

Phil 600 Syllabus–Fall 12

"Conflict and Contradiction"

This seminar concerns theories of development and change as a result of internal contradictions and conflicts. By contradiction we will usually mean “dialectical contradiction,” as that concept is found in Hegel and Marx, but has a long history dating back at least to Heraclitus. We will also explicitly consider contradiction in its more usual, non-dialectical sense.

Our overall approach is historical. We will start with Heraclitus and read forward to the twentieth century, sometimes superficially, sometimes in detail.

Instructor Data:

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Course Requirements:

The major requirement is a term paper, including a presentation of (some major part of) it to the seminar. There will also be weekly reading assignments, and most weeks will have a reading summary or leading question to be given a written answer in approximately 150 words, due at the beginning of the next class. Students are expected to make a serious attempt to read the assigned work. Understanding it will sometimes have to wait for later. Preparation for and participation in class counts.

The approximate percentages for each of these requirements is : Term Paper 60%, Weekly assignments 10%, Presentation to seminar 20%, 4. Preparation and participation 10%

The instructor will prepare a list of acceptable term paper topics in about three weeks. Additional topics may be negotiated. Materials for all these topics are available in English. Students who want to pick a source in another language should consult the instructor. First drafts are mandatory, and will be due at a date in November to be announced later. Final drafts will be due Friday of the last week of classes.

What to buy:

There are no books to buy. All readings will be posted on Blackboard, but students are advised to buy the packets. These will be available at Cal Copy, across the College Ave footbridge, down the alley, and around the corner from Starbucks.

Rough Outline:

1. Brief selections from Heraclitus
2. Brief selections from Zeno on motion and contradiction
3. Plato, a passage from the Republic
4. Aristotle on the principle of non-contradiction, contraries, and privation.
5. Notes on contradiction multi-valued logic. Vagueness.
6. Three things from Kant: selections on the antinomies of pure reason, on the composition of matter as attraction and repulsion, and on positive and negative quantities.
7. Fichte: From Foundations of the Wissenschaftslehre.
8. This is the where things get tough: We will read selections from Hegel's Science of Logic, including the key chapters of the “essence logic”.
9. Selections from Marx. These fragments will be supplemented by a paper by Weston.
10. Selections from Engels, from Socialism, Utopian and Scientific, and Dialectics of Nature.
11. Selections from Spencer, Bukharin and Lenin.
12. Selections from Mao Zedong.
13. Articles on the "One Divides into Two" controversy in 1960s China.
14. Althusser's “Contradiction and Overdetermination.”
15. Something from Badiou?

Other 20th century works may be added, but will probably be covered only in student presentations.