

***PHI 600: Derrida***  
***Syracuse University - Fall, 2010***  
***Dr. John D. Caputo***

A study of several representative texts from the work of Jacques Derrida (1930-2004) representing various phases of his thought and development and of the standpoint that was finally summarized with the word "deconstruction." I approach Derrida's numerous and subtle texts in terms of what he calls the "event" and of deconstruction as the work of facilitating the event, of letting something "happen." Everything in deconstruction is oriented around the "coming of the other" and letting the other come. This was depicted by Derrida most saliently as the "possibility of the impossible," something that happens across a spectrum ranging from literature and philosophy to ethics and politics. We will begin with Derrida's first major work and most comprehensive statement of his views, *Of Grammatology*, corrected edition, trans. Gayatri Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), in which he has laid out the basic strategies and resources of his thought from which, whatever his later development, he never retreated. From there we will move on to "The Invention of the Other" (*Psyche*, Stanford UP), a crucial statement of the axiomatics of the "other" and of the "to come" that animates all his work. Next we will read "The Force of Law," Derrida's landmark paper of 1988 which initiated a series of ethico-political writings, in which he introduces for the first time the idea of something "undeconstructible." After that I will follow a series of famous analyses—"Every other is wholly other" (*The Gift of Death*), negative theology ("How Not to Speak: Denials" and "*Sauf le nom—Post-scriptum*"), the gift (*Given Time*), forgiveness ("On Forgiveness"), and hospitality (*On Hospitality*). I will also set aside time for *Specters of Marx*, a book written in the "euphoria" of free market capitalism after the breakup of the USSR, and important not only because it takes up the question of Marx but also because it introduces the schema of a "spectrology" or "hauntology," which is a kind of touchstone of everything he has written. I will conclude the book with a look at his final writings—the last seminar (*The Beast and the Sovereign*) and his final interview, *Learning to Live Finally*. Along the way, we will be paying attention to the important relationship of Derrida to the thinkers in whose milieu he wrote and thought—like Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Husserl, Heidegger, and Levinas, as well as the biographical, social, political and religious contexts in which he found himself.

*Background Preparation:* If you are new to Derrida, you will find the "basics" of Derrida's thought and of my approach to him by consulting my *Deconstruction in a Nutshell* (Fordham UP), which contains both a helpful interview with Derrida and a commentary. A more advanced approach to his work and to one of my interests in Derrida is found in my *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida* (Indiana UP). Michael Naas, *Derrida From Now On* (Fordham UP) is the best book to appear on Derrida in quite some time, but it is not a place to begin with Derrida. Jeffrey Bennington's commentary in Bennington and Derrida, *Jacques Derrida* (U Chicago Press) is also a standard and by no w classic commentary.

*Course Requirements*

- (1) Seminar Participation (20%)
- (2) 2 Research Papers (40% each) (4,000-4,500 words each)