

# Skepticism

PHIL 375, UBC

Philosophy and Literature

November 21, 2017

Choose from the following options. This item will not be graded.

## iClicker Question

The X argument: someone whose life is guided by usual practices is in direct danger of becoming an X. Who is X?

- A   ▶ Oblomov
- B   ▶ Eichmann
- C   ▶ The Big Lebowski
- D   ▶ Charles Duhigg

Choose from the following options. This item will be graded.

## iClicker Question

What is the relevant pair of contrast for Odo Marquard's essay?

- A   ▶ accidents and narrative
- B   ▶ accidents and coincidence
- C   ▶ accidents and apriority
- D   ▶ accidents and choices

Choose from the following options. This item will be graded.

## iClicker Question

Which H.C. Andersen fairy tale does Marquard use to illustrate the relationship of “progress” to “myths”?

- A   ▶ The Snow Queen
- B   ▶ The Emperor's New Clothes
- C   ▶ Thumbelina
- D   ▶ The Ugly Duckling

# iClicker Question

Choose from the following options. This item will be graded.

## iClicker Question

Which of these statements reflects Marquard's position on narrativism?

- A   ▶ there must be one overarching grand narrative called a monomyth
- B   ▶ to narrate is necessary
- C   ▶ it is possible to strip myths away without acquiring new ones
- D   ▶ the story of monotheism ought to be replaced by the story of progress

# The Necessity of the Accidental

Marquard argues that an element of the accidental is necessary for being human:

## Odo Marquard

To get rid of what is accidental [Hegel] would mean . . . to get rid of philosophers . . . without philosophers there would be no philosophy . . . one would philosophy, in the name of philosophy, of philosophy (109)

Later on, Marquard restates that one would “rid man, in the name of man, of man.”

# Four Sections

- ① the program of making man absolute
- ② unavoidability of usual practices
- ③ human beings are always more accidents than choice
- ④ human freedom depends on the separation of powers

# What Is the Accidental

The accidental emerges from an interesting property of the world as phenomenon (lifeworld, 121): that things could have been otherwise (Leszek Kołakowski: “quod tamen potest esse aliter”).

The accidental is what is neither impossible nor necessary.

Distinguish between the

- arbitrarily accidental
- fatefully accidental (Nina Lugovskaya's strabismus)

Si contingens, unde necessarium et vice versa. Again, we are confronted with what looks like an irreducible dualism. Sartre, following Kant: human beings are, without exception, not their accidents, but only and completely their choice (contra “moral luck”).



# Absolutizing Ideologies

- religion
- Descartes' methodical doubt: in dubito contra traditionem (when in doubt, against tradition)
- German idealism
- Marxism
- Habermasian discourse ethics

Note how Marquard takes Gadamer's side in the debate over tradition; and Popper's side in the debate over dogmatism/determinism/historicism (open society).

Here are some similarities between Marquard and Popper:

- both were converted from adherence to absolutist ideologies (Popper from Marxism; Marquard from National Socialism)
- both assign an important role to creativity and the accidental in epistemology
- both vigorously criticize historicism (the idea that there is an intention in history beyond the intention of individuals which determines history)
- both emphasize the fallibility of knowledge

- “human life is too short for executing the program of making man absolute” (115)—compare and contrast the solution of German idealism/Marxism for this problem and Marquard’s
- what is the difference between an epistemological skeptic like Descartes and an anti-dogmatic skeptic like Marquard/Popper/Kořakowski?
- note Marquard’s unease with environmentalism: environmentalism has as one of its premises the “eternal significance” of human action, and our existing usual practices are often in conflict with this premise
- what is the Eichmann argument and how does Marquard address it?

- “critique is, above all, conflict between usual practices” (118)—what echoes of Kant do you hear here, and also a few lines later when Marquard rips into “perfectionistic deontological demands”
- what kind of narrator is Marquard? notice the difference between Aristotelian narratives (where form is imposed on content) and Marquardian narratives (where the contingent is necessary)
- note also similarities with Foucault: the significance of the contingent (versus Hume’s necessity in the genealogy of morality, for example)
- note also similarities with Taylor: Marquard’s emphasis on usual practices and tradition, which only make re-evaluation meaningful

- both Taylor and Marquard have a cautiously positive relationship with art and religion as human responses to mitigate arbitrariness
- skepticism (“Zweifel”): isosthenes diaphonia (in our course, for example, between the hermeneutic method and the scientific method)
- note Marquard’s resistance to Mill’s idea that there must be one principle of morality: “there is never only one such power at work, but always a number of them” (also for convictions, traditions, stories, souls, gods, points of orientation, freedoms—Marquard is a professing polytheist)
- finally, a nod to Jacques Derrida: “what makes a human being free is not zero determination—the absence of all determinants—or the superior force of a single determinant, but a superabundance of determinants” (124)

# What Is Enlightenment?

Human reason, says Marquard again with a bit of cheek directed at Immanuel Kant, is **the abandonment of the effort to remain stupid.**

# Marquard and Narrativism

Stories, according to Marquard, are neither good nor bad, they are necessary. They are detranscendentalizing agents. Myths are not preliminary stages or prostheses of the truth (90). The mythical technique is the art of bringing available truth within the reach of what we are equipped to handle in life.

## Odo Marquard, In Praise of Polytheism, 90

The truth is one thing, and how we can live with the truth is another. Knowledge serves the former, cognitively, and stories serve the latter, vitally. For knowledge has to do with truth and error, whereas stories have to do with happiness and unhappiness. Their task is not to find the truth, but to find a *modus vivendi* with the truth.

# Marquard and the Vienna Circle (Carnap)

*Mythonudism strives for something impossible; I have doubts about the striptease: doubts (to put it more precisely) about the idea of the enlightenment (late in world history) as a striptease operating with myths . . . Here, the mythical zero wardrobe is itself the explicitly proclaimed goal, and the scientific and emancipatory avant-garde strives for mythical nudity . . . until an impertinent phenomenological hermeneuticist . . . cries out, "You there, the gentleman from the late Vienna Circle, you are still wearing myths!" (92)*



Gadamer being a hermeneuticist holotically

Carnap the striptease

Foucault the genesis of the individual (102, IPOP)

Sartre absolute choice and usual practices (114, IDOTA)

Habermas absolute doubt shared with Descartes (hermeneutics of suspicion)

Popper see separate slide

There is a sustained attack by Marquard on Liberalism, charging it with extending the evils of religion. Si necessarium unde contingens (IDOTA, 110f): divine sovereignty and naturalism are two extreme forms. The monomyth of progress, history, science, revolution. The two ends of polymythical thinking: monotheism and historicism (this is the same historicism that Popper finds so objectionable).

# Enlightened Polymythic Thinking

- ① Disenchanted return of polytheism (101). Separation of powers. The many gods returning impersonally:
  - legislature, executive, judiciary
  - democratic institutions
  - federalism
  - free markets
  - the “endless differences of theories, of worldviews, and of decisive values” (102)
- ② The genesis of the individual (102).
- ③ The disenchanted return of polymythical thinking. Divide et impera. Divide et fuge. Isosthenes diaphonia.

# iClicker Question

Choose from the following options. This item will be graded.

## iClicker Question

What is Kolakowski's thesis statement?

- A   ▶ No explanatory method exists in the study of cultural history
- B   ▶ facts can be abolished by a supreme synthesis
- C   ▶ History would have turned out the same if certain important people (Descartes, Nietzsche) had died in infancy
- D   ▶ Western civilization must decline as a matter of historical necessity

Choose from the following options. This item will be graded.

## iClicker Question

According to Kolakowski, given the past, the future is

- A   ▶ unpredictable
- B   ▶ directed at a specific end
- C   ▶ predictable in its major movements
- D   ▶ predictable in detail

Choose from the following options. This item will be graded.

## iClicker Question

“The whole world is a work of art” – who is quoted saying this in Solnit?

- A   ▶ Virginia Woolf
- B   ▶ Jean-Paul Sartre
- C   ▶ Andrew Warhol
- D   ▶ Immanuel Kant

Choose from the following options. This item will be graded.

## iClicker Question

Why did Charlie Musselwhite stop drinking himself to death?

- A   ▶ because of a religious conversion experience
- B   ▶ because he heard of a not-yet two-year old being saved from a well
- C   ▶ because Aristotle appeared to him in a dream
- D   ▶ because he was shipwrecked and had no access to alcohol

# Student Questions

- Why hermeneutics matter? What would be problematic if we don't study the impact of it? Of those espousing hermeneutics, which has the most sound logic for you? (Same for poststructural.) Is synthesis possible or are the diametrically opposed?
- Can you please give a brief explanation as to what Plato means by Truth and why Nietzsche has a problem with it?
- Is existentialism supporting free will?



# Student Questions

- What is the difference between hermeneutics of trust and hermeneutics of tradition?
- What would Hume say about Parfit's reductionist view on personhood?
- I didn't understand too well what Sartre said about the human condition and what he says right after.

# Student Questions

- How different are Foucault's ideas from those of Marx?
- Can we get short summaries of what a philosopher says in this respective paper for the ones that are hard to understand?
- On the topic of spatio-temporal blending of horizons. Does anyone take into account the personal, subjective interpretation of each person? We take the widely-held interpretation of the past to be the historical horizon, which we use to interpret something new. But surely not everyone in the past shares these beliefs. Same can be said about the spatial horizon. Do we take the subjective point of view into account when interpreting something?

- What is the hermeneutic circle?
- Would it be safe to say that all philosophical argument are sound in interpretation/explanation, until they are at their application? As in, the application in real life isn't as accurate as they are in theory?
- What does philosophy mean to you? And what do you think the philosophy mean in current times?

# Student Questions

- Can you break down our readings into short topics so that we can better digest the information and study for our exam?
- What, according to Parfit, would happen if humans became aware that self-identity is an illusion or to some degree? And how would it be possible to be aware that the self is non-existing? From paradox, as Parfit agrees—is this somewhat impossible to explain?
- What is the significance of knowing your identity if the qualifications (such as contains half of the brain, or psychological continuity) can be so arbitrary? Do we have to know those answers?

# Student Questions

- On the topic of narratives, do you believe/have you created a narrative for yourself?
- Why did the author in existential writing say thinking is a luxury?
- Hermeneutics of trust, even though it's characteristic of structuralism, isn't it more prevalent among people even today?

- You said that part of Foucault's "Body of the Condemned" was one of the best things you've ever read. I'm guessing it was the last pages but I don't see why; I think there's not enough explanation there; so maybe I'm missing something?
- In some of the older readings, I'm wondering if the ideas of truth and freedom are accessible/attainable/were able to be demonstrated to be inherent in women?
- What is more destructive: discipline and punish targeting the body or the soul?

# Student Questions

- Do all readings we've done relate to hermeneutics? If so, how do some fit in which seem less clearly related, like Charles Hodges's *On Method*, or Charles Taylor's *Foucault on Freedom and Truth*? Or even Foucault's *The Incitement to Discourse* or *The Body of the Condemned*? Or Karl Popper's *The Logic of Scientific Discovery*?
- Are people with second-order desires really self-involved and selfish?
- And extremely general question: at this stage what should a student do if they feel rather lost in the course and have little to no idea whether they have grasped the concepts right/on the right track?

# Student Questions

- How does self-narrative relate to Foucault?
- What is the deductive method? Is it the same as deconstruction?
- How do topics such as punishment, power tie back in with hermeneutics? The link between our course title in the readings is sometimes unclear.



- Foucault's idea of modern power relation makes us better or worse?
- Do philosophers ever agree on an answer? Or does everyone just keep adding new points of view to all topics? How do some authors claim that "the enlightenment won"?
- What exactly does Charles Taylor mean by "purposefulness without purpose"?

# Student Questions

- Does Derek Parfit reject Marya Schechtman?
- When does knowledge become an all-trumping power?
- What would be Parfit's response to MS's claim that his view produces people who don't make plans, take responsibility for present or past?

# Student Questions

- What does Gadamer mean by “fusion of horizons”?
- Why do we use hypothetical questions that are unrealistic/could never happen?
- Is the power relation of Foucault a phenomenon or an ontological being? Does it make sense to say it's an ontological being?

# Student Questions

- About power of knowledge, is this reflecting historical background, say the colonial era?
- Does Foucault reject the idea of object? Given that Charles Taylor says his idea is Nietzschean.
- There was a discussion on the possible role of science in determining morals, something that was tentatively concluded to be impossible. Sam Harris fleshes out a position that it is possible in his book *The Moral Landscape*, using the empirical well-being of sentient creatures as his foundation. Is this position untenable purely on the assumption that empirical well-being is a good thing? Would it be possible to value well-being while finding his position unconvincing?

# Student Questions

- How much of an extent do you believe these philosophers carry weight to the modern day? Are they only relevant because some of the issues are they still prevalent, or are they a product of their time and only matter in their time period.
- Can you go over what once again about the paper due end of term?
- Could you explain how you could defend the non-narrativist view against the narrativist view?

- What is value neutrality?
- When arguing against a certain author's stance, should we invite the narrative of another philosopher, or should we include our own voices? Take Taylor as an example, or whoever that was that wrote something about existentialism, since he was attacking what those who go against existentialism are saying, do we argue in light of his objections and answer with the voices of existing philosophers, or do we use our own voices? (For whatever context, essay or exam or philosophy in general.)
- Is pragmatism possible? Why and why not? Van Hoozer—I have no idea what his stance on the three parables are.

- What modern philosophers/philosophical schools of thought totally reject hermeneutics? If so who are they and why?
- What is so wrong with the hermeneutics of suspicion?
- Doesn't Sartre's article speak about a role for collective reflection, a social aspect to defining purpose, goals, morals, etc.? It seemed like you said there wasn't any ... (Though I may be mistaken about that ...)

# Student Questions

- Why have we been historically taught to repress our sexual nature? Who said that sexual liberation was bad for society?
- How to Kant and Nietzsche differ when it comes to personal identity?
- Even though the logical positivists felt that some topics were impossible to talk about, did they still feel that things/questions such as ethics, aesthetics, where do we go when we die etc. still held importance in our lives? Even if they were logically only nonsense, they still hold importance. I want to know just how important they felt these things to be.



- What is hermeneutics?
- If hermeneutics is the interpretation of the text, doesn't that necessitate an "interpreter" or a "self" to do the interpreting?
- What does Van Hoozer say again?

- Can you please give a quick overview/refresher on Galen Strawson's views?
- What was Popper's main point in what he said about everything having probability zero?
- Is there such a thing as true altruism? Can it be viewed as an evolutionary tool to encourage cooperation/mutual support? Why do we "feel good" or get a "warm fuzzy feeling"?

# Student Questions

- Regarding the discussion from last week about Foucault and oppression: if we are all oppressed then wouldn't that be a given of life, hence, true oppression or freedom would be relative to the oppression imposed on us as a fact of life?
- Can only people that believe in control over their life narratives assert control/make changes?
- I am wondering if the use of technology, for example social networking sites such as Instagram or Facebook, help us to establish or maintain narratives.

# Student Questions

- What's the best way to argue that Carnap's linguistic framework/principle of tolerance supports Habermas's passion for methodology and hermeneutics compared to Gadamer's theory that there is no methodology to hermeneutics?
- Why did you choose Foucault for this class? What's your opinion of Foucault's academic achievements?
- What does Nietzsche mean when he says only the "think" in "I think therefore I am" exists and "I" is only the creation of grammar? Does it make sense to say "deed without subject"?

# Student Questions

- Will there be any re-weighting of the grades at the end of the course? For example, if someone does significantly better on the final paper than on the final exam, will the final exam be weighted less? I think philosophy requires a lot of heavy rumination on the topics at hand, so it surprised me that this course would have a final exam.
- How the power determines the forms and domains of knowledge?
- Isn't "I think, therefore I am" the same as "which came first: the chicken/egg"?

# Student Questions

- In your personal opinion, which has more weight: Foucault's theory or Taylor's rebuttal?
- What are intrinsic reasons?
- Do you think there is some kind of philosophy in ancient China? Or just agree with Hegel: there is no philosophy in ancient China.

# Student Questions

- Parfit—also don't understand much.
- Is it possible to submit a rough draft of the essay before the deadline and get reviewed?
- Would you choose to keep or abolish the law that forbids having sex with children?

# Student Questions

- What exactly do we have to know about Gadamer? He is confusing to understand. Same with Habermas.
- According to Popper, how is science and philosophy different?
- How would the personal view of a structuralist about a death differ from a poststructuralist?



# Student Questions

- What are the key arguments undermining determinism?
- How can one argue against against Habermas's methodology when he doesn't provide any method for hermeneutics?
- Plutarch and Marya Schechtman, what do they think about a good meaningful narrativist life?

- Is foundationalism compatible with non-reductionism? Are they the same thing?
- On effective history, is all history effective? If not what distinguishes something that isn't and how do we know without knowledge of the future? (or all events)
- In the reductionist view, what separates humans from non-humans?

# Student Questions

- To what extent does Taylor accurately represent Foucault?
- Why doesn't Sartre accept for moral guidance outside ourselves?
- What is the relation between strong evaluation and second order desires?

- Is modern societies' reliance on statistics inherently utilitarian in nature? How can Foucault's theories be anything resembling truth if truth is dependent on power and domination? If there's no objective truth, are Foucault's ideas only relevant to our current society?
- Are the contrasts between Habermas's and Gadamer's concepts of hermeneutics present in real life institutions? Like health field, government, science ...
- Optional: can you do a brief overview of every reading on one of the lectures in the final week?

# Student Questions

- How can you truly know if your desires are yours and are outside of some external social structure?
- Dostoyevsky's look on letting go of rationality really possible?
- what is rational reconstruction?

- The readings we do for the course do not date far back, but why don't we look at more contemporary readings? Don't the concepts and ideas seem more falsifiable in relation to circumstances today?
- Does the philosopher only focus on men?
- Hume—can we summarize quick—don't understand much.

# Student Questions

- Our class often reads and discusses both sides of a topic/view. Yet, we rarely sit down and consolidate that into a single view/choice. Personally, I am not sure how to begin weighing all of the sound (?) arguments out.
- Is Galen Strawson absolutely certain his views against narrativity won't change?
- What's up with Hume saying emotions are more important than reason; that reason should be a slave to emotion?