

Reading Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*

Kenji Hayakawa (Student Coordinator)
Email: kalessin@interchange.ubc.ca

Christina Hendricks (Faculty Sponsor)
Department of Philosophy
Email: c.hendricks@ubc.ca

Course Description

Despite its notoriety in philosophy circles around the globe, G. W. F. Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* remains largely unread. Much like other great German thinkers such as Karl Marx and Sigmund Freud, what students typically get is a highly simplified, almost completely distorted version of a “Hegelian dialectics” — “thesis,” “antithesis” and “synthesis” — which makes no reference to Hegel's actual text. Indeed, Hegel himself never uses these three terms. This suggests that despite his historical importance, Hegel is a largely ignored thinker. However, Hegel's texts contain not only historical value, but also radically new ways of conceiving just about any phenomenon in the contemporary world. For example, Slavoj Žižek even goes so far as to declare that “modern philosophy started with Kant and ended with Hegel,” suggesting that indeed no post-Hegelian thinker has succeeded in exceeding the horizon of understanding that Hegel reaches. For these reasons, it is not implausible to assume that there is great value to be found in exploring this largely misread or unread thinker's most well-known work. And this is exactly what this course is about.

The aim of this course is to read Hegel's *Phenomenology* on its own terms. The course will begin without any preconceptions of what Hegel is “supposed to be saying” in this book. Students will develop their own interpretations of the text. This includes an interpretation of what Hegel is aiming to establish in each section, how he argues for it, and how these aims and arguments may be relevant to other questions outside Hegel's text. On the one hand, students will be expected to maintain a high level of rigour and discipline in their readings of the text. However, on the other hand, students are also encouraged to be creative and make bold suggestions. The main function of the seminar will be to have a good chunk of time where students can exchange, comprehend, and further develop their initial interpretations of each section. Criticism and negative comments concerning the ideas of peers will only be made for the purpose of refining or substantiating the original ideas. Criticism for criticism's sake will be discouraged in this course. The course will be a success if students walk out of the classroom each week with a good grasp of the meaning of Hegel's text as well as its relevance to both historical and contemporary phenomena.

Pre-requisites for this Course

There are no pre-requisites for this course.

Required Text

Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich. *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Trans. James B. Baillie. Digireads.com, 2009.

Optional Texts and Resources

Crockett, Clayton, Creston Davis, and Slavoj Žižek, eds. *Hegel and the Infinite: Religion, Politics, and Dialectic*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2011. [A collection of essays by prominent Hegelians around the world that make Hegel relevant to contemporary issues]

Kojève, Alexandre. *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*. New York: Basic Books, 1969.

Magee, Glenn Alexander. *Hegel and the Hermetic Tradition*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001.

Malabou, Catherine. *The Future of Hegel: with an Introduction by Jacques Derrida*. Online Access.

Žižek, Slavoj. *Return to Hegel*. Online Access at Youtube. [Topics discussed: “Vanishing Mediator,” etc.]

———. *Interaction with the Other in Hegel*. Online Access at Youtube. [Topics discussed: “Aufheben,” “Antigone, Contingency, and Necessity,” “Interaction between Universal and Particular,” etc.]

Assignments and Assessments

Attendance (20%)

Students are expected to attend each and every seminar. Needless to say, the relevant sections must be read beforehand, and students will walk into the classroom each week with their own initial interpretations ready at hand.

Participation (30%)

In each class, students are expected to express their own interpretations in clear and intelligible language. Students are also required to listen to others and actively integrate the ideas of others into the general discussion.

Term Paper (50%)

Students will write one 15-20 page-long term paper of their own topic and hand it in on the last week of class.

The grading of the papers will be done through anonymous peer-reviewing. Students will turn in three copies of their term paper. Three peers will then read this paper and give grades. The final grade of the paper will be the average of the three grades submitted in this way.

(Ideal) Reading Schedule

Week 1: Preface

Hegel, *Phenomenology*, §§1-72

Week 2: Introduction, Sense-Certainty

Hegel, *Phenomenology*, §§73-110

Week 3: Perception, Force and the Understanding

Hegel, *Phenomenology*, §§111-165

Week 4: Self-Consciousness

Hegel, *Phenomenology*, §§166-230

Zizek Videos.

Week 5: Reason: Observing Reason

Hegel, *Phenomenology*, §§231-346

Week 6: Reason: Actualization of Rational Self-Consciousness

Hegel, *Phenomenology*, §§347-393

Week 7: Reason: Individuality

Hegel, *Phenomenology*, §§394-437

Week 8: Spirit: The Ethical Order

Hegel, *Phenomenology*, §§438-483

Sophocles, *Antigone*.

Week 9: Spirit: Culture

Hegel, *Phenomenology*, §§484-595

Week 10: Spirit: Morality

Hegel, *Phenomenology*, §§596-671

Week 11: Religion: Natural Religion, Religion in Art

Hegel, *Phenomenology*, §§672-747

Week 12: Religion: Revealed Religion

Hegel, *Phenomenology*, §§748-787

Week 13: Absolute Knowing

Hegel, *Phenomenology*, §§788-808