

JOSEPH CAREW
HEGEL'S *PHENOMENOLOGY*

Short Course Description: There is no better way to understand Hegel than to look at his most influential work, the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807). This book, which deals with the “idealistic” structure of our consciousness of objects, our self-consciousness of action, our social consciousness of communal beliefs and values, and their “dialectical” history, was designed as an introduction to his system and hence sketches the major ideas governing his mature thought. While this course will primarily be a close historical-critical reconstruction of the foundational text of the Hegelian project, we will also look at how the text has been appropriated by contemporary analytic and continental philosophy in order to acquire a deeper understanding of its complex historical impact and show how unique insights can still be gathered from the text through a plurality of philosophical approaches.

Thematic Course Description: According to a widespread belief, Hegel is one of the last great rationalist metaphysicians. It is said that he not only tried to deduce, by logic alone, the necessary structure of what exists, but that he also tried to use logic to demonstrate the dialectical progression of human history as culminating in the coming to self-consciousness of a “cosmic spirit” in and through us. This led him to be considered the enemy of most of 19th- and 20th-century philosophy. On the analytic side, Hegel was seen as misunderstanding and abusing logic. On the continental side, he was seen as creating a grandiose system that left no room for the contingency and finitude of the human condition. As Kierkegaard humorously remarks, Hegel is like someone who created a castle in the sky and then was forced to live next to it in a shack.

In this course, we will examine Hegel's *Phenomenology* in order to offer a non-metaphysical reading of Hegel's philosophy as one that offers a captivating answer to what it means to be an embodied rational subject enmeshed in a history that precedes us and informs every step of our lives, but which we can never master. Since the *Phenomenology* is Hegel's introduction to his *Science of Logic*, which is the first part of his Idealist system (the second being the *Philosophy of Nature* and the third the *Philosophy of Mind*), to grasp that system we must first come to terms with it.

We will investigate three groundbreaking moves Hegel makes. (1) The world around us is neither given immediately through the senses or perception, nor is it a pre-existing order that the understanding must capture. Instead, it arises through our theoretical attempts to give meaning to our conscious experience of things. (2) Theory itself has to be understood in terms of the role it plays in our practical life, that is, how it makes our self-conscious explanations of who we are and the goals that guide our actions more important to us than the imperatives of our biological nature. (3) Our theoretical relationship to the world and our practical relationship to ourselves are ultimately sociohistorical products—a result of our attempt, as a community, to comprehend the world around us, who we are, and how we should live with one another, attempts that evolve over time. As such, we will see how Hegel's account of the “dialectical progression” of history is an account of the evolution of our worldviews as the matrix of our lives, an account that neither “deduces” history from logic and which is open to the contingency of the human condition (our fundamental beliefs and values could have been otherwise) and its finitude (we are “thrown into,” as Heidegger would say, the sociohistorical life-worlds that make us who we are and only have some control over them).

We will, in conclusion, look at two contemporary appropriations of Hegel's *Phenomenology*: Brandom's return to Hegel as a precursor of his own pragmatist understanding of truth as

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arising from the social practice of giving and asking for reasons and how Butler's interpretation of the master-slave dialectic plays a role in her own feminist theory of desire and political recognition.

Class Schedule

Week 1: What Does it Mean to be "Modern"?

- Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Second Preface
- Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, excerpts

Week 2: The "Dialectical History" of Modernity: The Project and Methodology of Hegel's *Phenomenology*

- Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, §§73-89

Week 3: Consciousness: Sense-Certainty and Perception

- Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, §§90-131

Week 4: Consciousness: The Understanding

- Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, §§132-165

Week 5: Self-Consciousness: The Master and Slave Dialectic

- Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, §§166-196

Week 6: Self-Consciousness: Stoicism, Skepticism, and the Unhappy Consciousness

- Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, §§197-230

Week 7: Reason: The Actualization of Rational Self-Consciousness Through its Own Activity

- Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, §§231-239, §§347-393

Week 8: Reason: Individuality Which Takes Itself to Be Real In and For Itself

- Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, §§394-437

Week 8: Spirit: The Ethical Order of Ancient Greece

- Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, §§438-487

Week 9: Spirit: Medieval Culture

- Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, §§488-537

Week 10: Spirit: The Enlightenment and the Reign of Terror during the French Revolution

- Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, §§538-595

Week 11: Spirit: Kantian Morality and the Beautiful Soul

- Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, §§596-671

Week 12: What is "Absolute Knowing?"

- Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, §§788-808

Week 13: Contemporary Appropriations of Hegel's *Phenomenology*

- Brandom, 'Untimely Review of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*'

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- Brandom, 'Some Pragmatism themes in Hegel's Idealism: Negotiation and Administration in Hegel's Account of the Structure and Content of Conceptual Norms'
- Butler, *Subjects of Desire: Hegelian Reflections in Twentieth-Century France* (excerpts)

Assessment

The final grade will consist of four components:

1. Participation (10%)
2. Presentation (30%)
3. Commentary (10%)
4. Term Paper of 5000 words (50%)

Secondary Readings

You are asked to concentrate on reading Hegel's own text. However, if you wish to explore Hegel more or want some extra help in orienting yourself, here is a list of some helpful works:

General Background to Hegel:

Pinkard, Terry. *German Philosophy 1760-1860: The Legacy of Idealism*. Cambridge University Press, 2002.

- Pinkard presents a clear and comprehensive overview of German philosophy starting from Kant and ending with various post-Hegelian philosophers. It is rich with insights.

Pinkard, Terry. *Hegel: A Biography*. Cambridge University Press, 2001.

- Pinkard's biography is easy reading, filled with great depictions of Hegel's life, and complete with chapters on Hegel's philosophical development. Recommended for casual reading and those who want to know more of Hegel's thought as a whole.

Commentaries on the Phenomenology

Harris, H. S. *Hegel's Ladder*. 2 vols. Hackett Publishing, 1997.

- This massive work is the result of 30 years of research on the *Phenomenology*. It is a paragraph-by-paragraph reading and highly useful for decoding Hegel's technical language.

Pinkard, Terry. *Hegel's Phenomenology: The Sociality of Reason*. Cambridge University Press, 1996.

- This is a highly influential book that provides a compelling interpretation of Hegel as a thinker of the social nature of human rationality. In particular, his reading of the chapter on spirit would nicely compliment the latter part of our course.

Stern, Robert. *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Hegel and the Phenomenology of Spirit*. New York: Routledge Press, 2001.

- This is one of the best and most reliable introductions to the *Phenomenology*. It contains concise summaries of each chapter that will help first-time readers navigate through the twists and turns of Hegel's argument.

Learning Outcomes

At the end of the course, students will be familiar with one of the most major works in the history of philosophy, which has had a drastic impact not only on 19th-century philosophy through figures such as Marx, Kierkegaard, and Nietzsche, but also on contemporary continental and analytic philosophy. By becoming acquainted with this work, students will learn not only much about the history of philosophy (particularly empiricism, rationalism, transcendental idealism, and Kantian ethics), but also much about the intellectual and

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political history of Western Europe from the ancient Greeks to 19th-century Germany. The presentation and commentary, in which students are asked to summarize key concepts from different texts and respond to one another's readings, give students the opportunity to be "experts of the day." As such, these are meant to assure that students have sufficiently internalized the central tenants of Hegel's philosophy for their future studies and give them training in oral presentation and leading discussions. Students will also improve their critical reading and writing skills by analyzing Hegel's text and creatively putting it to use in order to explore their own philosophical interests and existential concerns through course material. The term paper, the topic of which can be freely decided by each student in consultation with the instructor, is to promote the development of such skills. Philosophy is not just a body of knowledge, but also a distinctive methodology of critical thinking best learned in practicing it.