

PHIL 3803: Topics in Metaphysics: Nothingness
Term 1, 2019

Time: Thur 9:30 am-12:15 pm

Location: LSK 210

Course Overview

This seminar investigates an overlooked aspect of metaphysics: nothingness. We will trace the use and reception of three distinct discourses on nothingness, namely: emptiness, nihilism, and apophysis. In addition to discussing Plato and Neoplatonism, we will also look at Schelling, Hölderlin, Heidegger, and Derrida, to name a few. While nothingness has often been cast negatively as nihilism, when seen apophatically, its meaning becomes positive. There is thus benefit to be had in positive uses of negativity, and while these are typically labelled mystical, we shall discover they are legitimately metaphysical at their core.

Advisory to Majors: to be taken in year 2 or above.

Learning Outcomes

1. Become familiar with key philosophical concepts, arguments, and movements.
2. Develop your skill in reading philosophical texts.
3. Develop your critical thinking skills by discussing lecture materials in tutorials.
4. Learn how to research and write philosophical papers.

Topics

See lecture schedule below

Learning Activities

1. Read and give thought to the assigned readings.
2. Develop the skills mentioned above in the Learning Outcomes.
3. Improve your research skills through various writing assignments.
4. Attend lectures and engage your fellow classmates in discussion on the material presented.

Assessment Scheme

Task	Description	Weight
Class Participation	5 random quizzes, 15 min each <i>or</i> 10-15 min presentation	25%
Term Paper Outline	3 pages	10%
Term Paper	10 pages	65%

Class Participation

Quiz:

If the class size exceeds 25 people, your participation will be based on **five** in-class quizzes, each commencing twenty minutes before the scheduled end of class. The date of each quiz will be randomly chosen and you will have **fifteen minutes to complete** it, no more. There will be no makeup quizzes, even in the case of illness. Each quiz is **worth 5 points**, for a combined total of 25 points of your total

course grade. You will be asked to answer two out of three given questions.

Presentation:

If the class size is less than 25 people, your participation will consist of an oral presentation on one of our lecture topics. I will choose who presents and when and post the list on Blackboard. **Presentations will begin from lecture 2** and depending on how many there are, will **range from 10 to 20 minutes**. Presentations will **take place at the beginning of class**, followed by our lecture. Do not repeat the text! You should present the main ideas of the topic, whether you agree with them or not, and say something about how useful they might be in modern society.

Term Paper Outline

The purpose of this outline is to ensure you begin work on your paper as early in the semester as possible. You will be writing a long philosophy paper which requires careful thought about your thesis and the sources you will use to support it. What I am expecting is the following: **one paragraph** outlining your thesis in which you clearly state what your paper is about, how you plan to argue it, and what you hope to prove (your conclusion); second, use **one paragraph** to outline **each** of your arguments; third, use **one paragraph** to describe your conclusion; and fourth, give **a bibliography** of at least **ten works** (books, chapters, articles) you plan to use in writing your paper. The outline is **due in class on Oct. 10**. You **must use** 1-inch margins, double-line spacing, 12pt. Times New Roman font. State your name, student number, and course code on a separate cover page. If you do not follow these instructions, your grade will be reduced by 5%. **Late submissions will not be accepted.**

Term Paper

You are to write one term paper, in English, on a **topic from the lecture schedule** below. Comparative papers are not allowed. Your paper must match the outline you submitted. **You must cite any and all material** that is not your own, including summarized sections of a text. Failure to do so is plagiarism and will result in a grade of zero. The citation format should follow the Chicago style. The length of your paper is to be **10 pages**, not including the title page and bibliography, and is **due in class on Nov. 28**. You **must use** 1-inch margins, double-line spacing, 12pt. Times New Roman font. State your name, student number, and course code on a separate cover page. If you do not follow these instructions, your grade will be reduced by 5%. **Late papers will not be accepted.**

Course Schedule

Lecture	Topic	Readings	Remarks
Sept 5	Plato	<i>Parmenides</i>	
12	Plotinus	<i>Enneads</i>	
19	Dionysius the Aeropagite	<i>Divine Names; Mystical Theology</i>	
26	Aquinas	<i>Summa Theologiae</i>	
Oct 3	Meister Eckhart	<i>Sermons</i>	
10	Holderlin	<i>Poems</i>	Paper Outline due
17	Schelling	<i>Philosophy of Revelation; Philosophical Fragments</i>	

24	Kierkegaard	<i>Fear and Trembling</i>	
31	Heidegger	Selected Writings	
Nov 7	87th Congregation – No Class		
14	Blanchot	How to Discover the Obscure	
21	Derrida	<i>On the Name</i>	
28	Marion	<i>God without Being</i>	Term Paper due

* This schedule is tentative and subject to change.

Readings:

[1] Franke, William. *On What Cannot Be Said: Apophatic Discourses in Philosophy, Religion, Literature, and the Arts*, 2 vols. University of Notre Dame Press, 2007.

Academic Honesty and Plagiarism:

Attention is drawn to University policy and regulations on honesty in academic work, and to the disciplinary guidelines and procedures applicable to breaches of such policy and regulations. Details may be found at <http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/policy/academichonesty/>

With each assignment, students will be required to submit a signed declaration that they are aware of these policies, regulations, guidelines and procedures. For group projects, all students of the same group should be asked to sign the declaration.

For assignments in the form of a computer-generated document that is principally text-based and submitted via VeriGuide, the statement, in the form of a receipt, will be issued by the system upon students' uploading of the soft copy of the assignment. Assignments without the receipt will not be graded by teachers. Only the final version of the assignment should be submitted via VeriGuide.

Contact Information

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Hours	If you need to see me at a specific time/day, contact me by email first