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PHIL 495.01: Modernity and Its Discontents

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**MODERNITY AND ITS DISCONTENTS
PHIL 495, SECTION 01 (CRN NO. 33917)
LIBERAL ARTS BUILDING, ROOM 146
T 5:10-8:00 P.M.
SPRING SEMESTER 2003**

Professor: David Sherman
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COURSE DESCRIPTION:

For much of the past 500 years, the merits of modernity have largely been beyond question, since, for many citizens of the "advanced" nation states, it has provided a standard of living that is unparalleled in human history. For much of this period, indeed, it would have been deemed virtually unintelligible to call the modern project itself (as opposed to this or that aspect of it) into question. Since, approximately, the late 1960's, however, not only have trenchant criticisms of modernity become increasingly prevalent, but there are many who have claimed that modernity itself is at an end, supplanted by postmodernity, which ostensibly refutes the essential premises of the modern project. But postmodernity itself has had its share of problems, not the least of which is its tacit reliance upon some of the very categories of modernity that it purports to have surmounted. At the present time, therefore, the status of modernity is less than clear.

In this course we shall consider what aspects, if any, of the modern project can be salvaged -- or, put the other way around, whether there are certain aspects of the modern project that, for one reason or another, are ineliminable. More specifically, we shall closely consider what I take to be the most basic premise of philosophical modernity -- namely, that there are grounds for arguing that human beings are capable of genuine self determination, i.e., that, in some robust (but as yet undefined) sense, they are capable of acting autonomously. After discussing the contours of classical modern theory in the first lecture, we shall consider this problem in Kant, Hegel, and Marx, all of whom had a more profound appreciation for its problematical nature than is generally appreciated. We shall then consider the more severe criticisms of such thinkers as Nietzsche, Heidegger, Foucault, Derrida and MacIntyre, as well as qualified supporters, such as Sartre, Horkheimer, and Adorno. And, finally, throughout the course, we shall consider Habermas, who is perhaps philosophical modernity's most ardent defender today.

REQUIRED TEXTS:

Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, MIT Press, 1987
Karl Marx and Fredrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, Oxford University Press, 2002
Martin Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, Harper
Torchbooks, 1977
Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Stanford University
Press, 2002
Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, University of Notre Dame Press, 1984

Assorted articles and excerpts from works by Kant, Hegel, Nietzsche, Weber, Sartre, Foucault, and Derrida will be on reserve in the Boyce Library

COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND EVALUATION:

Your grade will be based on two papers, an oral presentation, and class attendance and participation. The first paper (3000 words) will be worth 40% of your grade and the second paper (4500 words) will be worth 60% of your grade. Based upon your oral presentation, as well as class attendance and participation, I reserve the right to adjust your grade by one increment.

TENTATIVE SCHEDULE

WEEK:	READINGS:
Jan 28	Introductory Lecture: The Philosophical Roots of Modernity
Feb 4	Kant, "What is Enlightenment?" (reserve); Hegel, Preface from <i>The Phenomenology of Spirit</i> (1-45) (reserve); Habermas, "Hegel's Concept of Modernity," in PDM (23-44)
Feb 11	Marx: <i>The Communist Manifesto</i> ; Habermas, "Excursus on the Obsolescence of the Production Paradigm," in PDM (75-82)
Feb 18	Nietzsche, from <i>Twilight of the Idols, Genealogy of Morals</i> , and <i>The Will to Power</i> (reserve); Habermas, "The Entry into Postmodernity: Nietzsche as a Turning Point," in PDM (83-105)
Feb 25	Sartre, "Existentialism as a Humanism" (reserve); Heidegger, "Letter on Humanism" (reserve)
Mar 4	Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology" and "The Age of the World Picture," in <i>The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays</i> (3-35, 115-154)
Mar 11	Habermas, "The Undermining of Western Rationalism through the Critique of Metaphysics: Martin Heidegger," in PDM (131-160); Weber, from <i>Protestantism and the Spirit of Capitalism</i> (reserve)
Mar 18	Horkheimer and Adorno, "The Concept of Enlightenment" and "Excursus I: Odysseus or Myth and Enlightenment," in DOE (1-62)
Mar 25	SPRING BREAK
Apr 1	Horkheimer and Adorno, "Excursus II: Juliette or Enlightenment and Morality" and "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception," in DOE (63-136)
Apr 8	Horkheimer and Adorno, "Elements of Anti-Semitism: Limits of Enlightenment," in DOE (137-172); Habermas, "The Entwinement of Myth and Enlightenment: Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno," in PDM (106-130) -- PAPER DUE
Apr 15	MacIntyre, Chapters 1-6, in AV (1-78)
Apr 22	MacIntyre, Chapters 9, 12, 14-18, in AV (121-130, 146-164, and 181-263)
Apr 29	Foucault, Preface and Chapters 7 & 9, from <i>Order of Things</i> (reserve); Derrida, "The Ends of Man," from <i>Margins of Philosophy</i> (reserve)
May 6	Habermas, "An Alternative Way out of the Philosophy of the Subject" and "The Normative Content of Modernity" (294-326, 336-367)
May 13	PAPER DUE