

**ICS Calendar Title:** Metaphysics after Auschwitz: Adorno's Negative Dialectics

**ICS Course Code:** ICS 2730 F09

**Instructor:** Dr. Lambert Zuidervaart ; email address: [lambertz@icscanada.edu](mailto:lambertz@icscanada.edu) ; office hours: Monday, 3:00-4:30 pm

**Term and Year:** Mondays, 12:00-3:00 pm, Fall 2009

**Last Updated:** August 17, 2009

### Seminar Description

Once central to Western philosophy and theology, metaphysics has a bad press today. Leading philosophers in Europe and North America view it with suspicion and disdain. Indeed, no serious philosopher since Kant has been able to avoid his critique of metaphysical speculations about God, the soul, and the meaning of existence. Add to these intellectual problems the horrors of twentieth-century history, which continue today, and one wonders whether metaphysical inquiry has any merit. Theodor W. Adorno has posed such issues in dramatic and decisive ways. This seminar will study his reflections from the 1960s on the status of metaphysics "after Auschwitz." The aim will be to learn what it would mean, in Adorno's words, to show critical solidarity with metaphysics "in the moment of its collapse." The seminar is a research course in systematic philosophy at the Institute for Christian Studies. It falls under the general rubric "The Postmodern Condition" and under the more specific theme "Truth after Metaphysics." The seminar is listed at the Toronto School of Theology as ICT5763HF and at the University of Toronto as PHL 2089F, "Seminar in Twentieth-Century Continental Philosophy."

### Seminar Requirements

Each seminar participant is expected to:

- do every required reading and join in-class discussions (the required readings total about 445 pages, or approximately 37 pages per week over 12 weeks);
- make a presentation or two on the required reading;
- write a research paper on a topic relevant to the course and endorsed by the course instructor.

The approximate weight assigned each component for the course mark is as follows:

(1) Readings and Discussions 10-20%

(2) Presentation(s) 20-30%

(3) Research Paper 50-70%

### Seminar Texts (\*=ordered at the University of Toronto Bookstore)

Adorno, Theodor W. *Negative Dialektik* (1966, 1967) In *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 6. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1973. (=GS 6) [Robarts Library: AC35 .A28 Bd.6]

\*Adorno, Theodor W. *Negative Dialectics* (1966, 1967). Trans. E.B. Ashton. 1973. Reprint ed. New York: Continuum, 1983. ISBN 0826401325 (=ND)[ICS Library Reserve Shelf: B3199 .A33 N413 1973]

\*Kant, Immanuel. *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788). In Immanuel Kant, *Practical Philosophy*, pp. 133-271. Trans. and ed. Mary J. Gregor. General introduction by Allen Wood. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996. ISBN 0521654084 (=Critique). Also available separately from Cambridge UP, 1997: ISBN 0521599628 [ICS Library Reserve Shelf: B2758 .G74 1996]

\*Kant, Immanuel. *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics* (1783). The Paul Carus translation extensively rev. by James W. Ellington. Indianapolis: Hackett, 2001. ISBN 0872205932 (=Prolegomena) [ICS Library Reserve Shelf: B2787 .E5 C3 2001]

\*Zuidervaart, Lambert. *Social Philosophy after Adorno*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007. ISBN 9780521690386 (=Social) [ICS Library Reserve Shelf: B3199 .A34 Z84 2007 c.1]

### Office Hours

Please feel free to talk to me about creating favorable conditions for your work in the seminar. I welcome spontaneous visits during my office hours. You will need to make an appointment if you want to meet some other time.

**Schedule** (\* = presentation dates)

Date	Required Readings	Supplementary Readings
9/14	(No reading; introduction to seminar)	
9/21	Kant, <i>Prolegomena</i> : Third Part, Conclusion, Solution (AK 4: 327-71)	Habermas, <i>Postmetaphysical Thinking</i> vii-27
9/28	Kant, <i>Critique</i> : Part I, Book II, 226-58 (AK 5: 107-48)	Habermas, <i>Postmetaphysical Thinking</i> 28-51
10/5	Adorno, ND ix-31 (GS 6: 9-42)	Zuidervaart, "Thinking Otherwise" & "Adorno's Social Philosophy," in <i>Social</i> 1-15, 183-201
10/19*	Adorno, ND 31-57 (GS 6: 42-66)	Zuidervaart, "Heidegger and Adorno in Reverse," in <i>Social</i> 77-106; Tiedemann, "Concept, Image, Name"
11/2*	Adorno, ND 133-76 (GS 6: 137-77)	<b>(Hand in paper proposals)</b>
11/9*	Adorno, ND 176-207 (GS 6: 178-207)	Zuidervaart, "Transgression or Transformation," in <i>Social</i> 16-47
11/16*	Adorno, ND 211-55 (GS 6: 211-52)	Zuidervaart, "Autonomy Reconfigured," in <i>Social</i> 132-54
11/23*	Adorno, ND 255-99 (GS 6: 252-94)	Zuidervaart, "Globalizing Dialectic of Enlightenment," in <i>Social</i> 107-31 Horkheimer, "Materialism and Metaphysics" (1933)
11/30*	Adorno, ND 300-60 (GS 6: 295-353)	Zuidervaart, "Ethical Turns," in <i>Social</i> 155-81 Adorno, "Progress" (1964), in <i>Critical Models</i> 143-60;
12/7*	Adorno, ND 361-81 (GS 6: 354-74)	Bernstein, "'After Auschwitz'," in <i>Adorno</i> 371-414; Wellmer, "Metaphysics at the Moment of Its Fall (1988)," in <i>Endgames</i> 183-201
12/14	Adorno, ND 381-408 (GS 6: 374-400)	Zuidervaart, "Metaphysics after Auschwitz," in <i>Social</i> 48-76

**Notes:** There will be no sessions on October 12 (Canadian Thanksgiving) and 26 (ICS Reading Week). For abbreviations of book titles, see the list of seminar texts above. "AK" stands for Kant's collected writings as published by the Preussische Akademie der Wissenschaften, Berlin, 1900ff.--known in English as the "Prussian" or "Berlin" Academy Edition. Most English translations of Kant's writings indicate pagination from volumes in this

edition.

## About the Readings

Adorno's *Negative Dialectics* is one of his last two major works, the other being *Aesthetic Theory*. It builds on his previous writings, and it presupposes familiarity with central texts of German philosophy, especially writings by Kant, Hegel, and Heidegger. Obviously there is no way to read all of these writings in one seminar. So I have decided to concentrate on Adorno's book, hoping that we can illuminate its historical connections from within, after we have read crucial passages from Kant. Unfortunately, Ashton's translation of *Negative Dialectics* has serious flaws; e.g., it regularly mistranslates *Vermittlung* (a standard Hegelian term for "mediation") as "transmission" or, even worse, "indirectness"! While it is always a good idea to consult the original language when one works through a major philosophical text, Ashton's translation makes this even more urgent. The schedule above lists the equivalent pagination in Adorno's *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 6. I encourage you to consult this standard German edition frequently if you can. I have also provided a bibliography (below) for those who wish to range more widely. The list contains other books by Adorno that are closely linked to *Negative Dialectics*. It also contains secondary sources that shed either systematic or historiographic light on Adorno's negative dialectical project.

## Presentations

Each seminar participant will introduce at least one required reading in class. Your introduction will last about 20 minutes, depending on the number of presenters. It will summarize the reading, identify important issues in it, and state your position on these issues. You should also hand out two typed questions for us to discuss. They will help us think about the issues the reading raises. You should explain why you ask these questions and how the reading prompts them. Please keep your presentation succinct and lively, using the blackboard, photocopied handouts, computer projector, or other equipment where appropriate. Criteria for evaluation will include organization, clarity, perceptiveness, and scope.

## Research Paper (due Friday, January 29, 2010)

The research paper will be typed double-spaced, include footnotes or endnotes and a bibliography, and contain approximately 4000 words; papers by doctoral students will contain approximately 5000-7000 words. **A typed one-page proposal will be handed in during class on November 2.** The proposal should include a brief bibliography that lists key sources for your research. Papers are due January 29. Be sure to make consistent use of one of the following styles for format and documentation: either *The MLA Style Manual* or Kate L. Turabian's *A Manual for Writers* (based on *The Chicago Manual of Style*). **On the title page of your paper, please identify the style used.**

Approach: The paper will state, explain, and defend your position on one question, puzzle, or problem pertaining to metaphysical themes in continental philosophy. To accomplish this you will need to examine what other philosophers have said on your topic. Rather than simply report what others say, however, you should use their writings to develop your own position. **In general, the more specific your focus, the stronger your paper will be.**

Exceptions: Exceptions to the recommended approach should be discussed with the instructor well before the paper's due date. For example, you may wish to explore the implications of a controversy in contemporary theology or political theory for a philosophical approach to the topics considered in class. This might be acceptable, but only after we have discussed your proposal.

Evaluation: I shall assess your paper according to four criteria, each of which has a similar weight: research, writing, reasoning, and scope. A paper that has been **properly researched** will demonstrate familiarity with relevant sources and will make strategic use of these sources. A **well-written** paper will be free from errors of spelling, punctuation, and grammar; it will be clear, concise, imaginative, and persuasive; and it will use gender-inclusive language. A **well-reasoned** paper will use valid and sound arguments; it will also be open and fair to alternative positions--not one-sided or small-minded. A paper with **sufficient scope** will be thorough, and it will probe beneath the surface of its subject matter.

Policies on Course Work: According to ICS policy, the due date for course papers falls between the third and sixth week after the semester's end. I have set the paper's due date on the last day of that period. Since this occurs after the deadline at U of T for submission of grade, U of T students will need to complete petitions for extensions.

ICS policy gives the instructor discretion to refuse extensions for late work by ICS Junior Members, and also to penalize late work. I have five reasons to resist granting extensions beyond the due date:

1. Unlike fine wines, seminar papers rarely improve with age.
2. It is fairer to all seminar participants for everyone to observe the same deadlines.
3. Late papers impede finishing other course work and completing your degree program.
4. I lose motivation to grade papers the longer it takes to receive them, and that could have a negative impact on how your paper is evaluated.
5. Grading late papers disrupt my work as an instructor and research scholar.

**So aim to get your paper in on time, and talk with me right away if you are running stuck.**

### **Selected Bibliography**

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