

## **THE DEATH OF MAN: 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY FRENCH POLITICAL THOUGHT PLPT 8500, Fall 2020**

Monday 10:00am – 12:30pm on Zoom

Professor Kevin Duong

Virtual Office Hours: Monday 9:00-10:00am and by appointment

At the beginning of the twentieth century, French thinkers believed in “man” as a rational, rights-bearing creature. By the midcentury, that belief was dead. Two world wars, anticolonial resistance, and totalitarianism would shatter their faith in humanity’s capacity for reason, progress, and self-improvement. This seminar offers students a survey of twentieth century French political thought from the perspective of “the death of man.” We will explore how thinkers, from Catholics and anticolonial nationalists to structuralists and feminists, critiqued the idea of man. We will also study how these thinkers sought to redefine some of the basic concepts of politics—freedom, sovereignty, rights—without the idea of man. Our goal will be to understand the myriad currents of French thought, the better to understand the evolution of European political theory in the twentieth century. Students can also expect to study turning points of French history like the Algerian war, May 1968, and the rise of the New Right.

### **Required Materials**

All of the class readings will be made available online on Dropbox. At the beginning of the semester, a link will become available to students where they can download the semester’s readings.

### **Course Objectives and Expectations**

Assignments: Graduate students and workers will be responsible for completing each week’s readings and providing two short in-class presentations over the course of the semester. These presentations should briefly synthesize our conversation from the previous week, paying special attention to honor the contributions of fellow seminar participants. They contribute to the course participation grade.

At the end of the semester, graduate students and workers will also elect to either (a) write an 18-20 page research paper or (b) take a two-day miniature “comprehensive exam” covering the semester’s material. More details on these assignments will be provided in class.

Attendance: Though virtual, attendance is key for the seminar’s success. We will be moving through a large amount of material each week. Our class policy is that I ask no questions for the first absence. Beyond that first absence, students and workers should be able to provide an adequate justification, to be determined by the instructor. A person’s overall grade will be in jeopardy after four total absences.

Class Participation: Please note that participation is a substantial component of the course’s overall evaluation. Students and workers can ensure they receive maximum participation points by attending class, participating in class discussion, and by showing general attentiveness towards, including thoughtful responses to, their fellow classmates. If for any reason a student is concerned about their ability to do the above listed, please feel free to discuss the matter with me early in the semester.

**Course Evaluation:**

Participation: 40%  
Research paper or Final exam: 60%

**Other Matters:**

**Plagiarism:** Each student is expected to abide by the code of academic integrity. It is your responsibility to familiarize yourself with college policies regarding plagiarism and other violations of academic integrity, which will be strictly observed in this class. If work is found to be plagiarized, the student will receive an automatic failing grade in the class, and depending on the situation additional sanctions may be imposed by the university.

**Reasonable Accommodations for Students with Disabilities:** If you have a disability that may require assistance or accommodations, or if you have any questions related to any accommodation for testing, note taking, reading, etc., please speak with me as soon as possible. You may also contact the Student Disability Access Center at [SDAC@virginia.edu](mailto:SDAC@virginia.edu).

## Schedule of Readings

Readings and assignments are to be completed by their corresponding date. ‘Optional’ readings are additional selections that may improve your mastery of the material, but aren’t required. All required readings are available on Dropbox. Please read the assigned texts in the order they are listed.

### PART I: THE CRISIS OF ‘MAN’

#### WEEK 1-2: Modern ‘Man’ and its Early Challengers

- Aug 31:** John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (43-65)  
René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy* (pp. 8-24)  
“The Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen”
- Sep 7:** Auguste Comte, “Course on Positivist Philosophy”  
G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit* (pp. 111-19)  
Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel* (pp. 31-70)  
Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science* (pp. 181-82)  
Mark Greif, *The Age of the Crisis of Man: Thought and Fiction in America, 1933-1973* (pp. ix-25)
- Optional: Robert Nisbet, “The French Revolution and the Rise of Sociology in France”  
Lorraine J. Daston, “Rational Individuals versus Laws of Society: From Probability to Statistics”  
Robert Pippin, *Hegel’s Idealism: The Satisfactions of Self-Consciousness*  
William Connolly, *Political Theory and Modernity* (pp. 1-15, 137-175)  
Stefanos Geroulanos, *An Atheism That is Not Humanist Emerges in French Thought* (pp. 37-48, 130-172)

### PART II: REINVENTING HUMANISM

#### WEEK 3: Existentialism is a Humanism

- Sep 14:** Jean-Paul Sartre, “Existentialism: A Clarification”  
Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism is a Humanism* (pp. 17-54)  
Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (pp. 283-5, 292-5)  
Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology* (pp. 252-71)  
Jean-Paul Sartre, “Preface,” in Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (pp. 7-31)  
Edward Baring, “Humanist Pretensions: Catholics, Communists, and Sartre’s Struggle for Existentialism in Postwar France”
- Optional: Mark Poster, *Existential Marxism in Postwar France*  
Paige Arthur, *Unfinished Projects: Decolonization and the Philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre*

Yoav Di-Capua, *No Exit: Arab Existentialism, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Decolonization*

WEEK 4: The Catholic Reformulation of Humanism

- Sep 21:** Emmanuel Mounier, *Personalism* (pp. xv-xxviii, 17-32, 97-123)  
 Jacques Maritain, "The Person and the Common Good"  
 Samuel Moyn, *Christian Human Rights* (pp. 65-100)
- Optional: Sandrine Sanos, *The Aesthetics of Hate: Far-Right Intellectuals, Antisemitism, and Gender in 1930s France* (pp. 15-42)  
 John Hellman, *Emmanuel Mounier and the New Catholic Left, 1930-1950*  
 James Chappel, "The Catholic Origins of Totalitarianism Theory in Interwar Europe"  
 Edward Baring, *Converts to the Real: Catholicism and the Making of Continental Philosophy*  
 Seth D. Armus, "The Eternal Enemy: Emmanuel Mounier's Esprit and French Anti-Americanism"

WEEK 5: Négritude's Reformulation of Humanism

- Sep 28:** Léopold Sédar Senghor, *Prose & Poetry* (pp. 96-100, 121-22)  
 Aimé Césaire, "Notebook of a Return to the Native Land"  
 Aimé Césaire, *A Discourse on Colonialism* (pp. 29-78)  
 Suzanne Césaire, "The Malaise of a Civilization"  
 Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (pp. 7-14, 210-22)  
 Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (pp. 311-316)  
 Gili Kliger, "Humanism and the Ends of Empire, 1945-1960"  
 Film: Gillo Pontecorvo, *The Battle of Algiers*
- Optional: Gary Wilder, *The French Imperial Nation-State: Négritude & Colonial Humanism Between the Two World Wars*  
 Gary Wilder, *Freedom Time: Negritude, Decolonization, and the Future of the World*  
 Donna Jones, *The Racial Discourses of Life Philosophy: Négritude, Vitalism, and Modernity*  
 Lilyan Kesteloot, *Black Writers in French: A Literary History of Negritude*  
 David Macey, *Frantz Fanon: A Biography*

**PART III: ANTI-HUMANIST TRADITIONS**

WEEK 6-7: Structuralism: Foundations

- Oct 5:** Camille Robcis, "Structuralism and the Return of the Symbolic"  
 Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Elementary Structures of Kinship* (pp. 3-11, 29-68, 478-497)

Claude Lévi-Strauss, "Race and History" (pp. 5-15, 20-23, 46-49)  
 Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques* (pp. 383-392)  
 Roland Barthes, "The Great Family of Man"

**Oct 12:** Jacques Lacan, "The Mirror Stage"  
 Louis Althusser, "Freud and Lacan"  
 Louis Althusser, *For Marx* (pp. ix-xiv, 187-208)  
 Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses"  
 Carolyn J. Dean, "Law and Sacrifice: Bataille, Lacan, and the Critique of the Subject"

Optional: Camille Robcis, "China in Our Heads: Althusser, Maoism, and Structuralism"  
 Mark Greif, *The Age of the Crisis of Man* (pp. 281-315)  
 Jonathan Culler, *Structuralist Poetics* (pp. 3-36)  
 Stefanos Geroulanos, *Transparency in Postwar France* (pp. 282-284, 294-99)  
 Stuart Hall, "Signification, Representation, Ideology: Althusser and the Post-Structuralist Debates"

WEEK 8: Rethinking Sex Without Man

**Oct 19:** Monique Wittig, *The Straight Mind and Other Essays* (pp. 1-45)  
 Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One* (pp. 23-33)  
 Hélène Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa"  
 Linda Zerilli, "The Trojan Horse of Universalism: Language as a 'War Machine' in the Writings of Monique Wittig"

Optional: Christine Delphy, "The Invention of French Feminism: An Essential Move"  
 Linda Zerilli, "A Process Without a Subject: Simone de Beauvoir and Julia Kristeva on Maternity"  
 Jacqueline Rose, *Sexuality and the Field of Vision*  
 Lori Marso, *Politics With Beauvoir: Freedom in the Encounter*

WEEK 9: Rethinking Authority Without Man

**Oct 26:** Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author" (pp. 142-8)  
 Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition* (pp. 60, 64-67)  
 Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality, Vol. 1* (pp. 17-25, 58-70)  
 Jacques Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* (pp. 1-18)  
 Jason Frank, "Logical Revolts: Jacques Rancière and Political Subjectivization"

Optional: William Connolly, "Beyond Good and Evil: The Ethical Sensibility of Michel Foucault"  
 Nancy Luxon, *Crisis of Authority: Politics, Trust, and Truth-Telling in Freud and Foucault*

WEEK 10: Rethinking Power Without Man

**Nov 2:** Michel Foucault, *Discipline & Punish* (pp. 3-17, 195-211)  
 Michel Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended* (pp. 1-40)  
 Michel Foucault, "Truth and Power"  
 Wendy Brown, "Power After Foucault"

Optional: Michael Behrent, "Liberalism Without Humanism: Michel Foucault and the Free-Market Creed, 1976-1979"  
 Daniel Zamora and Michael C. Behrent, eds. *Foucault and Neoliberalism*

WEEK 11: Rethinking Democracy Without Man

**Nov 9:** Cornelius Castoriadis, "Presentation of *Socialisme ou Barbarie*"  
 Cornelius Castoriadis, "On the Content of Socialism"  
 Claude Lefort, "The Image of the Body and Totalitarianism"  
 Claude Lefort, "The Question of Democracy"  
 Jacques Rancière, "Who is the Subject of the Rights of Man?"

Optional: Warren Breckman, *Adventures of the Symbolic: Postmarxism and Radical Democracy*  
 Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*

WEEK 12: The Death of Man? May 1968

**Nov 16:** Alissa J. Rubin "May 1968"  
 Revolutionary Action Committee, "Reforms No, Revolution Yes"  
 Jeunesse Communiste Révolutionnaire, "Workers! Students!"  
 Situationists, "Address to All Workers"  
 Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things* (pp. 384-87)  
 Michel Foucault, "Preface to Anti-Oedipus"  
 Julian Bourg, *From Revolution to Ethics: May 1968 and Contemporary French Thought* (pp. 3-42, 112-24)  
 Film: Jean-Luc Godard, *La chinoise*

Optional: Kristin Ross, *May '68 and its Afterlives*  
 Todd Shepard, *Sex, France, and Arab Men, 1962-1979* (pp. 226-271)

WEEK 13: The Far Right and Nostalgia for "Man"

**Nov 24:** Alain de Benoist, "Manifesto for a European Renaissance"

Optional: Jacob Collins, *The Anthropological Turn: French Political Thought after 1968* (pp. 37-78)  
 Camille Robcis, "Catholics, the 'Theory of Gender,' and the Turn to the Human in France: A New Dreyfus Affair?"