

Seminar in Continental Philosophy:
Deconstruction and Critical Theory in a Time of Terror

Plan and Purpose

This seminar will examine the contributions of Deconstruction and Critical Theory to the understanding of the event of September 11 and its aftermath, of terror as a state of mind, and of global terrorism as a social and political phenomenon. The key-contributions of Jacques Derrida and Jürgen Habermas will be its focus, as formulated in the recent dialogues with each of them conducted by Ms. Borradori in *Philosophy in a Time of Terror*. The dialogues will be supplemented by selections from Kant's political writings, which have been crucial to both Habermas and Derrida, and which will be our window onto the legacy of the Enlightenment. We will also be reading key-texts in the debate surrounding the political appropriation of Islam, which will provide a context for Habermas and Derrida's positions in the contemporary debate. We shall then turn to the social and political writings by Habermas and Derrida pre-dating and post-dating the terrorist attacks of 2001. The examination of Derrida and Habermas's reflections on terror and terrorism, modernity and fundamentalism, will allow us not only to consider how the approaches of Deconstruction and Critical Theory conflict and complement each other but also to assess their value as methods of social and political analysis.

Requirements

Listed below are the reading assignments for the course. Each one of them should be prepared thoroughly before class. Active class participation and punctuality in handing in the assignments are essential, and attendance is required.

Two short written reports of 3 pages length are required. These reports should provide an insightful exposition of a part of the assigned text (eg. of 3-5 pages), chosen by the student, and end with some critical question(s) for discussion. The reports are due on the date of the assignment, with two copies provided to the instructors. One of the reports must be completed and submitted by March 6 prior to spring break. -- One of the reports will be read as a scheduled oral presentation in the seminar (see Sign Up page). Each presenting student should notify the instructors by email no later than Friday prior to the seminar of the exact text pages covered by the report to be given.

A term paper, 12-15 pages in length is also required. A written proposal for the subject of the paper must be submitted for approval no later than May 3; the paper is due May 15, printed in two copies.

Grading*

Grades will be determined in roughly the following proportion:

50% two short reports and class participation

50% term paper

Texts

- Giovanna Borradori, *Philosophy in a Time of Terror: Dialogues with Jürgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida*, University of Chicago Press, 2003
- Kant, *Perpetual Peace and Other Essays*, Hackett
- Jürgen Habermas, *The Inclusion of the Other. Studies in Political Theory*, MIT Press, 1998
- Jürgen Habermas, *The Divided West*, Polity Press, 2006
- Jacques Derrida, *Acts of Religion*, Routledge, 2002
- Jacques Derrida, *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason*, University of California Press, 2004
- Other texts to be distributed in class and/or made available in a digital format on this class site on “Blackboard”

* Academic accommodations are available for students with documented disabilities. Please schedule an appointment with the Instructor early in the semester to discuss any accommodations that may be needed for the course. All accommodations must be approved through the Office of Disability and Support Services (ext. 7584) as indicated in the accommodation letter

Course Structure and Assignments*

Jan. 30 Introduction—Sketch of the Course

Kant and the Political Legacy of the Enlightenment

Feb. 6 G. Borradori, "Introduction," *Philosophy in a Time of Terror* (PTT), 1-22
I. Kant, "An Answer to the Question: What Is Enlightenment?" in *Perpetual Peace and Other Essays* (PPOE)
"Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone," excerpts, Blackboard
"Perpetual Peace," excerpts, in PPOE

Islam, Enlightenment, and Modernity: Culturalists and their Critics

Feb 13 B. Lewis, "The Revolt of Islam," *New Yorker*, November 19, 2001, Blackboard
O. Roy, "Islam: a Passage to the West," in *The Globalization of Islam*, 1-41, Blackboard
M. Mamdani, "Culture Talk, or How Not to Talk about Islam and Politics," in *Good Muslim bad Muslim*, 17-62, Blackboard

Habermas: Critical Theory and the Project of a New Cosmopolitan Order

Feb. 20 G. Borradori, "Fundamentalism and Terror: A Dialogue with Jürgen Habermas," 1-24, in PTT
G. Borradori, "Reconstructing Terrorism: Habermas," in PTT, 45-84

Feb. 27 "Editor's Introduction," in J. Habermas, *The Inclusion of the Other* (IO) VII-XXXVII
J. Habermas, *Theory of Communicative Action*, Part I, Introduction, excerpts, Blackboard

Mar. 6 J. Habermas, "The European Nation-State: on the Past and Future of Sovereignty and Citizenship," in IO, 105-127
J. Habermas, "Kant's Idea of Perpetual Peace: at Two Hundred Years Historical Remove," in IO, 165-201

* All reading assignments marked "Blackboard" are available on the Vassar Blackboard system. To access it go to <http://info.vassar.edu>, click on blackboard, login with your username and password.

March 10-25 Spring Break

- Mar. 27 J. Habermas, "The Kantian Project and the Divided West," in *The Divided West*, 115-72
- Apr. 3 J. Habermas, "The Kantian Project and the Divided West," in DW, 179-93

Derrida: Auto-Immunity, Deconstruction, and the Democracy-to-Come

- Apr. 10 Derrida, "Semiology and Grammatology: Interview with Julia Kristeva," in *Positions*, Blackboard
"Positions: Interview with Jean-Louis Houdebine and Guy Scarpetta," in *P*, Blackboard
Borradori, "Autoimmunity: Real and Symbolic Suicides. A Dialogue with Jacques Derrida," in PTT, 85-136
G. Borradori, "Deconstructing Terrorism: Derrida," in *PTT*, 137-172
- Apr. 17 J. Derrida, "Force of Law: 'The Mystical Foundation of Authority'," in *Acts of Religion*, 190-228
- Apr. 24 J. Derrida, "Faith and Knowledge: The Two Sources of 'Religion' at the Limits of Reason Alone," in *AR*, 42-101
- May 1 J. Derrida, *Rogues*, 1-77
- May 8 J. Derrida, *Rogues*, 78-155
- May 3 **Paper Proposal Due by 3 pm**; 2 copies
Please hand it in to Ms. Schmidt, Philosophy Department Office, Rockefeller 209
- May 15 **Final Paper Due by 3pm** , 2 copies, Rockefeller 209