

PHILOSOPHY 325

CONTEMPORARY PHILOSOPHY: THE PROBLEM OF TRUTH

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Office Hours – Abbotsford – Tuesday – 11:30- 1 pm.

Thursday 2:30-4:00 pm.

Chilliwack – Wednesday 11:30- 1 pm.

Course Description: The purpose of the course is to guide students through a detailed examination of crucial texts in 20th century analytic and Continental philosophy. The unifying theme in these texts is a concern with the value placed on the concept of truth. In particular, the focus of the course is the central role played by the concept of truth in modern philosophical theory. In this respect, the course is not a course on theories of truth but rather an exploration of the overall status granted the concept of truth itself.

The course begins with an attempt to situate the concept of truth within debates that dominated late 19th century and the early 20th century philosophy. We then investigate the works of Ludwig Wittgenstein, W.V.O. Quine, and Donald Davidson as a way of understanding the analytic tradition. In the works of these thinkers, we discover that the concept of truth is closely interwoven with an analysis of language and how it operates in ordinary circumstances. The remainder of the course is dedicated to key thinkers in 20th century Continental philosophy, such as Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Gilles Deleuze and Jean-Francois Lyotard. In the process, we will read, as well, thinkers who had a pivotal influence on these individuals. Our intent will be to see how Continental philosophy employs a variety of critical tactics to undermine some traditional approaches to the concept of truth. The course will conclude with an overview of the legacies of both the analytic and Continental schools of philosophy in regards to the question of truth.

Readings : The assigned readings are found in the course-pack. They are by primary sources. Note: Many of these writings are difficult to read. Some of these thinkers write in such an obscure way that even professional philosophers avoid their work. Others write in a technical manner that has difficulties of its own. Please do not take the difficulty you may have with the readings as an indictment of your intellect. Failure to immediately understand the material says nothing about you. Please note as well that if you do not attend class you have the onerous task of trying to figure out the readings on your own. To help you with the readings, I will circulate handouts on each writer in class.

A list of weekly readings is provided on the syllabus.

Assignments: 5 discussion papers – Each paper is worth 20%. The discussion papers will be on assigned topics I will distribute. In these papers, you will be asked to reconstruct a position presented by a particular philosopher. The intent is for you to explain a position in your own words. They are not meant to be research essays. I will go over the paper topics in class when they are distributed.

Due dates for papers are found in the syllabus below. Note: I reserve the right to refuse papers that come in after the assigned date. If you do not think you will make a deadline, and require an extension, please contact me before the deadline.

Plagiarism: Students should be familiar with the institution’s plagiarism policy. Here is UFV’s plagiarism policy:

“Plagiarism is considered a serious breach of student conduct. Students should be aware that UFV has policies regarding academic dishonesty, including plagiarism and cheating. The policy defines plagiarism as follows: Plagiarism occurs when a student presents work or data as original when part, or whole, was written or composed by someone other than the student. Plagiarism occurs when paragraphs, phrases, sentences, or ideas within the work are taken from another source without referencing or citing the author. When an instructor has evidence of plagiarism or cheating by a student, the instructor is entitled to assign a score of zero with the first incident, and to issue a written notice that any further incident will result in the student being required to withdraw from the course. With any further incidents of plagiarism or cheating, the student may be required to withdraw formally from the course”.

Syllabus :

(All Assigned Readings are from the UFV Coursepack)

1. September 9th *Introduction*
2. September 16th *Truth and Propositions*
Reading: Wittgenstein: Excerpt from *The Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*
3. September 23rd *Truth and Forms of Life*
Reading: Wittgenstein: Excerpt from *The Philosophical Investigations*
Lee Hester & Jim Cheney: “*Truth and Native American Epistemology*”
4. September 30th *Truth and the Limits of Philosophy*
Reading: W.V.O Quine: “*Two Dogmas of Empiricism*”
5. October 7th *Radical Translation and Radical Interpretation*
Reading: W.V.O Quine: Excerpt from *Word & Object*
Donald Davidson: “*Radical Interpretation*”
*Discussion Paper # 1Due

6. October 14th *Structuralism and Meaning*
Reading: Louis Althusser: “*Marx’s Immense Theoretical Revolution*”;
“*Lacan and Freud*”
7. October 21st *Structuralism and Post-Structuralism*
Reading: Jacques Lacan: “*The Position of the Unconscious*”
Michel Foucault: Excerpt from *The Archaeology of Knowledge*
8. October 28th *Difference and Otherness*
Reading: Jacques Derrida “*Differance*”
Emmanuel Levinas: “*Transcendence and Intelligibility*”
*Discussion Paper #2 Due.
9. November 4th *Post-Modernism and Truth*
Reading: Jean-Francois Lyotard: Excerpt from *The Postmodern Condition*
Jean Baudrillard: Excerpt from *Simulations*
10. November 11th No Class Session (Remembrance Day)
11. November 18th *Truth, Expenditure, and Consumption* -
Reading: Georges Bataille: “*The Notion of Expenditure*”
Gilles Deleuze & Felix Guattari : Excerpt from *Anti-Oedipus*
* Discussion Paper #3 Due
12. November 25th *Truth and the Limits of Reason*
Reading: Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno: Excerpt from *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*
Elizabeth Grosz: “*Bodies and Knowledge: Feminism and the Crisis of Reason*”
13. December 2nd *Truth without Philosophy?*
Reading: Richard Rorty : “*Science as Solidarity*”
*Discussion Paper #4 Due.

*Discussion Paper #5 Due – No Later than December 20th