

Rel 667: Radical Theology From Hegel to Zizek
Syracuse University - Fall, 2009
Dr. John D. Caputo

Prospectus

In this course I raise the question of what can be called “radical theology” with a special focus on Hegel and the theological tradition that ensued after Hegel, down to the most lively among contemporary Hegelians, Slavoj Zizek, and his radical readings of Christianity. By radical theology I mean the tradition launched by Hegel’s critique of classical “transcendence” as abstract and one-sided, as a form of “alienation” or “estrangement” in which the human spirit fails to recognize itself. In Hegel this follows a Trinitarian schema—transcendence (the religion of the Father) concretizes itself in the world, in an empirical individual (the religion of the Son) whose empirical life is broken up in order to be redistributed in the spiritual life of the community (religion of the Spirit). In radical theology, religion is not about a gift from a being outside the world and it does not have to do with supernatural forces or with interventions here below by a divine being from the sky. It is instead a way of speaking about the unfolding life of the creative human spirit, and about the world itself, in which the divine life is actualized or actually worked out. In its most radical form, the name of God is finally translated (“without remainder”) into the world so that to understand “culture” or the “secular” we need to understand the “religion” of which it is the translation or repetition. The name of “God” in “religion” has become an “immanent,” “secular” or “cultural” formation, with the result perhaps that in the end we need to displace oppositions like religious/secular and transcendent/immanent. For orthodoxy, Hegel’s critique of an eternal God as an alienation to be overcome is a scandal that compromises the transcendence of God that has caused theology ever since to howl in pain (Kierkegaard) or to declare “No” (Barth). Although there are several places to turn in Hegel, we will devote the first third of the course to his 1827 “Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion.” In the second third of the course we will look at the materials that will prepare us to read *The Monstrosity of Christ*, which appeared recently and has occasioned a revision in this course as originally announced. This book, which is a debate between John Milbank and Slavoj Zizek about Hegel and Christianity, is we might say the state of the art, or the state of the question, of Hegel and radical theology today. It will occupy the last third of the course. So after Hegel, we will go on to Paul Tillich whose “theology of culture” is the upshot of this Hegelian idea, in which the distinction between the “correlational” and “non-correlational” theology defines the parameters of theology in the 20th century. From there I will take up the radicalization of Tillichianism in Altizer’s “death of God” theology, which has acquired a relevance to this course in the light of its use by Zizek. I will then take up the mysticism of Meister Eckhart, whose use in and by German Idealism is contested by Zizek and Milbank and is uniquely illustrative of the issues of immanence and transcendence that they are debating. From there we will spend a session on Peter Hallward’s *Out of this World: Deleuze and the Philosophy of Creation*, a provocative presentation of Gilles Deleuze as a “cognate” figure to certain mystical traditions, even as a “theophanic” thinker who organizes everything around a philosophy of creatures who manifest their creative source (see Bergson, Spinoza). While Hallward is sharply critical of all this (in the spirit of Badiou), he has in fact made an interesting presentation of Deleuze as a religious thinker. Then we will move on to something different, Nancy’s *Dis-Enclosure*, whose “deconstruction of Christianity” is a variation on this tradition but without the overarching metaphysics of Tillich or Deleuze. Nancy’s views are in many ways convergent with Vattimo’s version of an anti-metaphysical interpretation of (“after”) Christianity or with American “death of God” and “secular” theology. Then we will turn to the Milbank-Zizek

exchange by reading first some crucial sections of Zizek's *The Parallax View*, whose scintillating interpretations of Hegel, Kierkegaard, Heidegger, and Christianity address the opposition of "transcendence" and "immanence" in terms of "parallax shifts;" this book is regarded by Zizek as his major work of theory. This will be followed by selections from Milbank's first and to this day still his major work of theory, *Theology and Social Theory*. The course will conclude with three sessions, one on each chapter of *The Monstrosity of Christ*.

Required Texts

Hegel's *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion: The Lectures of 1827*. One-Volume edition.

Ed. Peter Hodgson (U Cal paperback)

Paul Tillich, *Theology of Culture* (Oxford UP ppbk.)

Peter Hallward, *Out of this World: Deleuze and the Philosophy of Creation* (Verso ppbk.)

Jean-Luc Nancy, *Dis-Enclosure* (Fordham UP ppbk.)

Slavoj Zizek, *The Parallax View* (MIT ppbk.)

Slavoj Zizek and John Milbank, *The Monstrosity of Christ* (MIT Press)

John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 2nd edition (2006), Blackwell ppbk.

T. J. J. Altizer, *The Contemporary Jesus* (SUNY Press, 1997)

Office Hours (HL 506)

I have scheduled office hours—Tuesday, 3:45-5:30, Wednesday, 1:00-4:15—but you should, for safety's sake, make an appt in advance by email at johncaputo@comcast.net.

Course Requirements

(1) Seminar Participation (20%)

(2) 2 Research Papers (40% each) (4,000-4,500 words each): For your first paper you should make a more detailed study of any of the particular figures or issues that are addressed in the seminars. For the second paper, you may do that again, with another figure or issue, or take up a related issue that I am not addressing in class.

Paper #1:

September 29: Statement of topic due

Oct. 27: Paper due

Paper #2:

Nov. 10 Statement of topic

Dec. 11 Paper due

Syllabus

- September 1 Orientation Lecture: Radical Theology from Hegel to Zizek.
Introduction to Hegel's *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion (LPR)*
Reading: Hegel, *LPR*, Introduction, Part I (pp. 73-199)
- September 8 Hegel, *LPR*, II.A.1-4 (pp. 199-328)
- 15 Hegel, *LPR*, II.B (pp. 328-89)
- 22 Hegel, *LPR*, III.A - III.A.1 (pp. 389-452)
- 29 Hegel, *LPR*, III.B.2, III.C (pp. 452-89)
Statement of Topic, Paper #1
- October 6 Paul Tillich, *Theology of Culture*, Parts One and Two (pp.3-145);
"The Method of Correlation," from *Systematic Theology*, I (handout)
- 13 T. J. J. Altizer, *The Contemporary Jesus* (pp. TBA)
- 20 Meister Eckhart: *Essential Sermons* (pp. TBA)
John D. Caputo, "Fundamental Themes in Eckhart's Mysticism," *The Thomist* 42 (1978), 197-225. (Handout)
- 27 Hallward, *Out of This World* (pp. TBA)
Paper #1 Due
- November 3 Slavoj Zizek, *The Parallax View*, Introduction (pp. 2-13), ch. 2 (pp. 68-123)
- November 10 John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, Preface to the Second Edition
(xi-xxxii; Introduction, 1-6, ch. 6 (147-76)
Rowan Williams, "Hegel and the Gods of Postmodernity" and "Logic and Spirit in Hegel," in *Wrestling with Angels* ; (the latter first appeared in *Post-Secular Theology* (ed) P. Blond;) "Saving Time" (review of *TST*)
(Handouts)
Statement of Topic, Paper #2
- 17 *The Monstrosity of Christ*, Zizek, "The Fear of Four Words"
- 24 Nancy, *Dis-enclosure*
- December 1 *Monstrosity*, Milbank, "The Double Glory"
- 8 *Monstrosity*, Zizek, "Dialectical Clarity vs. the Misty Conceit of Paradox"
- 11 Paper #2 Due