

PL 211 Theodor Adorno, Negative Dialectics

Seminar Leader: Dr. Jan Völker
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Office Hours: By appointment
Course Times: Wed 17:30-20:45

Course Description

This course focuses on perhaps the most challenging among the works of Theodor Adorno. Like his collaborators in the Frankfurt School of philosophers and analysts of culture, Adorno sought to think Hegel, Marx, and Freud together in relationship to the problem of modernity. *Negative Dialectics* (1966) is considered to form part of a triumvirate of critique that includes the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1944) and *Aesthetic Theory* (1970). *Negative Dialectics* can be understood to elaborate the fundamental conceptual parameters of Adorno's method and convictions. Dealing especially with the philosophical implications of Marx's description of "exchange value," the text centers on the concepts of "totality" and "identity," discovering in its exploration of the relation between these terms the philosophical response to the catastrophes of the twentieth century, and a way of grasping the predicament of philosophy itself "after the moment to realize it was missed" (an allusion to Marx's 11th Thesis on Feuerbach), or after the non-eventuality of the kind of Communism Marx and Engels had envisaged. *Negative Dialectics* pursues the consequences of its reflections to the point of surpassing philosophical "system" as such, which it finds to be enmeshed in the categorical oppressions it seeks to remove. Due to its place in Adorno's endeavors, and its connections with the projects of his interlocutors, Max Horkheimer and Walter Benjamin among others, as well as its own open-ended form and intellectual dauntlessness, it remains the vital reference point for critical theory today.

Participants of the class should purchase the following edition: Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E.B. Ashton, New York / London: Continuum 2007.

Requirements

Attendance at every class is essential, as is full advance preparation of the course readings for each session of the seminar. There will be two essays, the first of 1800-2500 words or 5-7 pages, and the second of 8-10 pages, or 2800-3500 words, as well as in-class presentations, which form part of the participation grade.

Academic Integrity

Bard College Berlin maintains the staunchest regard for academic integrity and expects good academic practice from students in their studies. Syllabi should note that, instances in which students fail to meet the expected standards of academic integrity will be dealt with under the Code of Student Conduct, Section 14.3 (Academic Misconduct) in the Student Handbook.

Attendance

Attendance at ALL classes is expected. More than two absences (that is absences from two sessions of 90 minutes) in a semester will significantly affect the participation grade for the course.

Students should consult the Student Handbook for regulations governing periods of illness or leaves of absence.

Assessment

Attendance at ALL classes is expected. More than two absences (that is absences from two sessions of 90 minutes) in a semester will significantly affect the participation grade for the course.

Students should consult the Student Handbook for regulations governing periods of illness or leaves of absence.

PLEASE NOTE: No electronic devices are allowed in class.

Assignments

Mid-Term Paper: 1800-2500 words, 5-7 pages. Final paper: 2800-3500 words, 8-10 pages.

Essay deadlines: Midterm paper: Friday 13 March 23.59. Final paper: Friday 8 May 23.59

Policy on Late Submission of Papers

Syllabi for core and elective classes should note or refer to the following policy from the Student Handbook on the submission of essays: *essays that are up to 24 hours late will be downgraded one full grade (from B+ to C+, for example). Instructors are not obliged to accept essays that are more than 24 hours late. Where an instructor agrees to accept a late essay, it must be submitted within four weeks of the deadline and cannot receive a grade of higher than C.*

Thereafter, the student will receive a failing grade for the assignment.

Grade Breakdown

Mid-term essay: 20%

Final essay: 30%

Seminar grade: 50% (20%presentation, 30%participation)

Schedule

Wednesday, 29 January

- Introduction, pp. 3-26
- The Possibility of Philosophy / Reality and Dialectics / The Concern of Philosophy / The Antagonistic Entirety / Disenchantment of the Concept / "Infinity" / The Speculative Moment / Presentation / Attitude Toward Systems / Idealism as Rage / The Twofold Character of the System

Wednesday, 5 February

- Introduction, pp. 26-60
- The Antinomical Character of Systems / Argument and Experience / Vertiginousness / Fragility of Truth / Against Relativism / Dialectics and Solidity / The Privilege of Experience / Qualitative Moment of Rationality / Quality and Individual / Substantiality and Method / Existentialism / Thing, Language, History / Tradition and Knowledge / Rhetoric

Wednesday, 12 February

- The Ontological Need, pp. 61-85
Question and Answer / Affirmative Character / Incapacitation of the Subject / Being, Subject, Object / Ontological Objectivism / The Disappointed Need / "Deficiency=Profit" / No Man's Land / Unsuccessful Realism / On Categorical Vision / Being

Wednesday, 19 February

- The Ontological Need, pp. 85-97
- "Sense of Being" / Ontology Prescribed / Protest Against Reification / The Wrong Need / Weakness and Support

Wednesday, 26 February

- Being and Existence, pp. 97-134
- Immanent Critique of Ontology / Copula / No Transcendence of Being / Expressing the Inexpressible / The Child's Question / The Question of Being / Looping the Loop / Mythology of Being / Ontologization of the Ontical / Function of the Concept of Existence / "Dasein in Itself Ontological" / The Nominalistic Aspect / Existence Authoritarian / "Historicality"

Wednesday, 4 March

- Negative Dialectics, Concept and Categories, pp. 134-161
- The Indissoluble "Something" / Compulsory Sustainment / "Peephole Metaphysics" / Noncontradictoriness Not to be Hypostatized / Relation to Left-wing Hegelianism / "Logic of Disintegration" / On the Dialectics of Identity /

Cogitative Self-reflection / Objectivity of Contradiction / Starting Out from the Concept / Synthesis / Critique of Positive Negation

Wednesday, 11 March

- Negative Dialectics, Concept and Categories, pp. 161-189
- Individuality Not the Ultimate Either / Constellation / Constellation in Science / Essence and Appearance / Indirectness by Objectivity / Particularity and the Particular / Subject-Object Dialectics / Reversal of the Subjective Reduction / Interpreting the Transcendental / "Transcendental Delusion" / The Object's Preponderance / The Object Not a Datum

Wednesday, 18 March

- Negative Dialectics, Concept and Categories, pp. 189-211
- Objectivity and Reification / Passage to Materialism / Materialism and Immediacy / Dialectics Not a Sociology of Knowledge / The Concept of Mind / Pure Activity and Genesis / Suffering Physical / Materialism Imageless

Wednesday, 25 March

- Models: Freedom, pp. 211-237
- On The Metacritique of Practical Reason / "Pseudoproblems" / A Split in the Concern with Freedom / Freedom, Determinism, Identity / Freedom and Organized Society / The Impulse Before the Ego / Experimenta crucis / The Addendum / The Fiction of Positive Freedom / Unfreedom of Thought / "Formalism"

Wednesday, 1 April

- Models: Freedom, pp. 237-269
- The Will as a Thing / Objectivity in the Antinomy / Dialectical Definition of the Will / Contemplation / Structure of the Third Antinomy / Kant's Concept of Causality / The Plea for Order / The Antithetical Argument / Ontical and Ideal Moments / Repressive Character of the Doctrine of Freedom / Self-experience of Freedom and Unfreedom
The Crisis of Causality

Wednesday, 8 April

- Spring Break

Wednesday, 15 April

- Models: Freedom, pp. 269-300
- Causality as a Spell / Reason, Ego, Super-ego / Potential of Freedom / Against Personalism / Depersonalization and Existential Ontology / Universal

and Individual in the Philosophy of Morals / On the State of Freedom / Kant's
"Intelligible Character" / Intelligibility and the Unity of Consciousness / Truth
Content of the Doctrine of Intelligibility

Wednesday, 22 April

- Meditations on Metaphysics, pp. 361-381
- After Auschwitz / Metaphysics and Culture / Dying Today / Happiness and Idle Waiting / "Nihilism"

Wednesday, 29 April

- Meditations on Metaphysics, pp. 381-409
- Kant's Resignation / Rescuing Urge and Block / Mundus intelligibilis / Neutralization / "Only a Parable" / The Semblance of Otherness / Self-Reflection of Dialectics

Wednesday, 6 May

- Conclusion

Wednesday, 13 May

- Completion Week