. *The Politics of Aesthetics* (Translator's Introduction, "Foreword," and "The Distribution of the Sensible: Politics and Aesthetics").  
April 14 Jacques Rancière. *The Politics of Aesthetics* ("Artistic Regimes...").  
April 16 Jacques Rancière. *The Politics of Aesthetics* ("Mechanical Arts..." and "Historical and Hermeneutic Methodology" in the Interview for the English Edition).  
*Optional Reading:* Jacques Rancière. *The Politics of Aesthetics* ("Is History a Form of Fiction?" and "On Art and Work").  
April 21 Jacques Rancière. *The Politics of Aesthetics* (Interview for the English Edition: "Universality, Historicity, Equality," "Positive Contradiction," "Politicized Art").  
April 23 Gabriel Rockhill. "Mapping Postwar French Thought."  
(work in progress serving as my final paper for the seminar).  
April 28 *No Class (Professor Absent for Lecture)*  
April 30 *No Class (Professor Absent for Lecture)*