In 1886, Friedrich Engels wrote a perfectly mediocre book, *Ludwig Feuerbach and the Outcome of Classical German Philosophy*, which nevertheless managed to raise a fascinating and important question that is still being debated today: how should we go about evaluating the legacy of German Idealism following the mid-nineteenth century breakdown of the Hegelian system? For Engels, the answer was relatively simple: the rightful heir of classical German philosophy was Marx’s doctrine of historical materialism. But, in truth, Engels’ response was merely one of many possible approaches. Nor would it be much of an exaggeration to claim that, in the twentieth-century, there is hardly a philosopher worth reading who has not sought to define him or herself via a confrontation with the legacy of Kant and Hegel.

Classical German Philosophy – Kant, Fichte, Hegel, and Schelling – has bequeathed a rich legacy of reflection on the fundamental problems of epistemology, ontology and aesthetics. Even contemporary thinkers who claim to have transcended it (e.g., poststructuralists such as Foucault and Derrida) cannot help but make reference to it in order to validate their post-philosophical standpoints and claims.

Our approach to this very rich material will combine a reading of the canonical texts of German Idealism (e.g., Kant and Hegel) with a sustained and complementary focus on major twentieth-century thinkers who have sought to establish their originality via a critical reading of Hegel and his heirs: Alexandre Kojève, Martin Heidegger, Michel Foucault, Theodor Adorno, and Jürgen Habermas.

The course will primarily focus on the nexus between philosophy, reason, and, autonomy. We will also examine the substantive arguments that the school’s leading representatives have set forth, with special attention to the “healing” role of both reason and the aesthetic dimension. If thought and being are sundered in real life, art and reason offer the prospect of making the world whole once more. Thus, in German Classical philosophy, aesthetic consciousness often plays what one might describe as a *redemptory* or *reconciliatory* function.

In his “Discourse on Language” Foucault warns us appositely that, “Truly to escape Hegel involves an exact appreciation of the price we have to pay to detach ourselves from him. It assumes that we are aware of the extent to which Hegel, insidiously perhaps, is close to us; it implies a knowledge that permits us to think against Hegel, of that which remains Hegelian. Thus we have to determine the extent to which our anti-Hegelianism is possibly one of his tricks directed against us, at the end of which he stands, motionless, waiting for us.” Foucault’s
insightful caveat will, in many respects, function as our interpretive watchword as we seek to decode and reconstruct German Idealism and its innovative contemporary legacies. * ***

Booklist:

J. Schmidt, What is Enlightenment?

** Pinkard, German Philosophy, 1760-1860**

Kant, Political Writings (Cambridge)

Kant, Critique of Pure Reason (Kemp Smith translation)

Hegel, Phenomenology of Spirit (Miller translation)

Hegel, Aesthetics (Knox translation)

Schiller, Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man

Schelling, System of Transcendental Idealism

Löwith, From Hegel to Nietzsche

Bowie, Aesthetics and Subjectivity: From Kant to Nietzsche

Tucker, ed., Marx-Engels Reader

Beiser, Enlightenment, Romanticism and Revolution

Heidegger, “Letter on Humanism” and “Origins of the Work of Art,” in Basic Writings

Wolin, ed., The Heidegger Controversy: A Critical Reader

Adorno, Lectures on Negative Dialectics (Polity)

Habermas, Philosophical Discourse of Modernity

* *** Note on the Heidegger Black Notebooks Conference, September 11 & 12

Last March, the editor of Heidegger’s Collected Works, Klostermann Verlag, published three volumes of Heidegger’s philosophical notebooks from the 1930s and early 1940s – the so-called Black Notebooks. Since their appearance six months ago, the Black Notebooks, which total 1300 pages, have become an object of far-reaching international controversy – predominantly owing to the prevalence of Heidegger’s pro-Nazi sentiments.

On September 11 and 12, an international conference, on the Black Notebooks, featuring six renown Heidegger scholars, will be held at the Graduate Center. (I am the conference organizer). Under the circumstances, it only makes sense to integrate the conference into the structure of our course. For this reason, we will devote our first class discussion to issues relevant to Heidegger’s work, as it is framed by the conference themes. Since the Black Notebooks remain untranslated, we will concentrate on texts that are related to the way in which philosophy and politics intersected in Heidegger’s work during the 1920s and 1930s. Needless to say, you are strongly encouraged to attend the conference. I have included the conference schedule on the last page of the syllabus.

** Pinkard’s book, German Philosophy, 1760-1860: The Legacy of Idealism, offers the best overview of German Idealism from Kant through Schelling. I urge you to purchase it and utilize it as an interpretive key. I have assigned several chapters as secondary reading.
General Requirements: regular class attendance; class participation; class report (optional); final writing assignment

Weekly Assignments:

Sept. 1: Labor Day

Sept. 8: Introduction (N.B.: see note on last page of syllabus concerning GC Heidegger conference on 11 & 12 September)

Sept. 15: Reason, Autonomy, and Freedom: Debating the Enlightenment
J. Schmidt, What is Enlightenment? (Selections)
Kant, Political Writings (selections)
Habermas, “Modernity’s Need for Self-Reassurance,” Philosophical Discourse of Modernity, 1-22

Kant, Critique of Pure Reason, Prefaces, Introduction
Pinkard, German Philosophy, 1-80

Sept. 29: Hegel and the Idea of a Phenomenology of Spirit
Phenomenology of Spirit: Preface, Introduction, “Consciousness” (Sense Certainty, Perception, Force, Self-Consciousness)
Pinkard, German Philosophy, 214-304
Recommended: M. Forster, Hegel’s Idea of a Phenomenology of Spirit

Oct. 6: Kant versus Hegel: Practical Reason versus Objective Spirit
Kant, Groundwork of a Metaphysics of Morals
Hegel, Philosophy of Right, Preface, Part II “Morality”
Hegel, Phenomenology of Spirit, “Spirit in Self-Estrangement”
Habermas, “Morality and Ethical Life: Does Hegel’s Critique of Kant Apply to Discourse Ethics” (in Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action)
Habermas, “Hegel’s Concept of Modernity,” in Philosophical Discourse of Modernity, 23-44

Oct. 13: No classes scheduled

Oct. 20: The Aesthetic Dimension
Schiller, Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man (selection)
Hegel, Aesthetics, Introduction
Schelling, System of Transcendental Idealism (selection)
Bowie, *Aesthetics and Subjectivity*, 16-48, 140-182*
Pinkard, *German Philosophy*, 172-198

Oct. 27: Marx and the Confrontation with German Idealism
Lukács, “Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat,” *History and Class Consciousness*
L. Kolakowski, *Main Currents in Marxist Thought*, vol. I

Nov. 3: **Heidegger: Fundamental Ontology as a Critique of German Idealism**
Heidegger, *Being and Time* (selections)

Nov. 10: **The French Hegel**
Hegel, “Lordship and Bondage” (*Phenomenology of Spirit*)
Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*
Foucault, “Discourse on Language”
Heckman, “The French Hegel Renaissance”

Nov. 17: **Negative Dialectics**
Adorno, *Lectures on Negative Dialectics*
Adorno, *Negative Dialectics* (selections)
Marcuse, “A Note on Dialectics”

Nov. 24: work on papers

Dec. 1: work on papers

Dec. 8: **What is Postmetaphysical Thinking?**
Adorno, “Why Still Philosophy?” (*Critical Models*)
Habermas, “Themes in Postmetaphysical Thinking” (*Postmetaphysical Thinking*)
Habermas, “The Unity of Reason in the Plurality of Its Voices” (*Postmetaphysical Thinking*)

Dec. 15: Final Paper Due
Recommended Secondary Works

Beiser, *German Idealism*
Beiser, *The Fate of Reason*
Taylor, *Hegel*
Heine, *Religion and Philosophy in Germany*
Hyppolite, *Genesis and Structure of Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit*
Lukács, *The Destruction of Reason*
Marcuse, *Reason and Revolution*
Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*
Pippin, *Hegel’s Idealism: The Satisfactions of Self-Consciousness*
Pippin, *Idealism as Modernism*
Adorno, *Three Essays on Hegel*
Adorno, *Kierkegaard: The Construction of the Aesthetic*
Derrida, “From General to Restricted Economy: A Hegelianism without Reserve,” in *Writing and Difference*
Foucault, “Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?” in *The Foucault Reader*
Goldmann, *Lukács and Heidegger*

Written Assignment: Final papers are due on December 15. You are to choose a syllabus-related topic (in consultation with yours truly) and write a 12-15 page essay. The assignment is meant to be an “interpretive essay” rather than a full-blown “research paper.” By the same token, the essay should demonstrate extensive familiarity with the relevant secondary literature as well as the relevant conflict of interpretations. What matters is your capacity to discern and reconstruct the major interpretive standpoints, to evaluate the stronger and weaker arguments and positions, and to arrive at fresh conclusions that, ideally, will advance our understanding of the material

Some Quotes to Keep in Mind:

In politics, the Germans thought what other nations did. Germany was their theoretical conscience. The abstraction and presumption of its thought was always in step with the one-sidedness and lowliness of its reality. If, therefore, the status quo of German statehood expresses the completion of the ancien régime, the completion of the thorn in the flesh of the modern state, the status quo of German state science expresses the incompletion of the modern state, the defectiveness of its flesh itself.

Karl Marx, “Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right, Introduction”
Classical German philosophy . . . is able to think the deepest and most fundamental problems of the development of bourgeois society through to the very end – on the plane of philosophy. It is able – in thought – to complete the evolution of class. And – in thought – it is able to take all the paradoxes of its position to the point where the necessity of going beyond this historical stage in mankind’s development can at least be seen as a problem.

Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*

But truly to escape Hegel involves an exact appreciation of the price we have to pay to detach ourselves from him. It assumes that we are aware of the extent to which Hegel, insidiously perhaps, is close to us; it implies a knowledge, in that which permits us to think against Hegel, of that which remains Hegelian. We have to determine the extent to which our anti-Hegelianism is possibly one of his tricks directed against us, at the end of which he stands, motionless, waiting for us.

Foucault, “The Discourse on Language”

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Black Notebooks Conference

**11 September**, Proshansky Auditorium, 6:00, Film: Jeffrey van Davis, “Heidegger: Only A God Can Save Us” (followed by panel discussion)

**12 September**, Elebash Recital Hall, The Graduate Center, 34th and Fifth Avenue, New York

9:30: Opening Remarks: Richard Wolin

10:00 – 12:00
Karsten Harries (Yale University): “Nostalgia, Spite, and the Truth of Being”
Steven Crowell (Rice University): “Reading Heidegger’s *Black Notebooks*”

12:00 – 1:00 Lunch Break

1:00 – 3:00
Peter Trawny (University of Wuppertal): “Heidegger and the Myth of a Jewish World Conspiracy”
Sidonie Kellerer (University of Cologne): “Heidegger’s ‘Will to Power’ in the *Black Notebooks*”
3:00 Break

3:15 – 5:15
Emmanuel Faye (University of Rouen): “Anti-Semitism and Extermination: Heidegger, the *Collected Works*, and the *Black Notebooks*”
Thomas Sheehan (Stanford University): “Heidegger: The Greatest Philosopher of the Twentieth Century?”

5:15 – 5:30 Break

5:30 - 6:30 Concluding Remarks: Richard Wolin