

**Centre for the Study of Theory and Criticism  
Western University  
CSTC 9155—The Waning of Philosophies of Difference and the Rise of the New  
Universalism [Category A course]  
Fall 2022**

**MEETINGS: Wednesday 10:00 a.m. – 12:50 p.m. Theory Seminar Room (Stevenson Hall 3165)**

**Instructor:** Antonio Calcagno, PhD

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**Office Hours:**

Tuesdays and Thursdays 2:20 – 3:50 pm

By appointment: Please feel free to send me an email message so that we can arrange a time to meet.

**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%): Students can select date of presentation.  
One short paper (20%): Due October 19, 2022 in class.  
One large research paper (18–25 pages) (40%). Due December 7, 2022 in class.  
Class participation (10%)

**Readings:**

All class readings can be accessed from the class owl site under the resources tab. Please click the file "Readings."

**Method:**

Classes will consist of a student seminar presentation. We shall also follow a lecture discussion format to supplement and expand on key ideas covered in the readings. Students are expected to come to class prepared to parse and discuss the assigned weekly readings. Questions and discussion are always welcome.

**SYLLABUS**

**September 14:** Introduction and explanation of course requirements; contextualizing difference and universalism in contemporary philosophy?

## **September 21: 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>

## **September 28: Jean-François Lyotard**

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

## **October 5: Luce Irigaray**

Excerpts from the *Sex Which is Not One*

Read chapters 2, 4, and 11

## **October 12: Hélène Cixous and Monique Wittig**

Hélène Cixous's *The Laugh of the Medusa*

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

## **October 19: Jacques Derrida [short paper due in class]**

*Writing and Difference*

**October 26:** Gilles Deleuze

*Difference and Repetition*

Read pp. 1–50

**November 2:** Reading Break: No class

**November 9:** Emmanuel Levinas

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

**November 16:** Alain Badiou

*Being and Event*

Read first 45 pages of Part V

**November 23:** Alain Badiou

*Being and Event II: Logics of Worlds*

Read Book V, pp. 355–389

**November 30:** Jacques Rancière

*Dis-agreement: Politics and Philosophy*

Read pp. 1–42

**December 7:** Jacques Rancière [Large paper due in class]

Rancière's "Ten Theses on Politics"