

# PH8121 Recent Continental Philosophy

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JORG 424

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This seminar examines two of the most important European philosophers of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century: Emmanuel Levinas and Jacques Derrida. Though grounded in western philosophy, Levinas's distinct thought challenges some of the fundamental assumptions that have governed philosophers since at least Plato. He offers a major alternative to the picture of subjectivity — itself a critique of the Cartesian subject — that his teacher Martin Heidegger put forward in *Being and Time*. Rather than the question of Being, Levinas identifies the Other as the true starting place for philosophy. The tension between Heidegger's and Levinas's different philosophical perspectives remains to this day a site of major contestation for philosophers working within the continental tradition. Levinas insisted on the primacy of ethics over ontology — a claim that he maintains can be made on philosophical grounds. Derrida, Levinas's student, developed his own unique philosophy, one which in important ways can be understood as following in the wake of Heidegger's thought, but which over time becomes increasingly more responsive to and engaged with that of Levinas's — while nevertheless remaining independent and at times even critical of his former teacher. Together Levinas and Derrida reshaped much of the landscape of contemporary continental philosophy. The seminar will explore a number of themes including alterity (otherness), deconstruction, responsibility, the gift, hospitality, and the return of religion.

## Requirements

### **Seminar Note: 20%**

- choose a critical passage from the reading(s) and attempt a (approximately) 300 word analysis
- total of 5 notes (you can choose which weekly readings you will write your note on)
- these will be collected at the start of each class. I will assess them twice during the semester (mid-semester and at the end of the semester)

### **Seminar Presentation: 15%**

- 7 to 10 minute presentation
- the presentation will cover a keyword or theme (these will be discussed shortly)

### **Participation: 10%**

Straightforward: come prepared for discussion and/or questions.

**Research Essay: 50%**

- 12-15 pages
- due one week after our last class

**Research Paper Proposal: 5%**

- 2 to 3 page proposal including bibliography

**Texts**

I strongly recommend that you purchase the following books:

Levinas, *Totality and Infinity* (Duquesne University Press)  
Derrida, *Adieu: To Emmanuel Levinas*

The following books contain parts of the readings (that will also be available on D2L) that we will be discussing. You may wish to purchase these books:

Levinas, *Basic Philosophical Writings*  
Derrida, *The Gift of Death*

**General, Background Reading**

Bernasconi, Robert. ““There Is Neither Jew Nor Greek: The Strange Dialogue Between Levinas and Derrida,” in [Blackwell Companion to Derrida](#).

Bloechl, Jeffrey. ed. *The Face of the Other and the trace of God: Essays on the philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas* [[Ryerson ebook](#)]

Caputo, John D. *Deconstruction in a Nutshell: A Conversation with Jacques Derrida* [[Ryerson ebook](#)]

Caputo, John D. *Radical Hermeneutics* (Indiana UP)

Caputo, John D. *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida* (Indiana UP)

Cohen, Richard A. *Ethics, Exegesis, and Philosophy: Interpretation after Levinas* [[Ryerson ebook](#)]

Critchley, Simon. *The Ethics of Deconstruction: Derrida & Levinas* [[Ryerson ebook](#)]

Critchley and Bernasconi, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Levinas* [[Ryerson ebook](#)]  
[the introduction presents one of the best concise overviews of Levinas's philosophy]

Jacques Derrida, "Deconstruction and the Other [An Interview]," in Richard Kearney, ed., *Debates in continental philosophy: conversations with contemporary thinkers* [[Ryerson ebook](#)]

Direk, Zeynep and Leonard Lawlor, eds. *Blackwell Companion to Derrida* [[Ryerson ebook](#)]

Haddad, Samir. *Derrida and the Inheritance of Democracy* [[Ryerson ebook](#)]

Levinas, E. *Ethics and Infinity: Conversations with Philippe Nemo* (Duquesne UP)

Levinas, E. "Ethics of the Infinite [An Interview]," in Richard Kearney, *Debates in continental philosophy: conversations with contemporary thinkers* [[Ryerson ebook](#)]

Morgan, Michael. *The Cambridge Introduction to Emmanuel Levinas* [[Ryerson ebook](#)]

Naas, Michael. "'Alors, qui êtes-vous?'" Jacques Derrida and the Question of Hospitality," *SubStance* Issue 106 (34:1), 2005, reprinted in *Derrida From Now On*

Naas, Michael. *Derrida from Now On* (Fordham UP) [[Ryerson ebook](#)]

Peperzak, A. T. (1993). *To the Other: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas*. West Lafayette, Ind.: Purdue University Press.

Putnam, Hillary. "Levinas and Judaism." In *The Cambridge Companion to Levinas*

***Other readings will be made available on D2L***

## Topics and Readings

1. **Introduction**

2. **Totality and Infinity: I**

*Readings:*

- TI 109-142

3. **Totality and Infinity: II**

*Readings:*

- TI 143-154, 156-162 [for now we are skipping section D2 *Habitation and the Feminine* (pp. 154-156); we'll return to this particular part of the book later]
- TI 33-52

4. **Totality and Infinity: III**

*Readings:*

- TI 53-90, 194-201
- Optional: "The Face," in *Ethics and Infinity*, 85-92

5. **Totality and Infinity: IV**

*Readings:*

- TI 154-156, 168-174, 180-183, 201-219, 267-269

6. **Jew-Greek? Derrida's Critical Reflections on Levinas's Ethical Project**

*Readings:*

Derrida, "Violence and Metaphysics" [from *Writing and Difference*] pp. 79-84, bottom of 100 to top 109, 114-117, 124-133, 146-153; [selection will be made available on D2L]

7. **Later Levinas: A More Complicated Picture of Ethics**

*Readings*

- Levinas, "God and Philosophy," [available from Purdue University [here](#)] and "Substitution [selection]" [in *Basic Philosophical Writings*]

8. **Derrida, Justice as 'Undeconstructible'**

*Readings*

- Derrida, "Force of Law" [From *Acts of Religion*]; pp. 230-258; [selection will be made available on D2L]

9. **Derrida on Hospitality – Part I**

*Readings*

- Derrida, *Adieu* [read first half]

10. **Derrida on Hospitality – Part II**

*Readings*

- *Adieu* [read second half]

- OPTIONAL: “Hospitality, Justice and Responsibility; A Dialogue with Jacques Derrida” [from *Questioning Ethics*] Available online [here](#) [Ryerson Library ebook]

11. **Derrida on Ethical Singularity: *Tout autre est tout autre***

*Readings*

Derrida, *Gift of Death* [to be made available on D2L]; pp. 53 - 88

12. **Derrida and the ‘Impossibility’ of Forgiveness**

*Readings*: Derrida, “On Forgiveness,” [from *Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness*] pp. 27 - 60

Available online [here](#) [Ryerson Library ebook]

## ***The FINE PRINT***

### **Essays: Writing Standards and Plagiarism**

*Students agree that by taking this course all required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to Turnitin.com for the detection of plagiarism. All submitted papers will be included as source documents in the Turnitin.com reference database solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of such papers. Use of the Turnitin.com service is subject to the terms of use agreement posted on the Turnitin.com site. [Secretary of Academic Council, Ryerson University]*

Anyone who submits a plagiarized essay will receive an 'F' for the course.

#### ***Avoiding Plagiarism***

In addition to what is stated below, students must carefully read the *Student Code of Academic Conduct* in the Ryerson Calendar.

Essays in this course should be written using Chicago, Turabian, or MLA formats. All footnote references require the *page numbers* of the published sources from which information and quoted material is taken.

It is assumed that all work submitted for evaluation and course credit will be original writing. Plagiarism, whether from work by other students, from published material or from commercial sources, will result in a minimum penalty of 'zero' on the assignment. In the event of a subsequent offense, the student will fail the course.

Plagiarism means passing off someone else's work as your own. But academic work builds upon work already done by other people. When you write your own paper, *you need to use quotation marks and footnotes whenever you use someone else's exact words*. Footnotes are also used to give credit to someone whose ideas you specifically borrow, *even if you are not using his or her exact words*. Writing sentence after sentence with borrowed ideas but without footnotes is plagiarism.

As you write you should ask yourself the same questions the reader has the right to ask about what you are saying and where you get your ideas: "Why do you believe this?", "Where did you get that?", and "Why should I believe you?" If you answer these types of question by providing footnotes, you will avoid plagiarism. In addition you relieve yourself of the burden of defending someone else's ideas or judgments with which your reader may disagree.

**PLEASE NOTE: AN ORAL EXAMINATION MAY BE REQUIRED IF THERE ARE ANY CONCERNS AS TO THE PROVENANCE OR CONTEXT OF ESSAY MATERIAL.**

You may be asked for rough notes or files related to your essay. In accordance with departmental policy, the assignment of a grade for submitted work will be based in part on the quality of writing skills.

#### **DEPARTMENTAL AND UNIVERSITY POLICIES:**

It is the *responsibility* of *all students* to familiarize themselves with university policies. For university policies, please consult the Ryerson Calendar.

#### **NOTE FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES**

If you require any special accommodation as a result of a disability, please feel free to speak to me about your situation. For further information relating to disabilities, you may wish to contact the Access Centre.