

**Department of Philosophy  
University of Sydney  
Semester 2, 2007**

**PHIL2609: CONTEMPORARY FRENCH PHILOSOPHY**

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Lecture time: Monday 9-11 am, Eastern Ave Seminar Room 403

**UNIT OF STUDY DESCRIPTION**

Examining influential and controversial 20<sup>th</sup> Century French philosophers this unit focuses on debates about reason and knowledge; identity and intersubjectivity; ethics and politics; and embodiment and sexual difference. Existential, phenomenological, structuralist and poststructuralist approaches will be canvassed through the work of different theorists each year – including major figures such as Sartre, Beauvoir, Merleau-Ponty, Levinas, Foucault, Derrida, Deleuze, Nancy, Irigaray and Kofman. These approaches and debates will be explored drawing on philosophical texts as well as examples from film and literature.

**LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

The aims of this unit are:

- To introduce aspects of French philosophy, building understanding of this field and enabling issues to be analysed through this framework;
- To analyse and critically evaluate these approaches;
- To provide an opportunity for students to develop skills in independent research, critical analysis of texts, and creative and original thinking;
- To encourage cooperation and interaction with other students through tutorial based discussion;
- To develop competency in the use of information technologies as part of the research process.

**LEARNING OUTCOMES**

By the end of the unit students should:

- Be able to understand and engage with the concepts, debates and theoretical frameworks within French philosophy;
- Be able to demonstrate skills in critical analysis, independent thinking, and textual interpretation
- Have developed verbal and written communication skills through tutorial discussion and written assignments.

## UNIT STRUCTURE AND READINGS

This unit consists of a 2-hour lecture and a 1-hour tutorial. Attendance at (at least 80% of) lectures and tutorials is compulsory. It is vital that students do all the set reading before the lecture and tutorial in order to participate in the discussion. Students should allow around 4-6 hours a week to read and think through the arguments in the set texts thoroughly. The readings and further readings are all available in special reserve in Fisher Library.

## ASSESSMENT

Tutorial presentation and participation (presentation of 500 works to be submitted at the tutorial where it is presented)	15%
Mid-semester essay: due Monday 10 September; 1500 words	35%
Take-home exam: due Monday 5 November; 2000 words	50%

Essay questions and take-home exams will be distributed in lectures.

## EXTENSIONS

Please note extensions must be negotiated with the unit lecturer before the due date. Extensions will only be given when a medical certificate is provided and in other extenuating circumstances. In the absence of an extension, late work will be penalised at the rate of 2% per (working) day and no work will be accepted later than ten days after the submission date without the approval of the lecturer.

## ACADEMIC HONESTY AND PLAGIARISM

Plagiarism is defined as the unacknowledged use of another's words or ideas and is not acceptable within the University. While most assignments require that you present the work of other scholars as evidence of your critical engagement with the course material, it is essential that you reference this material. If you are lifting text directly from another author into your essay then you must use quotation marks around the text and reference appropriately. If you are using an author's argument or ideas but paraphrasing this material, you must still provide a reference for the idea/s that you have incorporated. **To pass off the ideas or arguments of others as your own work constitutes plagiarism.**

For more information on the University of Sydney's policy regarding academic honesty and plagiarism, please visit the following web site:  
<http://www.usyd.edu.au/senate/policies/Plagiarism.pdf>

## PHIL2609: CONTEMPORARY FRENCH PHILOSOPHY

### Week 1 (23 July): Introduction

#### Reading

- Peter Sedgwick, 'Anti-humanism and the Problem of Ethics: Levinas and Derrida', *Descartes to Derrida: An Introduction to European Philosophy*, Blackwell, Oxford, 2001.

#### Further Readings

- Vincent Descombes, 'Semiology' in *Modern French Philosophy*, (trans L. Scott-Fox and J. M. Harding) Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1980.
- Dermot Moran, 'Introduction', *Introduction to Phenomenology*, Routledge, London, 2000.
- Caroline Williams, *Contemporary French Philosophy*, The Athelone Press, London, 2001.
- Gary Cutting, *French Philosophy in the Twentieth Century*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2001.

### Section 1: Levinas and Responsibility

Emmanuel Levinas is a significant figure in French Philosophy, who prioritises the issue of ethics within the phenomenological tradition, and provides a link (through his influence on Derrida) between phenomenology and poststructuralism. We focus here on Levinas' concepts of the face-to-face relation and the third party before looking at his reflections on and reformulation of humanism.

### Week 2 (30 July) Levinas's Ethics: Face to Face

#### Readings

- Emmanuel Levinas, 'Responsibility for the Other', *Ethics and Infinity*, (conversations with Philippe Nemo; trans Richard A. Cohen), Duquesne University Press, Pittsburgh, 1985.
- Emmanuel Levinas, 'Ethics and the Face,' *Totality and Infinity*, (trans Alphonso Lingis), Duquesne University Press, Pittsburg, 1969.

#### Further Readings

- Emmanuel Levinas, 'The Face', *Ethics and Infinity*, (conversations with Philippe Nemo; trans Richard A. Cohen), Duquesne University Press, Pittsburgh, 1985.
- Emmanuel Levinas and Richard Kearney, 'Dialogue with Emmanuel Levinas', Richard A. Cohen (ed), *Face to Face with Levinas*, State University of New York press, Albany, 1986.
- Ewa Plonowska Ziarek, 'The Ethical Passions of Emmanuel Levinas', Tina Chanter, (ed), *Feminist Interpretations of Emmanuel Levinas*, Pennsylvania State University Press, Pennsylvania, 2001.
- Diane Perpich, 'Figurative Language and the "Face" in Levinas's Philosophy', *Philosophy and Rhetoric*, Vol 38 No 2, 2005.

### Week 3 (6 August) Levinas's Politics: The Third Person

#### Readings

- Emmanuel Levinas, 'The Other and Others', *Totality and Infinity*, (trans Alphonso Lingis), Duquesne University Press, Pittsburg, 1969.

- Robert Bernasconi, 'The Third Party. Levinas on the Intersection of the Ethical and the Political', *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology*, Vol 30 No 1, January 1999.

#### Further Readings

- Emmanuel Levinas, 'Freedom and Responsibility', *God, Death and Time*, (trans Bettina Bergo), Stanford University Press, Stanford, 2000.
- Rosalyn Diprose, 'Thinking Through the Radical Generosity of Levinas', *Corporeal Generosity: On giving with Nietzsche, Merleau-Ponty, and Levinas*, State University of New York Press, Albany, 2002.
- Sara E. Roberts, 'Rethinking Justice: Levinas and Asymmetrical Responsibility', *Philosophy in the Contemporary World*, Vol 7, No 1, Spring 2000.
- Robert Bernasconi, 'A Love that is Stronger Than Death: Sacrifice in the thought of Levinas, Heidegger, and Bloch', *Angelaki*, Vol 7 No 2, August 2002.

### **Week 4 (27 March) Levinas's Humanism of the Other**

#### Readings

- Emmanuel Levinas, 'Humanism of the Other', *Humanism of the Other*, (trans Nidra Poller), University of Illinois Press, Urbana, 2006.
- Peter Sedgwick, 'Levinas: The Ethical Versus the Ontological', *Descartes to Derrida: An Introduction to European Philosophy*, Blackwell, Oxford, 2001.

#### Further Readings

- Augusto Ponzio 'Humanism of the Other Man in Bakhtin and Levinas' Signs, Dialogue and Ideology (trans Susan Petrilli) John Benjamins Publishing Company, Amsterdam, 1993.
- John Llewelyn, 'Levinas and Language', *The Cambridge Companion to Levinas*, Simon Critchley and Robert Bernasconi, (eds), Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2002.
- Peter Atterton, 'Levinas's Skeptical Critique of Metaphysics and Anti-Humanism', *Philosophy Today*, 41: 4, Winter 1997.
- John Llewelyn, 'Levinas's Critical and Hypocritical Diction', *Philosophy Today*, 41, 1997.

### Section 2: Derrida's Hospitality

Jacques Derrida is one of the leading poststructuralist philosophers - an approach that avoids explaining the world through overarching structures such as class, clan, family, gender, race, etc, and instead examines (and deconstructs) the disciplines and knowledges that insist on and produce these categories. In this section we examine Derrida's concept of *différance* and his critique of humanism before turning to his more recent considerations of ethics and politics through the concepts of hospitality and friendship.

### **Week 5 (20 August) Derrida and Différance**

#### Readings

- Jacques Derrida, From 'Différance', *A Derrida Reader: Between the Blinds*, Peggy Kamuf, (ed), Columbia University Press, New York, 1991.
- Penelope Deutscher, 'Différance' How to Read Derrida, Granta Books, London, 2005.

#### Further Reading

- Nicholas Royale, 'Differance', *Jacques Derrida*, Routledge, London, 2003.

- Robert J. S. Manning, 'Openings: Derrida, Difference and the Production of Justice', *Philosophy Today*, 40:3, Fall 1996.
- Rodolphe Gasché, *Interventions of Difference: On Jacques Derrida*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge: Massachusetts, 1994.
- Simon Critchley, *The Ethics of Deconstruction: Derrida and Levinas*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1992.

### **Week 6 (27 August) Derrida's Critique of Humanism**

#### Readings

- Jacques Derrida, 'The Ends of Man', *Margins of Philosophy*, (trans Alan Bass), The Harvester Press, Sussex, 1982.
- Richard M. Zaner, 'Discussion of Jacques Derrida, 'The Ends of Man'', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 32:3, March 1972..

#### Further Readings

- Robert Bernasconi, 'Politics Beyond Humanism', in Gary B. Madison (ed), *Working Through Derrida*, Northwestern University Press, Evanston, Illinois, 1993.
- Peter Sedgwick, 'Derrida, Deconstruction and the Question of Ethics', *Descartes to Derrida: An Introduction to European Philosophy*, Blackwell, Oxford, 2001.
- Giovanna Borradori, 'Introduction', *Philosophy in a Time of Terror: Dialogues with Jürgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida*, The University of Chicago press, Chicago, 2003.

### **Week 7 (3 September) RESEARCH WEEK**

## **ESSAY DUE: MONDAY 10 SEPTEMBER (1500 WORDS)**

### **Week 8 (10 September) Derrida and Hospitality**

#### Reading

- Jacques Derrida, 'Hospitality, Justice and Responsibility', Richard Kearney and Mark Dooley, (eds), *Questioning Ethics*, Routledge, London, 1999.
- Jacques Derrida, 'A Discussion with Jacques Derrida', *Theory and Event*, 5: 1, 2001.

#### Further Readings

- Jacques Derrida (with Anne Dufourmantelle), *Of Hospitality*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 2000.
- Marguerite La Caze, 'Not Just Visitors: Cosmopolitanism, Hospitality, and Refugees', *Philosophy Today*, Vol 48 No 3, Fall 2004.
- Nancy J. Holland, "'With Arms Wide Open" Of Hospitality and the Most Intimate Stranger', *Philosophy Today*, Vol 45 No 5, 2001.
- Hent de Vries, 'Derrida and ethics: hospitable thought,' Tom Cohen, (ed), *Jacques Derrida and the Humanities*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2001.
- Penelope Deutscher, 'Already Lamenting: Deconstruction, Immigration, Colonialism', *Studies in Practical Philosophy*, Vol 3 No 1, Fall 2003.

## **Week 9 (17 September): Derrida and the Politics of Friendship**

### Readings

- Jacques Derrida, 'A Politics of Friendship', *The Journal of Philosophy*, Vol 85, Issue 11, 1988.
- Jacques Derrida, 'Politics and Friendship', Centre for Modern French Thought, University of Sussex, 1 December 1997.  
[www.sussex.ac.uk/Units/frenchthought/derrida.htm](http://www.sussex.ac.uk/Units/frenchthought/derrida.htm)

### Further Readings

- Jacques Derrida, *Politics of Friendship*, (trans George Collins), Verso, London, 1997.
- Jacques Derrida, 'The Villanova Roundtable: A Conversation with Jacques Derrida' John D. Caputo, (ed), *Deconstruction in a Nutshell*, Fordham University Press, New York, 1997.
- Penelope Deutscher, 'Mourning the Other, Cultural Cannibalism, and the Politics of Friendship (Jacques Derrida and Luce Irigaray)', *differences*, 10.3, 1998.
- John D. Caputo, 'Who is Derrida's Zarathustra? Of Fraternity, Friendship, and a Democracy to Come', *Research in Phenomenology*, No 29, 1999.
- David Webb, 'On Friendship: Derrida, Foucault, and the Practice of Becoming', *Research in Phenomenology*, No 33, 2003.

## **MID-SEMESTER BREAK (24-28 SEPTEMBER)**

### **Week 10 (1 October) PUBLIC HOLIDAY – NO LECTURE**

#### **Section 3: Kofman and the New Humanism**

Sarah Kofman's work is not as well known as other French women philosophers such as Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva. Yet her early work on Freud and Nietzsche significantly challenges other interpretations and her later work on the Holocaust enables a rethinking of the tradition of humanism. Poststructuralism has questioned the humanist tradition believing that the human here is modelled on white, European man and that this marginalizes women and other races and facilitated a paternalistic colonialism and phallogentrism. Kofman, while sympathetic to this view, nevertheless insists on the significance of human relations.

#### **Week 11 (8 October) Kofman and the Holocaust**

##### Reading

- Sarah Kofman: Extracts from *Smothered Words*, (trans Madeleine Dobie), Northwestern University Press, Evanston, 1998. (sections v, viii, ix) (p 36-41, p 57-73)
- Madeleine Dobie, 'Sarah Kofman's *Paroles suffoquées*: Autobiography, History and Writing "After Auschwitz"', *French Forum*, 22: 3, September 1997.

##### Further Readings

- Kathryn Robson, 'Choking on Words: Sarah Kofman's Autobiographical Writings', *Writing Wounds: The Inscription of Trauma in Post-1968 French Women's Writing*, Rudopi, Amsterdam, 2004.

- Diane Morgan, "'Made in Germany': Judging National Identity Negatively', in Penelope Deutscher and Kelly Oliver, (eds), *Enigmas: Essays on Sarah Kofman*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 1999.
- Alan D. Schiff, 'Kofman, Nietzsche, and the Jews', in Penelope Deutscher and Kelly Oliver, (eds), *Enigmas: Essays on Sarah Kofman*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 1999.

### **Week 12 (15 October) Kofman's Autobiographical Philosophy**

#### Readings

- Sarah Kofman, Extracts from *Rue Ordener/Rue Labat*, (trans Ann Smock) university of Nebraska press, Lincoln, 1994. (sections ii, iii, xii, xiii, xvii) (p5-10, p39-45, p57-61)
- Eilene Hoff-March, 'Still Breathing: Sarah Kofman's Memoires of Holocaust Survival', *The Journal of Midwestern Modern Language Association*, 33:3, Autumn 2000-Winter 2001.

#### Further Readings

- Kelly Oliver, 'Sarah Kofman's Queasy Stomach and the Riddle of Paternal Law' in Penelope Deutscher and Kelly Oliver, (eds), *Enigmas: Essays on Sarah Kofman*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 1999.
- Tina Chanter, 'Eating Words: Antigone as Kofman's Proper Name', in Penelope Deutscher and Kelly Oliver, (eds), *Enigmas: Essays on Sarah Kofman*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 1999.
- Kathryn Robson, 'Bodily Detours: Sarah Kofman's Narrative of Childhood Trauma', *Modern Language Review*, Vol 99 No 3, 2004.
- Nicole Fermon, 'Conversion and Oral Assimilation in Sarah Kofman', *College Literature*, Vol 28 No 1, 2001.
- Francoise Durox, 'How a Woman Philosophizes', in Penelope Deutscher and Kelly Oliver, (eds), *Enigmas: Essays on Sarah Kofman*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 1999.

### **Week 13 (22 October) Conclusion: Filmic Philosophy: Dogville**

FILM: Lars von Trier, (dir), *Dogville*,

#### Reading

- Adam Atkinson, 'On the Nature of Dogs, the Right of Grace, Forgiveness and Hospitality: Derrida, Kant and Lars von Trier's *Dogville*', *Senses of Cinema*, No 36, July-August 2005.
- Tom Conley, 'Cinema and its Discontents: Jacques Rancière and Film Theory', *SubStance*, 34:3, 2005.

#### Further Readings

- Justin Clark, 'Dogville, or How Not to Discover America', *Bright Lights*, No 45, August 2004.
- J. Hoberman, 'Our Town', *Sight and Sound*, Vol 14 No 2, February 2004.

**TAKE-HOME EXAM DUE: MONDAY 5 NOVEMBER  
(2000 WORDS)**