

THEOLOGY AND CRITICAL THEORY: A

Course Outline

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Teaching Assistant: TBA **Office Hours:** By Appointment

Location: TBA **Time:** Tuesday 9:30AM to 12:15 PM

Course Code: THEO5012 **Chinese Title:** N/A

Course Description: Though unlikely partners, Theology and Critical Theory have tarried alongside each other, sometimes unwillingly, for quite some time. Since Heidegger's early lectures on phenomenology and Saint Paul, all the way to the recent work of Agamben, Žižek, and most importantly Badiou, Christian theology has been an irresistible, yet neglected feature of many contemporary philosophers. The truth is atheist philosophers love to talk about God. In fact, contemporary philosophical readings of Christian theology provide some of the most interesting and convincing interpretations of some of our most sacred texts, relating themes such as Time, the Body, Capitalism, and Artificial Intelligence, in ways that provide new insight into the field of critical theological reflection. It is now impossible to do theology without reference to critical theory; likewise, it is impossible to do critical theory without reference to theology. This course surveys the work of important thinkers in the field of critical theory, reflecting on their key ideas, and outlining their relationship to Christian theology. The course sequentially analyzes (week to week) the work of these philosophers: Karl Marx, Friedrich Nietzsche, Martin Heidegger, Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, and more recently in the work of these living philosophers: Slavoj Žižek, Giorgio Agamben, Gil Anidjar, Peter Sloterdijk, and Alain Badiou.

Course Outcomes:

- 1) Introduce primary source material to students who have limited, or introductory experience in the field of critical theory, providing an overview of key moments and relationships between philosophers in the modern period.
- 2) Analyse each philosopher and their contribution to understanding elements of Christian theology in new, or interesting ways. To show how critical theory provides a fuller understanding of neglected elements within Christian theology.
- 3) While spending a considerable amount of time on the topic of deconstruction and Christian theology, the course aims to emerge from the context of deconstruction to help students outline the conditions of a "truth" in our contemporary world. How do truths appear now in our world? What happens after deconstruction?

Course Syllabus (Weekly Mandatory Reading Schedule):

Week One (January 9th): Nietzsche and Deconstruction

Week Two (January 16th): Marx and Engels: Utopias

Week Three (January 23rd): Martin Heidegger on Time

Week Four (January 30th): Michel Foucault and Power

Week Five (February 6th): Jacques Derrida and Signification

Week Six (February 20th): Slavoj Zizek on Christian Atheism

Week Seven (February 27th): Giorgio Agamben on Paul

Week Eight (March 12th): Gil Anidjar: Capitalism and Christianity

Week Nine (March 19th): Peter Sloterdijk: Artificial Intelligence and Theology

Week Ten (March 26th): Alain Badiou: Conditions of a Truth

Week Eleven (April 2nd): Alain Badiou: Truth and Event

Week Twelve (April 9th): Alain Badiou: Immanence of Truths

Week Thirteen (April 16th): Concluding Remarks

Course Components: Lecture, interactive quizzes, guest lecture, tutorial discussions.

Blackboard Course Address:

Will be posted when available.

Assignments and Course Assessment

- 1. Class Attendance (10% of Final Grade):** Students are expected to come to class and arrive on time. Students will use the Ureply app to log attendance at the beginning of class. Students may miss class due to medical or personal reasons but must consult with the instructor ahead of time. Given that there are 13 weeks of instructions, students may miss up to three (3) classes and still receive at full 10% grade on attendance.
- 2. Class Participation (10% of Final Grade):** This course (because it deals with a significant amount of theory) places an emphasis on weekly readings and interactions. Please come prepared to participate in classroom discussions, both with the instructor and with your peers, as is appropriate for a senior level university course.

3. Personal Reflection Paper (30% of Final Grade, 1000 words): Why Deconstruction?

This paper is meant to be a personal reflection on the role and value of deconstruction both “in the world” and in your own life. What is the purpose of deconstruction in the modern world? What authors do you associate with it? What is its value for you in your own life? Was there a moment in your life where you experienced deconstruction?

4. Academic Essay (50% of Final Grade): Students will be required to submit a 2500–3000-word essay on a topic of their choice, related to one of the topics listed below. Proper footnoting and bibliography are required according to the Chicago Manual of Style (17th Edition). Deadline will be negotiated at the beginning of the semester. Topics include, but not limited to:

- 4.1 Christianity and Capitalism
- 4.2 Theology and Artificial Intelligence
- 4.3 Is God Dead?
- 4.4 Bible and Critical Theory (interpret a bible text using a theorist)
- 4.5 Is Postmodernity Over?
- 4.6 What is Scripture? A Conversation between Alain Badiou and Jacques Derrida

Structure of the Class: The class will begin with attendance, then follow with brief group discussions and free writing exercises. The bulk of the class will be lectures which combine primary text material from the weekly reading and additional sources provided by the instructor. There will be two, ten-minute breaks over the course of the lecture.

The course readings will generally be given on the Blackboard site, along with courses grades, Professor feedback, and written submission guidelines.

Academic honesty and plagiarism: Attention is drawn to University’s 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.

Grading: The grading follows the general grading policy of the CUHK outlined below (in short form):

Grade A / Excellent: Outstanding performance on ALL learning outcomes. Demonstrates the ability to synthesize and apply the principles or skills learned in the course in a manner that

would surpass the normal expectations at this level and typical of standards that may be common at higher levels of study.

Grade A- / Very Good: Generally outstanding performance on all or almost all learning outcomes. Demonstrates the ability to synthesize and apply the principles or skills learned in the course in a manner that would fully fulfill the normal expectations at this level and occasionally reaches standards that may be common at higher levels of study.

Grade B / Good: Substantial performance on all learning outcomes, OR high performance on some learning outcomes which compensates for slightly less satisfactory performance on others, resulting in overall substantial performance. Demonstrates the ability to apply the principles or skills learned in the course in a comprehensive manner that would sufficiently fulfill the normal expectations at this level.

Grade C / Fair: Satisfactory performance on the majority of learning outcomes. Demonstrates the ability to partially apply the principles or skills learned in the course in a manner that would meet the basic requirement at this level.

Grade D / Pass: Barely satisfactory performance on a number of learning outcomes. Addresses the task inadequately by meeting the basic requirement at this level only in some areas while responding minimally with possibly tangential content in others.

Grade F / Failure: Unsatisfactory performance on a number of learning outcomes, OR failure to meet specified assessment requirements. Fails to address the task and likely does not understand the assignment, perhaps completely misses the point.

Excellent

Good

Needs Improvement

Unacceptable

Thesis	A clear statement of what is being proposed or argued in the paper.	The thesis is easily detectable after reading the paper, but it is not presented in a single and clear statement.	The thesis is present, but a reader must work hard to reconstruct from the entire paper.	There is no thesis or central argument/proposal to tie the paper together, or the thesis is unclear.
Arguments	Each reason, support, or argument to follow the thesis is made clear, thorough, relevant and convincing. Proper references are consistently made to the text in question (biblical and/or a textbook) to show why the proposed thesis is valid.	Arguments made to support the thesis are clear, but less thorough, relevant, and/or convincing. References are often made to the text in question (biblical and/or a textbook) to show why the proposed thesis is valid, but this is done not as consistently.	Arguments made to support the thesis are acceptable but sketchy or their relevance unclear. Some references are made to the text in question (biblical and/or a textbook) to show why the proposed thesis is valid.	Arguments to support the thesis are missing, irrelevant, or not convincing. The paper makes lots of claims or assertions that are not substantiated. There are few or no references to the text in question (biblical and/or a textbook) to show why the proposed thesis is valid.

Organization	The paper's flow, from one paragraph to another, is consistently sensible, logical, and always with clear transitions. The movement from introduction to the body and then the conclusion is easy to follow and coherent.	The paper's flow, from one paragraph to another, is largely sensible and logical. Transitions are mostly appropriate. The movement from introduction to the body and then the conclusion is distinguishable if not easy to follow.	There are signs of sensible and logical organization, but these are mixed with abrupt or illogical shifts and ineffective flow of ideas. The movement from introduction to the body and then the conclusion is not clearly distinguishable.	The paper does not flow well in terms of organization or for the argument of the thesis. Transitions from paragraph to paragraph or from one idea to the next are missing. The movement from introduction to the body and then the conclusion is non-existent.
Style	The paper is written in complete and grammatically correct sentences. Word choice is precise; definitions are provided if and when needed. Paper has been spell-checked, proofread, and contains no errors.	The paper is written in complete sentence and grammatically correct sentences. Word choice is understandable, definitions are generally (though not always) provided if and when needed. Paper has been spell-checked, proofread, and contains only a few errors.	The paper contains some incomplete or grammatically incorrect sentences. Word choice is imprecise, at times not understandable, and/or not defined when needed. Not clear if the paper has been spell-checked and proofread because of the number of errors present.	The paper is written with many incomplete or grammatically incorrect sentences. Word choice is not understandable and definition of particular terms or words is not given even when needed. The paper has clearly not been spell-checked or proofread, and hence contains an excessive number of errors.
Documentation	Notes to indicate sources of information are given whenever they are needed. Both notes and bibliography use consistent and academically acceptable format.	Notes to indicate sources of information are generally given when they are needed. Notes and bibliography are generally but not always consistent or conform to required academic standard.	Sources of information are not consistently documented. If they are, format is inconsistent or does not conform to required academic standard.	Source materials are used without documentation.

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