

CSTC Course Proposal 2022–2023

Antonio Calcagno, Ph.D.

Title/Theme: The Waning of Philosophies of Difference and the Rise of the New Universalism

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DESCRIPTION:

Contemporary political philosophy in the 1960's produced a large body of work focused on difference or alterity in response to the failure of politics and society to recognise and address the excesses of privilege, mass inequality, and social injustice. Philosophies of difference had a huge impact and helped change western politics and thinking. Movements like post-structuralism, post-colonialism, postmodernism, ethics of alterity, deconstruction, and some parts of feminism stem from a consistent thinking about difference by thinkers like Frantz Fanon, Luce Irigaray, Jean-François Lyotard, Jacques Derrida, Gilles Deleuze, and Emmanuel Levinas. Some contemporary and later philosophers, while accepting the importance of difference, argued that difference had to be situated within a larger more unifying or universalist discourse in order to avoid fragmentation, isolation and atomization. For example, Alain Badiou and Jacques Rancière have put forward such concepts as the ultra-one of the event or the assumption of universal equality. At the present moment, there exists in contemporary philosophy a tension between philosophers of difference and universalist thinkers. This course will explore this tension, ultimately offering students the possibility of critically navigating the relevant debates while making up their own minds on whether difference, universalism, or the tension between the two are sufficient for addressing the social and political inequalities that still continue to afflict contemporary society.

The course has three main learning objectives:

1. To familiarize students with some of the central questions, ideas and figures of contemporary theory;
2. To help students identify the lingering social and political effects of modern and postmodern thought, both the liberating and oppressive ones;

3. To help develop students' own creative and critical philosophical positions and questions by responding to the views of the philosophers discussed.

Course Requirements

One seminar presentation: (30%)
One short paper (20%)
One large research paper (18–25 pages) (40%)
Class participation (10%)

SYLLABUS

Week 1: Introduction and explanation of course requirements; contextualizing difference and universalism in contemporary philosophy?

Week 2: MODELS OF DIFFERENCE AND CRITIQUE

Cornel West, "The New Cultural Politics of Difference"

Frantz Fanon

National Culture and the Flight for Freedom:

<https://www.marxists.org/subject/africa/fanon/national-culture.htm>

The Pitfalls of National Consciousness:

<https://www.marxists.org/subject/africa/fanon/pitfalls-national.htm>

The Wretched of the Earth: Conclusions

<https://www.marxists.org/subject/africa/fanon/conclusion.htm>

Week 3: Jean-François Lyotard

Excerpts from *The Differend* and *The Postmodern Condition*:

Week 4: Luce Irigaray

Excerpts from the *Sex Which is Not One*

Read chapters 2, 4, and 11

Week 5: Hélène Cixous and Monique Wittig

Hélène Cixous's *The Laugh of the Medusa*

Monique Wittig's "One is Not Born a Woman"

Week 6: Jacques Derrida

Writing and Difference

Week 7: Gilles Deleuze

Difference and Repetition

Read pp. 1–50

Week 8: Emmanuel Levinas

Excerpts from *Totality and Infinity* and *Otherwise than Being*

Week 9: Alain Badiou

Being and Event

Read first 45 pages of Part V

Week 10: Alain Badiou

Being and Event II: Logics of Worlds

Read Book V, pp. 355–389

Week 11: Jacques Rancière

Dis-agreement: Politics and Philosophy

Read pp. 1-42

Week 12: Jacques Rancière

Rancière's "Ten Theses on Politics"