

# Hegel



**Winter 2024**

**Thursdays 2:30 PM–5:20 PM, A 402**

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# PHIL 483M: Hegel

## Course Description

In the long, complicated reception of his thought, Hegel has been both celebrated and condemned, often in the same breath, for his contributions to philosophy. These include his doctrine of absolute idealism, his theory of recognition, his notion of ethical life, his dialectical conception of history, and his metaphysical account of spirit, reason, and freedom—to name but a few. But perhaps he is most well-known for being one of the last great system builders. Indeed, his own system seems unparalleled in that it encompasses the domains of epistemology, metaphysics, logic, philosophy of nature, philosophical anthropology, philosophy of mind, moral philosophy, social and political philosophy, philosophy of law, philosophy of history, world history, aesthetics, philosophy of religion, the history of philosophy, and even meta-philosophy. By providing a close reading of his monumental *Phenomenology*, this seminar will serve as an initiation as well as a deep dive into Hegel's life, times, and philosophy.

## A Breakdown

There is no better way to understand Hegel than to examine his first *magnum opus* and most influential work, his *Phenomenology*. This work is an ambitious effort to reconstruct the history of consciousness from its immediate lifeworld to the standpoint of what he calls “absolute knowing” through a re-enactment and internal exploration of the key dimensions of human experience. As such, the book deals with the underlying structure of our conscious sensing, perceiving, and understanding of objects, our self-consciousness of action, the full awakening of our reason in modern science and its vicissitudes, and the development of our shared beliefs and values, what he refers to as “the spirit” of a community, in the West from Classical Greece up to his contemporary day. Designed to be the introduction to his system, Hegel's *Phenomenology* develops the major concepts and theories that will govern his mature thought and which his name has become largely synonymous with ever since.

We will focus on three groundbreaking moves that Hegel's *Phenomenology* makes, all of which bring into view the role that spirit, reason, and freedom play in human experience: (1) the myth of the given; (2) anti-reductionism; and (3) historicism. (1) The world around us, which we encounter as simply “there” in our day-to-day consciousness by assuming the standpoint of direct or indirect realism, is neither immediately present through the senses or perception, nor is it a pre-existing order that the understanding must capture. Instead, it arises in virtue of the system of ideas—that is to say, the

theories—that we build, both consciously and unconsciously, to give meaning to objects. (2) Theory itself has to be conceived in terms of the role it plays in our practical life, namely, how it makes our self-conscious awareness of who we are and the goals that guide our actions more important to us than the imperatives of our biological nature. In a different register, the attempt to explain human experience or propose principles for the self-regulation of individuals and societies via the methods of modern science is bound to fail. (3) Our theoretical relationship to the world and our practical relationship to ourselves are ultimately sociohistorical products of a self-contained dialectical process—a result of our attempt, as a community, to comprehend the world around us, who we are, and how we should live with one another, leading to shared beliefs and values that evolve over time due to unavoidable contradictions. Just as what makes an individual's life possible is the family into which they are born, enculturated, and eventually come into their own as independent, what makes distinctively human experience possible is therefore the reason that is at work, continually revising its norms, in the concrete, dynamic, and lived sociohistorical context into we are thrown.

Hegel is, without a doubt, one of the most significant philosophers of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Engagement with his work is at the origin of numerous movements and traditions in the history of philosophy. We see his importance just as much in the existentialist and materialist inversion of Hegel's system proposed by early continental thinkers such as Kierkegaard and Marx as in the wholesale rejection thereof in early analytic philosophy. What is more, we also see his importance in how his system, his *Phenomenology* in particular, has become the source of inspiration for much contemporary continental and analytic philosophy. To this end, while this course will primarily be a close reading of Hegel's *Phenomenology*, we will conclude the course by investigating two ongoing appropriations of Hegel's *Phenomenology*: Žižek's return to Hegel to develop his new dialectical materialism and Brandom's return to Hegel as a precursor of his own linguistic pragmatism.

## Course Structure

Each meeting will be divided into two equal parts: a lecture and a seminar. The lecture will provide background on the topic of the meeting as well as a summary of key points. During the seminar, we will discuss points of interest led by student presentations.

## Learning Outcomes

Upon successful completion of the course, students will be able to:

- Analyze a key work from the history of philosophy.
- Evaluate Hegel's role in the history of philosophy.

- Evaluate Hegel's views on central debates in metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, and social and political philosophy.
- Evaluate Hegel's contributions to contemporary continental and analytic philosophy.
- Create a new and unique research paper on a central aspect of Hegel's philosophy.

## Texts

The texts listed below are required and are the basis for coursework. They are available through the bookstore. Other readings will be made available on Blackboard.

- G.W.F. Hegel. *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. Edited and translated by Terry Pinkard. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018.
- Robert Stern. *The Routledge Guidebook to Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*. Second Edition. London: New York, 2013.

## Recommended Secondary Literature

H.S. Harris. *Hegel's Ladder*. 2 vols. Hackett Publishing, 1997.

- This massive work is the result of 30 years of research on Hegel's *Phenomenology*. It is a paragraph-by-paragraph reading and highly useful for decoding Hegel's technical language.

Terry Pinkard. *Hegel's Phenomenology: The Sociality of Reason*. Cambridge University Press, 1996.

- This is a highly influential book that provides a compelling interpretation of Hegel as a thinker of knowledge, culture, and history arising from the complex dynamic of reason as a social practice.

Requirements and Grading	Holistic Assessment	10%	
	Exegetical Essay	25%	
	Presentation	15%	
	Research Proposal	10%	March 28
	Research Essay	40%	April 22

### *Holistic Assessment*

Holistic assessment will be determined not only by regular attendance and contributions to discussions, exercises, and activities but also by preparation, improvement in academic performance throughout the semester, and eagerness to acquire course-specific knowledge and skills.

### *Exegetical Essay*

The essay will be of a historical and expository nature. You will contextualize and summarize the formal argument from one of our readings from Hegel's *Phenomenology*. A list of possible texts will be distributed in the first week of the course. The essay should be approximately 1500 words and will be due two weeks after the session in question.

### *Presentation*

Each student will be responsible for giving a presentation on a portion of one of our readings from Hegel's *Phenomenology*. Each presentation will be a minimum of 10 minutes. The presentation should include two or three questions that will serve as a springboard for discussion. Presentations will be chosen in the first week of the course.

### *Research Proposal*

At the end of this course, you will submit a research essay on a topic of your own choosing. You may write on Hegel or you may relate Hegel to other philosophers you have studied or to contemporary debates in philosophy. You will hand in a prospective abstract of 500 words that describes your topic, the thesis you will defend, and the main steps of your argument. Additionally, you will include a bibliography that identifies the relevant primary texts from Hegel as well as secondary literature from your own independent research.

### *Research Essay*

You will submit a thesis-driven research essay that reflects your engagement with the course material, discussions, and independent research. The essay will be approximately 3000 words.

# Course Schedule

Unit	Date	Topic
1	Jan. 4	Modernity and Freedom: The Life, Times, and Philosophy of Hegel <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Recommended: Kant, "What is Enlightenment?"</li> <li>Recommended: Hegel, <i>Lectures on the Philosophy of World History</i>, vol 1., excerpt</li> </ul>
2	Jan. 11	Introduction: The Project and Method of Hegel's <i>Phenomenology</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Hegel, <i>Phenomenology</i>, §§ 73-89 (pp. 49-59)</li> <li>Stern, <i>Guidebook</i>, pp. 45-53</li> </ul>
3	Jan. 18	Consciousness: Sensuous-Certainty and Perception <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Hegel, <i>Phenomenology</i>, §§ 90-131 (pp. 60-79)</li> <li>Stern, <i>Guidebook</i>, pp. 54-71</li> </ul>
4	Jan. 25	Consciousness: Force and the Understanding <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Hegel, <i>Phenomenology</i>, §§ 132-165 (pp. 79-101)</li> <li>Stern, <i>Guidebook</i>, pp. 71-84</li> </ul>
5	Feb. 1	Self-Consciousness: Mastery and Servitude <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Hegel, <i>Phenomenology</i>, §§ 166-196 (pp. 102-116)</li> <li>Stern, <i>Guidebook</i>, pp. 85-100</li> </ul>
6	Feb. 8	Self-Consciousness: Stoicism, Skepticism, and the Unhappy Consciousness <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Hegel, <i>Phenomenology</i>, §§ 197-230 (pp. 117-135)</li> <li>Stern, <i>Guidebook</i>, pp. 100-113</li> </ul>
7	Feb. 15	Observing Reason: The Natural Sciences <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Hegel, <i>Phenomenology</i>, §§ 231-255 (pp. 136-152)</li> <li>Stern, <i>Guidebook</i>, pp. 114-127</li> <li>Recommended: Hegel, <i>Philosophy of Nature</i>, §§ 247-250 (pp. 13-24)</li> </ul>
	Feb. 22	Reading Week
8	Feb. 29	Observing Reason: The Cognitive Sciences <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Hegel, <i>Phenomenology</i>, §§ 298-346 (pp. 174-203)</li> <li>Stern, <i>Guidebook</i>, pp. 127-132</li> </ul>

9	Mar. 7	Reason in Action: Normativity's Sociohistorical Context <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hegel, <i>Phenomenology</i>, §§ 347-437 (pp. 203-252)</li> <li>• Stern, <i>Guidebook</i>, pp. 133-135</li> </ul>
10	Mar. 14	Spirit: Classical Greece and Rome <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hegel, <i>Phenomenology</i>, §§ 437-482 (pp. 253-281)</li> <li>• Stern, <i>Guidebook</i>, pp. 156-168</li> </ul>
11	Mar. 21	Spirit: The Enlightenment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hegel, <i>Phenomenology</i>, §§ 537-595 (pp. 313-347)</li> <li>• Stern, <i>Guidebook</i>, pp. 173-190</li> </ul>
12	Mar. 28	Spirit: Kantian Morality and the Beautiful Soul <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hegel, <i>Phenomenology</i>, §§ 596-671 (pp. 347-389).</li> <li>• Stern, <i>Guidebook</i>, pp. 191-207</li> </ul>
13	Apr. 4	Absolute Knowing: The Dialectics of History and Its Legacy Today <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hegel, <i>Phenomenology</i>, §§ 788-808 (pp. 455-467)</li> <li>• Stern, <i>Guidebook</i>, pp. 222-229</li> <li>• Žižek, <i>The Most Sublime Hysteric: Hegel with Lacan</i>, excerpts</li> <li>• Bandom, "Untimely Review of Hegel's <i>Phenomenology of Spirit</i>"</li> </ul>

# Course Procedures and Policies

## *Professionalism*

I require that students maintain a professional attitude toward the class and their peers. This entails doing all readings before each session, paying attention during lectures, participating in discussions, completing in-class exercises, arriving on time, not leaving early, and being respectful.

## *Email Communication*

The subject line should include the course number and the nature of the inquiry. I do my best to respond within 2 weekdays. Please refrain from resending the inquiry or asking about its status before the timeframe has passed. If it has passed without a reply, feel free to reach out with a friendly reminder. Should it be an urgent matter, indicate so in the subject line. That way, I can prioritize getting back to you. Kindly note that UFV's Instructional Responsibilities Policy 46 states that "Instructors are not expected to respond to student emails on weekends or statutory holidays."

## *AI Use*

Students are strictly prohibited from using generative AI for any requirements. In alignment with UFV's Student Academic Misconduct Policy 70, it "shall be an offense knowingly to [...] submit academic work for assessment that was purchased or acquired from another source." This includes work created by generative AI tools.

## *Essay Drafts*

I appreciate the eagerness to learn students display when asking for feedback on essay drafts. However, I must respectfully inform you that I cannot provide this service. Reviewing academic work for some students and not others creates an uneven playing field that is contrary to the principle of fairness that I uphold myself to. I encourage you to make use of my office hours for any specific questions or concerns you may have regarding your essays. For general help on essay writing, the [Academic Success Centre](#) offers [individual tutoring](#) and [writing support tools](#). If you need assistance with references, please consult the [Citation Style Guides](#) developed by the [Library](#) or [request an appointment](#) with a librarian.

## *Late Essays*

Any essay handed in late will be penalized by 5% per day for a maximum of 5 days. Late essays submitted after this period will not be accepted, except under extenuating circumstances.

### *Rewrites*

While I admire the dedication to academic success students show when they request a rewrite, I do not permit any rewrites. It is inequitable to offer some students and not others the opportunity to improve their grades. I encourage you to make use of my office hours throughout the term for any specific questions or concerns you may have regarding course material, learning outcomes, and requirements. Once again, the [Academic Success Centre](#) and the [Library](#) offer personalized support in the form of [tutoring](#) and [consultation, writing support tools](#), and [Citation Style Guides](#) to aid you in your studies. If you take advantage of all the resources available to you, you will be prepared for each requirement by its scheduled time or due date.

### *Grade Grubbing*

Grade grubbing is when a student requests, threatens, or pleads for a grade increase for no legitimate academic reason. Instances include asking or begging for a grade bump, seeking preferential treatment, disputing grades on subjective rather than objective criteria, or seeking to complete requirements long after they were scheduled or due. The course syllabus clearly articulates students' responsibilities in demonstrating learning outcomes through the listed requirements, the grading scheme, and policies regarding missed exams or late essays. There will be no grade changes that are not rightfully earned.



*"When philosophy paints its grey in grey, a shape of life has grown old, and it cannot be rejuvenated, but only recognized, by the grey in grey of philosophy; the owl of Minerva begins its flights only with the onset of dusk."*

— G.W.F. Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, Preface