

***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. We will transition in the works of the 1980s by way of "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 and the famous discussion of the "gift" in *Given Time*. Next we will read "The Force of Law," Derrida's landmark paper of 1989 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 analyze the famous saying "Every other is wholly other" in *The Gift of Death*, negative theology ("How Not to Speak: Denials" and "*Sauf le nom—Post-scriptum*"), the gift (*Given Time*), and then take up *Rogues*, an important discourse on the "democracy to come" which introduces us to the trope of "auto-immunity." *Specters of Marx* is 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 course 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 now classic commentary.

*Required Texts*

Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, corrected edition, trans. Gayatri Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997)

Jacques Derrida, *Psyche*, (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2007)

Jacques Derrida, *Acts of Religion*, ed. Gil Anidjar (New York and London: Routledge, 2002).

Jacques Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, trans. David Wills (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

Jacques Derrida, *Given Time, I: Counterfeit Money*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

Jacques Derrida, *Rogues* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2005)

Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge, 1994).

Jacques Derrida, *The Beast and the Sovereign* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, )

Jacques Derrida, *Learning to Living Finally* (Hoboken, NJ: Melville House, 2007)

### *Office Hours (HL 506)*

I have scheduled office hours—Tuesday, 3:45-5:30, Wednesday, 1:00-4:15—but you should, for safety's sake, make an appt in advance by email at [johncaputo@comcast.net](mailto:johncaputo@comcast.net).

### *Course Requirements*

(1) Seminar Participation (20%)

(2) 2 Research Papers (40% each) (4,000-4,500 words each): For your first paper you should make a more detailed study of any of the particular figures or issues that are addressed in the seminars. For the second paper, you may do that again, with another figure or issue, or take up a related issue that I am not addressing in class.

#### *Paper #1:*

September 29: Statement of topic due

Oct. 27: Paper due

#### *Paper #2:*

Nov. 10 Statement of topic

Dec. 10 Paper due

## Syllabus

September 1	Orientation; <i>Of Grammatology</i> , pp. 1-164
8	OG (con't)
15	OG (con't)
22	OG (concluded)
29	"Psyche: Inventions of the Other," in <i>Psyche</i> , pp.1-47 Statement of Topic, Paper #1
October 6	<i>Given Time</i> , ch. 1
13	"Force of Law," <i>Acts of Religion</i> , pp.
20	<i>Gift of Death</i> , chs. 3-4
27	<i>Rogues</i> Paper #1 Due
November 3	<i>Rogues</i> (concluded)

- 10      *Specters of Marx*, ch. 1  
Statement of Topic, Paper #2
- 17      *The Beast and the Sovereign*, Sessions 1-4
- 24      Thanksgiving
- December 1      *The Beast and the Sovereign*, Sessions 5-10
- 8      *The Beast and the Sovereign*, Sessions 11-13;  
*Learning to Living Finally*
- 10      Paper #2 Due