



ST. JEROME'S UNIVERSITY

St. Jerome's University in the University of Waterloo

Department of Philosophy

PHIL 262J - WINTER 2021

Postmodernist Philosophy

INSTRUCTOR INFORMATION

Instructor: Professor Nikolaj Zunic
Office: SH 2003 [Sweeney Hall]
Phone: 519-884-8111 ext. 28229
Office Hours: By appointment only. Contact the professor to schedule a personal meeting.
Email: nzunic@uwaterloo.ca

The best and most effective way of contacting the professor is by e-mail.

E-mail messages will normally be answered within 24 hours.

Due to the extraordinary circumstances regarding the COVID-19 preventative measures in place at the university, the professor will not have regular access to his office or to his office phone. Therefore, please do not leave messages by phone at the number given above.

All office hours will be conducted remotely with Microsoft Teams.

COURSE FORMAT

As everyone is undoubtedly aware, the University made the decision to have all courses in the 2020-2021 academic year be delivered remotely, rather than in person or face-to-face, because of the risks associated with the COVID-19 virus. This course will, therefore, in accordance with these official regulations, be delivered entirely remotely, that is, by means of the Internet.

We will be relying on LEARN (D2L or Desire to Learn) as the primary means in the delivery of the course. Everything to do with this course will be conducted through LEARN. Therefore, students must have access to LEARN.

The professor will post all relevant course material – e.g. the course outline, assignments, links, announcements – to the LEARN site. However, e-mail will also be a mode of communication between the professor and students.

The course will be divided into four components:

1. Lectures
 2. Readings
 3. Discussions
 4. Assignments
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1. Lectures

All lectures will be recorded by the professor and posted to LEARN in the **Content** section.

The mode of content delivery in this course will be entirely asynchronous (= there is no set time to listen to and view lectures) instead of synchronous (= when a scheduled time is set for live instruction). All the lectures will be recorded, and students will have the opportunity to listen to the lectures on their own time.

Each recorded lecture will be either an audio recording or a narrated PowerPoint presentation. The video lecture will not be the normal mode of content delivery.

Each lecture will be typically 30 minutes in duration, although the lectures may be longer from time to time (for example, 40 or 50 minutes).

There will be two MP4 files posted regularly each week, one on Mondays and the second on Wednesdays, by noon at the latest. If for some reason the professor will be late in posting a lecture on a Monday or Wednesday, he will announce this in LEARN.

The lectures will focus on the important concepts from the prescribed readings and as such will be concise and targeted.

2. Readings

Students are required to read the prescribed books/texts/readings in accordance with the schedule contained in this course outline.

The readings for which students are responsible for studying are given in a weekly schedule.

The readings play a pivotal part of this course, as all the lectures and assignments will deal with them centrally.

Students are strongly advised to follow the readings schedule and diligently to do the prescribed

readings.

3. *Discussions*

Each week forums for discussion on the week's main topics will be open for student engagement on LEARN.

- In LEARN go to **Connect** → **Discussions**.

The professor will participate in the discussions on Friday mornings from 10:00 am to 12:00 pm. What this means is that the professor will answer any questions once per week on Friday mornings. To be clear, this is not a "live" event.

If you wish the professor to address any concerns or questions please make your posts to this site by Friday morning at 10 am. Posts that are made after 12 pm on Friday will be answered the following Friday morning.

These discussions are not intended to be solely a forum between students and the professor. Instead, they are mainly to be a site where students can discuss course material among themselves. The professor's involvement here is marginal.

The purpose of the discussion forums is to allow students to dialogue with each other, to pose and answer questions related to the week's topics, and to facilitate the comprehension of course material. In short, it is an opportunity for students to ask questions and to offer and receive responses.

Participation in the discussions is optional and will not constitute any part of the student's final grade.

4. *Assignments*

There are three assignments in this course. The entirety of each student's final grade will be based on these three assignments.

Each assignment will be an argumentative essay.

A very good resource to consult in order to understand how to write an effective philosophy paper is the following website:

https://philosophy.fas.harvard.edu/files/phildept/files/brief_guide_to_writing_philosophy_paper

[er.pdf](#)

**Please read through this document on how to write a philosophy paper before the first essay is assigned.*

The first two essays should be between 4-6 double-spaced pages (1200-1800 words). The third essay should be between 6-9 double-spaced pages (1800-2700 words). The essays will be based on topics corresponding to relevant sections of the course and thus will be specific to the readings that we are covering.

The instructions and topics for each essay assignment will be posted to LEARN approximately 3 weeks before the due dates.

All essay assignments must be submitted electronically to LEARN in the Dropbox section.

- In LEARN go to **Submit → Dropbox**.

Each essay will also be submitted to Turnitin, a program that scans essays for academic integrity infractions.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

PHIL 262J: Postmodernist Philosophy will introduce students to the important philosophers, texts, and themes of postmodernism.

Although postmodernism is a term that can describe many different ideas and areas of life, our focus in this course will be on the *philosophical* engagement with postmodernism. We want to know what the key philosophical arguments are for the unique ways of thinking that fall under the rubric of postmodernism and what the most important philosophers have expressed regarding this movement.

This course will endeavor to present the theories and ideas of postmodern philosophers in the best possible light. Since caricatures and criticisms of postmodernism abound, we intend to focus on the strengths and merits of the views propounded by the respective philosophers treated in this course. Nonetheless, we will also point out the shortcomings and weaknesses of these intellectual positions where it is deemed appropriate. Moreover, it is crucial that we arrive at an accurate understanding of postmodern philosophy to dispel all the misunderstandings that exist. Many people think they know what postmodernism means, but all too often these beliefs are not based on facts and erudition, but mere speculations and conjectures.

The course is divided into five thematic units.

The first section is entitled “Origins”. We will be examining the background context of postmodernity with respect to the influences that spawned this particular era in philosophy. Gianni Vattimo’s book *The End of Modernity* will be our guide in this discussion. Vattimo’s claim is that postmodernism emerges from the German philosophical tradition, especially the work of Friedrich Nietzsche and Martin Heidegger. Some of the ideas that we will be covering here include the emergence of nihilism and the development of hermeneutics.

The second section is “Epistemology” and will be devoted to a close study of a very influential text, namely, Jean-François Lyotard’s *The Postmodern Condition*. This book looks at the area of knowledge and how science is to be understood and critiqued. Lyotard offers his readers a definition of postmodernity and emphasizes the problem of legitimation as the key philosophical concept that distinguishes this novel period.

The third section—“Culture”—will deal with the thought of Jean Baudrillard. We will read his book *Simulacra and Simulation*. Baudrillard has a lot to say about postmodern culture. His concepts of simulacra and hyperreality will feature prominently. We will discuss his views on film, architecture, values, society, the media and nihilism.

The fourth section is about “Art”. Postmodernism has had an enormous impact on art in general and our task will be to understand what is distinctive about postmodern art. We will study the views of Gianni Vattimo, Arthur Danto, and Richard Kearney who will give us a synoptic vision of what postmodern art means.

Finally, “Deconstruction” will be the final section of the course. This section will focus on the thought of Jacques Derrida, one of the most significant and influential postmodern philosophers. Derrida coined the term “deconstructionism” to describe a particular way of reading and interpreting texts. We will read three essays by Derrida, namely, “Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences”, “Differance”, and “Signature Event Context”, and will end of the course by studying the first part of his important book, *Of Grammatology*.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

This course aims to fulfill the following pedagogical objectives:

- To examine prominent ideas and texts in post-modernist philosophy.
- To introduce students to some of the main philosophical thinkers of the post-modernist period.
- To recognize how post-modernist philosophical ideas have shaped the western world.
- To appreciate the contributions of post-modernist philosophers to intellectual history.

REQUIRED TEXTS

There are four books which students are required to purchase or acquire for this course. They may be purchased at the University of Waterloo Bookstore or through some other book seller, such as Amazon. The four books are:

Gianni Vattimo, *The End of Modernity: Nihilism and Hermeneutics in Post-modern Culture*, translated by Jon R. Snyder. Polity Press, 1998.

Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, translated by Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1979.

Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, translated by Sheila Faria Glaser. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1994.

Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, translated Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974.

In addition to these texts, shorter essays will be provided to students through Course Reserves. These essays are the following:

Arthur C. Danto, "Introduction: Modern, Postmodern, and Contemporary", in *After the End of Art: Contemporary Art and the Pale of History*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997, pp. 3-19.

Richard Kearney, "The post-modern imagination", in *Poetics of Imagining: Modern to Post-modern*. New York: Fordham University Press, 1998, pp. 178-217.

Jacques Derrida, "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences", in *Writing and Difference*, translated by Alan Bass. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1978, pp. 278-293.

Jacques Derrida, "Differance", in *Margins of Philosophy*, translated by Alan Bass. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982, pp. 1-27.

Jacques Derrida, "Signature Event Context", in *Limited Inc.*, translated by Alan Bass. Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1977, pp. 1-23.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND ASSESSMENT

There are three written assignments for this course.

The first two essays will be relatively short, ranging in length from 4-6 pages each. The first essay will deal with themes in the first two parts of the course (i.e. “Origins” and “Epistemology”) and the second essay will deal with themes in the third and fourth parts of the course (i.e. “Culture” and “Art”).

The third essay will be longer and more substantial, ranging in length from 6-9 pages. It will deal with themes from the philosophy of Jacques Derrida.

The nature of each essay will be argumentative. What this means is that the professor will provide a selection of questions or topics to choose from and students will have to argue or defend a position by using logical reasoning and evidence from the texts and lectures. It is crucial that students learn philosophy by learning how to reason and argue their positions. Therefore, the essay assignments will aim to foster such argumentative and logical reasoning skills.

The detailed instructions for each assignment as well as the essay topics will be posted to LEARN approximately 3 weeks before the due date.

This course uses the Turnitin software, so all essays will be checked for plagiarism.

There is no final exam in this course.

The breakdown of the assignments with their corresponding due dates and weightings is given in the table below:

ASSIGNMENT	DUE DATE	VALUE
1. Essay #1	February 10 at 9:00 pm	25%
2. Essay #2	March 10 at 9:00 pm	25%
3. Essay #3	April 19 at 9:00 pm	50%

COURSE SCHEDULE

The following is a weekly schedule for this course. It lists the readings that students are responsible to study each week. The lectures, which will be posted to LEARN, will relate to the readings as they are listed in this schedule.

Please consult this schedule throughout the fall term.

PART 1: ORIGINS

WEEK 1: January 11-15

Introduction to the course

Topic: The Origins of Postmodern Philosophy in Nietzsche and Heidegger

Readings: Gianni Vattimo, *The End of Modernity*: Introduction, Chapters 1 and 2, pp. 1-47

WEEK 2: January 18-22

Topic: Hermeneutics and Nihilism

Readings: Gianni Vattimo, *The End of Modernity*: Chapters 7-10, pp. 113-181

PART 2: EPISTEMOLOGY

WEEK 3: January 25-29

Topic: Defining Postmodernity; Knowledge and Science

Readings: Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, Chapters 1-7, pp. 3-27

WEEK 4: February 1-5

Topic: The Problem of Legitimation

Readings: Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, Chapters 8-14, pp. 27-67

PART 3: CULTURE

WEEK 5: February 8-12

Topic: The Precession of Simulacra; Film; Architecture

Readings: Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, pp. 1-73

ESSAY #1 is due on Wednesday, February 10 at 9:00 pm.

WEEK 6: February 15-19

READING WEEK

**There is no course activity from February 13 to 21.*

WEEK 7: February 22-26

Topic: Hypermarket and Hypercommodity; Media; Nihilism

Readings: Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, pp. 75-164

PART 4: ART

WEEK 8: March 1-5

Topics: The Death of Art; The Structure of Artistic Revolutions

Readings: Gianni Vattimo, *The End of Modernity*: Introduction, Chapters 3-6, pp. 51-109

WEEK 9: March 8-12

Topic: Descriptions of Post-modern Art

Readings: Arthur C. Danto, "Introduction: Modern, Postmodern, and Contemporary" (Available in Course Reserves);

Richard Kearney, "The post-modern imagination", (Available in Course Reserves)

ESSAY #2 is due on Wednesday, March 10 at 9:00 pm.

PART 5: DECONSTRUCTION

WEEK 10: March 15-19

**No class or course activity on March 15 and 16*

**There is only one lecture this week on March 17*

Topic: Introduction to Jacques Derrida

Readings: Jacques Derrida, "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences" (Available in Course Reserves)

WEEK 11: March 22-26

Topic: Derrida's Concept of Differance

Readings: Jacques Derrida, "Differance" (Available in Course Reserves);

WEEK 12: March 29-April 2

Topic: Derrida on Writing, Communication and his Critique of Austin

Readings: Jacques Derrida, "Signature Event Context" (Available in Course Reserves)

WEEK 13: April 5-9

Topic: Part 1 of *Of Grammatology*

Readings: Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, Part 1, Chapters 1-2, pp. 6-73

WEEK 14: April 12-16

Topic: Continuation of Part 1 of *Of Grammatology*

Readings: Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, Part 1, Chapter 3, pp. 74-93

The last day of lectures for the winter term is April 14.

Essay #3 is due on Monday, April 19 at 9:00 pm EST

IMPORTANT DATES TO REMEMBER

January 11: Beginning of classes

February 13-21: Reading Week: No lectures or course activity

March 15 and 16: No class or course activity on these two days

April 14: End of classes

April 17-26: Final exam period [Please note that this course does not have a final exam]

COURSE POLICIES

Lateness Penalty: The penalty for late assignments is 3% deducted from the grade of the paper for each day that the paper is late.

Absolute Deadline: The maximum allowable amount of time for submitting essays beyond the due date is one week.

Illness: If a student is unable to participate in the course because of an illness, the student must complete a Verification of Illness form and report the illness to the instructor so that appropriate measures or accommodations made be made. For more information, please visit the following webpage: <https://uwaterloo.ca/registrar/current-students/accommodation-due-to-illness>

CORRESPONDENCE

As indicated at the beginning of this document, the best way to contact the professor is by e-mail at nzunic@uwaterloo.ca.

If you have any questions or concerns about any aspect of this course feel free to contact the professor.

When you write to the professor please be sure to indicate your name and the course that you are enrolled in.

Use formal language and proper grammar in your correspondence.

OTHER IMPORTANT INFORMATION

Academic Integrity: In order to maintain a culture of academic integrity, members of the University of Waterloo community are expected to promote honesty, trust, fairness, respect, and responsibility. [Check www.uwaterloo.ca/academicintegrity/ for more information.]

Grievance: A student who believes that a decision affecting some aspect of their university life has been unfair or unreasonable may have grounds for initiating a grievance. Read the St. Jerome's University Policy on Student Petitions and Grievances, www.sju.ca/sites/default/files/upload_file/PLCY_AOM_Student-Petitions-and-Grievances_20151211-SJUSApproved.pdf. When in doubt, please be certain to contact the St. Jerome's Advising Specialist, Student Affairs Office, who will provide further assistance.

Discipline: A student is expected to know what constitutes academic integrity, to avoid committing an academic offence, and to take responsibility for their actions. [Check www.uwaterloo.ca/academicintegrity/ for more information.] A student who is unsure whether an action constitutes an offence, or who needs help in learning how to avoid offences (e.g., plagiarism, cheating) or about "rules" for group work/collaboration should seek guidance from the course instructor, academic advisor, or the Associate Dean. When misconduct has been found to have occurred, disciplinary penalties will be imposed under the St. Jerome's University Policy on Student Discipline, www.sju.ca/sites/default/files/PLCY_AOM_Student-Discipline_20131122-SJUSApproved.pdf. For information on categories of offences and types of penalties, students should refer to University of Waterloo Policy 71, Student Discipline, www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infosec/Policies/policy71.htm. For typical penalties, check the Guidelines for the Assessment of Penalties, www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infosec/guidelines/penaltyguidelines.htm.

Appeals: A decision made or penalty imposed under the St. Jerome's University Policy on Student Petitions and Grievances (other than a petition) or the St. Jerome's University Policy on Student Discipline may be appealed if there is a ground. A student who believes they have a ground for an appeal should refer to the St. Jerome's University Policy on Student Appeals, www.sju.ca/sites/default/files/PLCY_AOM_Student-Appeals_20131122-SJUSApproved.pdf.

Note for students with disabilities: AccessAbility Services, located in Needles Hall (Room 1401) at the University of Waterloo, collaborates with all academic departments to arrange appropriate accommodations for students with disabilities without compromising the academic integrity of the curriculum. If you require academic accommodations to lessen the impact of your disability, please register with AccessAbility Services at the beginning of each academic term, www.uwaterloo.ca/accessability-services/.

Turnitin.com: Text matching software (Turnitin®) may be used to screen assignments in this course. Turnitin® is used to verify that all materials and sources in assignments are documented. Students' submissions are stored on a U.S. server, therefore students must be given an alternative (e.g., scaffolded assignment or annotated bibliography), if they are concerned about

their privacy and/or security. Students will be given due notice, in the first week of the term and/or at the time assignment details are provided, about arrangements and alternatives for the use of Turnitin® in this course. It is the responsibility of the student to notify the instructor if they, in the first week of term or at the time assignment details are provided, wish to submit the alternate assignment.