

Political Science (PLSC) 20610: Critical Theory Encounters the Nonhuman

Autumn 2006

Mondays and Wednesdays, 3:00-4:20 P.M. in Cobb Hall Room 204

Instructor: Christopher Buck
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Course Website: chalk.uchicago.edu

Office Hours: Tues. 3-5 P.M. and by Appt.
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Course Description:

What sorts of political and ethical obligations do humans have towards nonhuman animals and nature? Can things, such as commodities, wield power over people? How would the body politic be transformed if we began to question the distinctions between humans, animals, and machines? These are just a few of the many questions posed by critical theorists who treat nonhuman entities as a central object of inquiry. This course invites students to participate in the debates that animate recent investigations into the significance of nonhumans for political theory. This course can also be taken as a thematic introduction to contemporary critical theory.

Course Requirements:

Attendance: You are expected to attend each class session. Absences due to illness will be excused if a doctor's note is provided.

Reading: You are expected to read all of the materials assigned for this course.

Discussion Questions (5%): You are required to post a discussion question to the course website by midnight the night before class meetings. These questions should reference a particular passage in the assigned reading for the next day.

Participation (10%): I intend to devote the majority of the class to discussion of the assigned texts, and expect active and respectful participation from all students. This includes listening attentively to other students when they are speaking.

Presentation (15%): Each student will be responsible for giving a five-minute presentation (approximately 3 double-spaced pages) on one of the readings in order to facilitate class discussion. The presentation should provide a brief summary of the main arguments of the reading and raise issues to be discussed by the entire class. You are not required to submit a discussion question to the Chalk website the evening before your scheduled presentation.

Midterm Paper (30%): There will be a 5-7 page paper due on Friday, 10/27 at 4:30pm.

Final Paper (40%): There will be a 10-12 page paper due on Wednesday, 12/06 at 4:30pm.

Your midterm and final papers should be typed using 12 point Times New Roman. The body should be double-spaced with 1-inch margins all around.

Late midterm and final papers will be penalized 1/3 of a letter grade per day late. For the purposes of calculating this penalty, the day an assignment is due ends at 4:30 P.M.

Required Texts (To Be Purchased at the Seminary Co-op Bookstore):

Agamben, Giorgio. *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998). JC571.A16813 1998

Agamben, Giorgio. *The Open: Man and Animal* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004). BD450.A3613 2004

Bennett, Jane. *The Enchantment of Modern Life: Attachments, Crossings and Ethics* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2001). BJ301.B46 2001

Horkheimer, Max and Theodor W. Adorno. *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002). B3279.H8473 P513 2002

Latour, Bruno. *We Have Never Been Modern* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993). Q175.5.L35130 1993

Copies of these books can be found on reserve at the Regenstein Library. All additional readings will be available as PDF files on the Chalk site.

Course Schedule:

Week One

1. Monday, September 25th: *Introduction to the Course*
2. Wednesday, September 27th: *Alienation from and Mastery of Nature*
Marx, Excerpt from "Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts" (*M/E Reader* pp. 70-93)
Marx, Excerpt from the *Grundrisse*, (*M/E Reader* pp. 283-5)

Week Two

3. Monday, October 2nd: *Commodity Fetishism*
Marx, "Chapter 1: The Commodity," *Capital, Vol. I* (*Penguin/Vintage Ed.* pp. 125-177)
4. Wednesday, October 4th: *Commodity Enchantment*
Bennett, "The Wonder of Minor Experiences" and "Commodity Enchantment," *The Enchantment of Modern Life* (pp. 3-16, 111-130)

Week Three

5. Monday, October 9th: *The Domination of Nature*
Horkheimer and Adorno, "Preface," "Introduction," and "The Concept of Enlightenment," *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (pp. xi-34)
6. Wednesday, October 11th: *The Domination of Nature cont.*
Horkheimer and Adorno, "Excursus I: Odysseus and the Myth of Enlightenment," *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (pp. 35-62)

Week Four

7. Monday, October 16th: *Questioning the Disenchantment of Nature*
Bennett, "Disenchantment Tales" and "Complexity and Enchantment," *The Enchantment of Modern Life* (pp. 56-110)
8. Wednesday, October 18th: *Nature and Mimesis*
Horkheimer and Adorno, Excerpts from "Elements of Anti-Semitism: Limits of Enlightenment" and "Notes and Sketches," *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (pp. 147-165, 184-7, 190-1, 192-6, 197-9, 203-212, 213-4)

Week Five

9. Monday, October 23rd: *Nature, Aesthetics and Communication*
Adorno, "On Subject and Object," *Critical Models* (pp. 245-58)
Adorno, "Natural Beauty," *Aesthetic Theory* (pp. 61-77)
10. Wednesday, Oct. 25th: *Against Nonhuman Communication*
Habermas, "Theodor Adorno: The Primal History of Subjectivity," *Philosophical-Political Profiles* (pp. 101-111)
Habermas, Excerpt from "A Reply to My Critics," *Habermas: Critical Debates* (pp. 238-250)
Habermas, Excerpt from "Remarks on Discourse Ethics," *Justification and Application* (pp. 105-111)

MIDTERM PAPER DUE ON FRIDAY, OCT. 27TH AT 4:30 P.M.

Week Six

11. Monday, October 30th: *Modernity and the Nonhuman*
Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* (pp. 1-67)
12. Wednesday, November 1st: *Modernity and the Nonhuman cont.*
Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* (pp. 67-145)

Week Seven

13. Monday, November 6th: *Democracy and the Nonhuman*
Latour, "Introduction," "How to Bring the Collective Together," and "Conclusion," *The Politics of Nature: How to Bring the Sciences into Democracy* (pp. 1-8, 53-90, 221-8)
14. Wednesday, November 8th: *Problematizing the Distinction between Human and Machine*
Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto," *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women* (pp. 149-181)

Week Eight

15. Monday, November 13th: *Madness and Animality*

Foucault, "Preface," "'*Stultifera Navis*,'" and "The Insane," *Madness and Civilization* (pp. ix-xii, 3-37, 65-84)

16. Wednesday, November 15th: *Biopower*

Foucault, "Right of Death and Power over Life" *The History of Sexuality, Vol. I* (pp. 135-159)

Foucault, "17 March 1976," "*Society Must Be Defended*" (pp. 239-264)

Week Nine

17. Monday, November 20th: *Bare Life*

Agamben, Selections from Part One of *Homo Sacer* (pp. 1-67)

18. Wednesday, November 22nd: *Bare Life cont.*

Agamben, Selections from Part Two and Three of *Homo Sacer* (pp. 71-180)

Week Ten

19. Monday, November 27th: *Questioning the Distinction between Human and Animal*

Agamben, *The Open: Man and Animal* (pp. 1-47)

20. Wednesday, November 29th: *Questioning the Distinction between Human and Animal cont.*

Agamben, *The Open: Man and Animal* (pp. 49-92)

Week Eleven (Exam Week)

FINAL PAPER DUE WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 6TH AT 4:30 P.M.