

Rel 667: Radical Theology From Hegel to Zizek
Syracuse University - Fall, 2009
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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 Žižek, 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 take up his 1827 “Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion.” From there we will go on to Paul Tillich and Karl Barth, who play out the Hegelian and anti-Hegelian sides, which Tillich called “correlational” and “non-correlational” theology, which defines the parameters of theology in the 20th century. After Tillich and Barth, I want to take up Michel Henry and Gilles Deleuze, two forms of 20th century life-philosophy that belong to the philosophy of “immanence” tradition. We will read Michel Henry’s *Material Phenomenology*, a work rooted in the mysticism of Meister Eckhart, the metaphysics of life in German Idealism, and Husserl’s phenomenology, and is also deeply influential on the “new phenomenology” represented by Jean-Luc Marion and the contemporary school of French phenomenologists. For Deleuze, we will read Peter Hallward’s *Out of this World: Deleuze and the Philosophy of Creation*, a provocative presentation of Gilles Deleuze as a “cognate” figure to Henry and 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, Henry 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. We conclude with a discussion of Žižek’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 Žižek as his major work of theory. Žižek’s book will

provide us with the opportunity to offer some concluding reflections on “religion.”

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.)

Karl Barth, *The Humanity of God* (Westminster JKP ppbk.)

Michel Henry, *Material Phenomenology* (Fordham 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 Žižek, *The Parallax View* (MIT ppbk.)

Course Requirements

2 Research Papers (4,000-4,500 words each)

Paper #1: Hegel or Hegel and one of the other figures

Paper #2: Any of the other figures