The Life of the Spirit: Hegel and Kierkegaard
PHIL 394-01
MW 7:00-8:30 PM
Spring 2012
Main 011

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Course Description

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel’s daring and drama-packed volume, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, has long stood out as one of the masterworks of 19th century-European philosophy. In this course, we will embrace the adventure of reading the *Phenomenology*, starting with the preface and continuing through the section on Unhappy Consciousness. Among the questions guiding our adventure will be: Just what does Hegel mean by “spirit”? What does it mean to “do” philosophy as a speculative science and how does this approach differ from some of Hegel’s predecessors, most importantly Kant? What are the historical forms that Hegel identifies with the emergence and development of philosophical consciousness and how are the transitions between these forms accomplished? In the second part of the course, we will turn to one of Hegel’s most sharp-witted and wittiest critics, the Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard, in whose writings the roots of existentialism can be found. Through reading and discussing original texts such as *Fear and Trembling*, *The Sickness unto Death*, and parts of *Either-Or* and *The Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, we will critically examine the contrast
between Hegel’s stages of consciousness and those proposed by Kierkegaard: the aesthetic, the ethical, and the religious. What does Kierkegaard mean when he claims that “truth is subjectivity”? And what are we to make of it when he proposes that “a human being is spirit…..spirit is the self”?

**Learning goals**

The learning goals for this course can be simply expressed.

With respect to learning about content, this course is designed to help you acquire a critical understanding of (a) the fundamental questions, concepts, perspectives, and thematic developments within Hegel’s and Kierkegaard’s philosophies, as exemplified by the works that will challenge us in this course; (b) how Hegel’s philosophy fits within the broader tradition of European philosophy, both as an astute questioning of this tradition and as its continuation; and (c) how the themes sounded by Kierkegaard in his response to Hegel as well as his consideration of Christianity lay the groundwork for the movement of existentialist thought in the 20th century.

This course is also intended to give you opportunities for becoming more practiced in the kinds of reading, talking, thinking, and writing that are part of the activity of “doing philosophy,” and to help you become more aware of the questions and assumptions you bring to this activity. It is also intended to give you a greater appreciation of the genuine difficulties involved with doing philosophy, as well as its genuine pleasures.

**Required Texts**


**Academic Integrity**

In this class, we will strive to have an environment geared as best as possible toward facilitating individual learning and which models best scholarly practices. Please know that in reviewing your work, I will adhere to the College’s *Academic Integrity Policy* as published in the *Student Handbook*.

Through the gift of your attention, you not only offer yourself more opportunities to be involved in class discussion, but you also help support the integrity of the learning environment. For your own sake and that of your fellow students, kindly take your phone
off the “ring” setting while in class and please refrain from texting, tweeting, googling, and the like.

Coursework

For this course, you will be writing one short and a draft and a final version of a longer, term paper, which you will also get a chance to present in class. You will also have multiple opportunities through contributing to class discussion to develop your skills as an active participant in the construction of philosophical knowledge. And, you will be able to further develop your skills for reading philosophical texts that are far from famous for their simplicity.

The focus of your first paper, which should be from 5-7 pages long, will be a critical analysis on a topic from the portion of the Phenomenology that we will be considering in class. For your second paper, you may choose to extend your Hegel paper, write on a topic in Kierkegaard, or take a comparative look at one aspect of Hegel’s and Kierkegaard’s philosophy. Before you turn it in in its final form, you will have benefited in two ways from the feedback of your peers. First, each of you will be reading a draft of everyone else’s paper on Moodle and offering a comment or a question prior to the day on which the author of the paper presents it in class. Second, following the presentation of each paper, there will be time for discussion.

A late paper will be accepted without penalty if you have a good reason for turning it in late and you let me know in advance of the due date that you will not be turning it in on time. Unexcused late papers will be accepted up to one week after the due date, but you will lose half a grade (eg your grade will go from A- to B+) on the first day your paper is late, and every two days thereafter.

You will also be asked to turn in ten one-page reflections on the readings, oriented by a question of your own choosing. Why start with a question, rather than come up with one about a text after you have read it? The point of these “MyQuestion” reflections is to help you “read from the inside” by having a dialogue with the works we will be considering in this course. One “MyQuestion” reflection will be due during each of the weeks 3-7 and 9-13. It does not matter if you turn it in as a reflection for a Monday reading or a Wednesday one, just send it electronically before class meets on that day. These will be graded on a check plus, check, and check minus basis. It is acceptable and even anticipated that the question you ask at the beginning may undergo modification as you read, and so be different from the one you are asking at the course’s end.

In general, for any given class meeting, we will spend the first half hour exploring the general themes and trajectories of thought posed by the reading assignment as well as by putting it in its philosophical and larger historical context. We will spend the remaining hour looking more closely at the substance of the reading and on discussion. As just noted, this is a general plan, and it could turn out that on some occasions we may not follow it. In keeping with the advanced level of this course, in the course of the semester, each of you will have the opportunity to co-lead one class discussion.
Coursework evaluation

Your final grade for this class will be based on the following percentages:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First paper</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Second paper, draft</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Second paper, final</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>MyQuestion reflections</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Oral presentation</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Co-leading class discussion</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Class participation</td>
<td>15%</td>
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Class Schedule

This schedule may change at the discretion of the instructor; any changes will be announced in class and also e-mailed to the class distribution list.

Week One

Monday, 23 January  Welcome and orientation to the course
                    Introduction to Hegel: Hegel and his times

Wednesday, 25 January  Hegel and Kant
                      The paradox of philosophical prefaces
                      Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Sections 1-19

Week Two

Monday, 30 January  “The true is the whole”
                    Spirit and the modern age
                    *Phenomenology*, Sections 20-37

Wednesday, 1 February  Argumentative and speculative thinking
                      *Phenomenology*, Sections 38-72

Week Three

Monday, 6 February  The phenomenon of consciousness
                    *Phenomenology*, Sections 73-89

Wednesday, 8 February  Here and now with Hegel: Sense-certainty
                      *Phenomenology*, Sections 90-110
Week Four

Monday, 13 February  
Sense-perception and the objects of its frustrations
*Phenomenology*, Sections 111-131

Wednesday, 15 February  
Force, understanding, and the world turned upside-down
*Phenomenology*, Sections 132-165, giving particular attention to Sections 148-165

Week Five

Monday, 20 February  
The kaleidoscopic structure of life
Spirit enters the scene
*Phenomenology*, Sections 166-177

Wednesday, 22 February  
Lordship and servitude
*Phenomenology*, Sections 178-196

Week Six

Monday, 27 February  
Stoicism and skepticism
*Phenomenology*, Sections 197-206

Wednesday, 29 February  
Why, at this point, is consciousness unhappy?
*Phenomenology*, Sections 207-238

Friday, 2 March  
**First Paper Due**

Week Seven

Monday, 5 March  
Unhappy consciousness and the reception of Hegel in 20th century French philosophy
*Readings to be assigned*

Wednesday, 7 March  
Spirit knowing itself as spirit:
One look ahead and another look back
*Phenomenology*, Sections 788-808, review of Preface

Week Eight

Monday, 12 March  
Spring break

Wednesday, 14 March  
Spring break

Week Nine

Monday, 19 March  
Kierkegaard in the setting of his times, especially “the System”
Reading: *The Present Age*

**Wednesday, 21 March**
The dimensions of the aesthetic life
Selections from *Either-Or*, in Hong & Hong, pp. 37-65

**Week Ten**

**Monday, 26 March**
The dimensions of the ethical life
Further selections from *Either-Or*, in Hong & Hong, pp. 66-83; also pp. 182-186 (from *Stages on Life’s Way*).

**Wednesday, 28 March**
Knights of faith and infinite resignation
*Fear and Trembling*, Preface through Problem One

**Week Eleven**

**Monday, 2 April**
Ethical duty and faith-full passion
*Fear and Trembling*, Problems Two and Three

**Wednesday, 4 April**
Possibility and anxiety (and spirit again)
Selections from *The Concept of Anxiety*, in Hong & Hong, pp. 138-155

**Week Twelve**

**Monday, 9 April**
Spirit, the self, and despair
Selections from *The Sickness unto Death*, in Hong & Hong, pp. 351-372

**Wednesday, 11 April**
The impossibility of thinking system and existence together
Selections from *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, in Hong & Hong, pp.187-198

**Week Thirteen**

**Monday, 16 April**
Truth as subjectivity
*Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, in Hong & Hong, pp.198-225

**Wednesday, 18 April**
The style of the subjective thinker
*Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, in Hong & Hong, pp.225-246
Friday, 20 April  

**Second Paper Drafts Due**

**Week Fourteen**

Monday, 23 April  
Second paper oral presentations

Wednesday, 25 April  
Second paper oral presentations

**Week Fifteen**

Monday, 30 April  
Additional time for oral presentations, if needed
End-of-semester wrap-up and reflection on the course

Friday, 4 May  

**Second Paper Final Version Due**

Your papers may be turned in to me in my office at any time before 5 pm