POTENTIALITY AND NORMATIVITY
AUGUST 10–12, 2011, UNIVERSITÉ DE MONTRÉAL

Pavillon Lionel-Groulx
3150 Jean-Brillant

The welcome, coffee breaks and reception will take place in room C-2083 of the Lionel-Groulx building. All talks will take place in room C-2059.

Wednesday, August 10, 2011 — Chair: Thomas Khurana

9:00–10:00 Coffee and pastries
Welcome

10:00–11:00 Francisco Gonzalez (Ottawa)
*Actuality or Activity? Aristotle and Heidegger on the Dynamic Being of Life*

11:15–12:15 Iain Macdonald (Montréal)
*Heidegger and Marx*

12:15–1:45 Lunch (on your own)

1:45–2:45 Will Roberts (McGill)
*Heidegger’s Political Anthropology: Potentiality vs. Normativity?*

3:00–4:00 Dirk Setton (Frankfurt am Main)
*A Right to the Real: The Being of Potentiality in Aristotle, Heidegger, and Sartre*

4:00–4:30 Coffee and snacks

4:30–5:30 Walter Brogan (Villanova)
*Thinking Potentiality apart from Actuality: Agamben on Aristotelian Dunamis and the Logic of Sovereignty*

5:30–7:30 Wine and cheese reception

Thursday, August 11, 2011 — Chair: Dirk Setton

9:00–9:30 Coffee and pastries

9:30–10:30 Thomas Khurana (Chicago/Frankfurt am Main)
*The Potentiality of Habit: On the Reality of the Possible in Hegel*
10:30–11:30  Francesca Raimondi (Frankfurt am Main)
The Potentiality of Realization: Hegelian Perspectives

11:45–12:45  Kieran Aarons (DePaul):
‘Claws of Absolute Necessity’: Deleuze and the Involuntarist Image of Thought

12:45–2:15  Lunch (on your own)

2:15–3:15  Claudie Hamel (Montréal)
The Anatomy of the New: Adorno and Laplanche

3:30–4:30  David Weber (Potsdam)
Subject’s Potential, Breast’s Enigma: Jean Laplanche on Primal Seduction and the Afterwardsness of Translation

5:00–6:00  Maxime Doyon (McGill)
Intentionality and Normativity: A Phenomenological Look at McDowell’s Latest Proposal

Friday, August 12, 2011 — Chair: Iain Macdonald

9:30–10:00  Coffee and pastries

10:00–11:00  Borhane Blili-Hamelin (Columbia)
Forbidding what Ought to Be

11:15–12:15  Pierre-Francois Noppen (Montréal)
Adorno’s Materialist Metaphysics: Beyond the Oxymoron

12:15–1:45  Lunch (on your own)

1:45–2:45  Xander Selene (Montréal)
Artistic Truth-Potential (Wellmer) versus Art-Truth Potentiality (Adorno)

3:00–4:00  Phil Buckley (McGill)
Husserl and Heidegger on the Structure of Religious Life

4:00–4:30  Coffee and snacks

4:30–5:30  Marie-Eve Morin (Alberta):
The Time of the Im-possible in Derrida

7:30–     Banquet at Ouzeri
          4690 St-Denis, Montréal
Kieran Aarons (DePaul), “Claws of Absolute Necessity”: Deleuze and the Involuntarist Image of Thought

The essential coordinates of Deleuze’s irrational logic of the outside are comprised of two dimensions—involuntarism in truth, involuntarism in politics. The same order of necessity that forces us to think, and which enacts the enabling condition of philosophy, enacts the condition of politics no less. In both cases, the critical injunction is the same: Deleuze calls us to dispense from the outset with any innate disposition that could guarantee us what we want in advance. This critique of dogmatic voluntarism is linked to a distinctive concept of evaluation in thought, and a new relation between activity and passivity, according to which the “activation” of our facultative powers is inseparable from the eruption and development of possible worlds.

Reading suggestions:

- Gilles Deleuze, Proust and Signs, Chapter One, “The Types of Signs.”
- Gilles Deleuze, Difference and Repetition, Chapter Three, “The Image of Thought.”
- Gilles Deleuze, Two Regimes of Madness, “May ’68 Did Not Take Place,” pp.233-236.

Borhane Bili Hamelin (Columbia), Forbidding what Ought to Be

Adorno’s concept of Bann, of the “magical spell,” is a possible answer to the question of what makes the correction of wrong social arrangements impossible — the correction of their normative failure, their failure to be as they ought to be. Very broadly, his account of this concept takes the form of explaining how contingent world arrangements — i.e. actuality — force individual behaviour into sacrificing the possibility of a genuine satisfaction of their interests for the sake of making their actual lives liveable. For the purposes of our workshop, this means that the problem of the priority of actuality over possibility is tied to the problem of correcting the normative failure of social arrangements. A first peculiarity of Adorno’s account of the concept of Bann is that it takes as its starting point an analysis of animal behaviour. On this view, the problem of how actuality might block the possibility of correcting its normative failure has natural, pre-human roots. The first part of my presentation is an attempt at making explicit these natural roots. From there, Adorno’s account tries to make sense of how the introduction of the capacity of reflection, though it has the potential to overcome the Bann pattern found in animal behaviour, actually functions to reinforce that pattern. This second problem, which I go
on to discuss, is the problem of what might make impossible the correction of normative failure properly speaking.

Reading suggestions:

- Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, part 3, chapter 2: “World Spirit and Natural History,” especially the paragraphs entitled “Bann” ["The Spell"] and “Regression unterm Bann” [“Regression under the Spell”].

Walter Brogan (Villanova), *Thinking Potentiality apart from Actuality: Agamben on Aristotelian Dunamis and the Logic of Sovereignty*

I will be drawing from chapter 3 of Giorgio Agamben’s *Homo Sacer* and part 3 of his *Potentialities*. In the background will be Heidegger’s reading of the co-primordiality of potentiality and actuality as together constituting one of the many senses of being in Aristotle’s philosophy. I will be dealing with the treatment by both authors of impotentiality and steresis as central to Aristotle’s concept of potentiality and thus to Aristotle’s ontology. Finally, I will trace in the paper the difference between Heidegger’s and Agamben’s reading of Aristotle on potentiality and suggest the political implications of this difference with regard to the notion of sovereignty and political power.

Reading suggestions:

- Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, ch. 3.

Philip Buckley (McGill), *Husserl and Heidegger on the Structure of Religious Life*

Hegel famously claims in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* that “Philosophy is itself, worship; it is religion.” In this paper, I want to suggest that such a claim could also have been uttered by Husserl or Heidegger in the early 1920’s. As in the case of Hegel, however, exactly what such a statement would intend is by no means unambiguous. In the first part of the paper, I outline some of the positive aspects, and also some of the dangers, of Husserl’s analogy between phenomenology and religion that are captured in his fundamentally ambiguous description of phenomenological life as *Venunftglauben* in the *Kaizo* articles from 1922–23. In the second part, I turn to Heidegger’s interpretation of the “formally indicative” nature of religious language in his 1920–21 lecture course on the phenomenology of religion. The aim of this working paper is to uncover in what similar (and different) ways Husserl and Heidegger see an analysis of religious life as containing unique possibilities for unlocking a more general phenomenological understanding of the experience of life itself.
Maxime Doyon (McGill), Intentionality and Normativity: A Phenomenological Look at McDowell’s Latest Proposal

This presentation will take a critical look—from a phenomenological point of view—at the thesis put forward by J. McDowell in his 2009 essay “Avoiding the Myth of Given.” I will begin by elucidating the sense in which McDowell’s latest position improves on Mind in World before explaining why I think his account of the normative is still problematic, because too narrowly conceived.

Reading suggestions:


Francisco Gonzalez (Ottawa), Actuality or Activity? Aristotle and Heidegger on the Dynamic Being of Life

A central thesis of Heidegger’s existential analysis in Being and Time is that possibility is to be ranked higher than actuality. This evident overturning of the Aristotelian priority is the result of an intensive study of Aristotle during the 1920’s through which Heidegger seeks to recover from Aristotle’s account of the being of motion a dynamic conception of being opposed to the conception of being as presence which has been the Aristotelian legacy to the subsequent philosophical tradition. In considering some of Heidegger’s detailed readings of key Aristotelian texts that form the basis of his interpretation (giving particular attention to several important unpublished seminars), the present paper seeks to challenge this interpretation by showing that it fails to grasp both the being and the temporality of energeia and entelecheia. These terms, which can be translated as neither ‘actuality’ nor ‘activity’ (in the sense of a motion or process), point to an ontology situated beyond the opposition between possibility and actuality or between the not-yet-present and presence. Specifically, Aristotle, as witnessed most clearly by his account of the unmoved mover, can interpret the being of life as dynamic without being potential, as active without being in motion, as complete without being at an end, as existing fully and as a whole ‘now’ without being merely present, as encompassing the whole of time without being in time. Such an interpretation indeed suggests that what Aristotle makes prior to dunamis is not
‘actuality’ but something quite different and that therefore attempts like Heidegger’s to overturn or ‘destruct’ the Aristotelian priority might be missing their mark. The confrontation between Heidegger and Aristotle requires us in the end to ask: is an ontology of finitude and radical incompleteness the only alternative to the so-called ‘metaphysics of presence’?

Reading suggestions:

- Aristotle, *Physics* III, ch. 1-3; *Metaphysics* IX, ch. 6

Claudie Hamel (Montréal), *The Anatomy of the New: Adorno and Laplanche*

In the *Diskussionsprotokolle* of 1939, Adorno contends that “das Neue nicht in den Elementen, sondern in deren Konfiguration besteht” (p. 464). This implies that the quality of the New always exists in the elements as a potentiality, but that the New really becomes and realises itself only through a transformation of the elements’ relation to one another. Thus the New would already exist in what is old, its positivity waiting to be released from the reconfiguration of elements. But this release itself can only be an action of negation, in that only what is old can be determined, but not yet the New. “Das Neue kann nur negativ bestimmt werden, indem man sich kritisch zum alten verhält” (p. 466). This presentation attempts a qualitative leap (mutation) in the very definition of the elements rather than through their reconfiguration. It attempts to base the individual as Adorno conceived it on the positive epistemology of Laplanche, who deconstructs the Freudian idea of the drive, which he (Laplanche) describes as *biologising*. The aim is to circumscribe the positivity of the New that is missing in Adorno.

Reading suggestions:

Thomas Khurana (Frankfurt), The Potentiality of Habit: On the Reality of the Possible in Hegel

In contemporary debates it is often assumed that one is committed to the priority of actuality if one maintains that genuine potentiality needs to manifest itself as ‘real’ or ‘actual’. The paper argues that this inference is made much too quickly. It is in fact the attempt to free the thinking of potentiality from the priority thesis that makes it all the more necessary to conceive of ways in which potentiality as such might be ‘actual’ or ‘real’. In order to do so, the paper turns to a concrete form of ‘real potentiality’ that is analyzed in Hegel’s Encyclopaedia: habit. According to Hegel, habit formation establishes a ‘second nature’ in which spirit can begin to dwell freely. This process of habit-formation is not only an essential episode in the emergence of spirit, it also provides a first and paradigmatic form of the reality of potentiality in spirit. Against merely formal possibilities, habit establishes real possibilities and endows accidentality with a certain necessity. The paper discusses how to conceive of this process and whether this specific reality of potentiality amounts to a reduction of potentiality to actuality. It is argued that habit allows for a complex self-relation in which certain potentials are turned into actualities, but only by presupposing that a further potential is kept in reserve.

Reading suggestions:


Iain Macdonald (Montréal), Heidegger and Marx

Heidegger’s occasional mentions of Marx do not provide much in the way of detail and certainly do not amount to a full-fledged critique. Yet what little Heidegger does say allows us to fray a path to the heart of his thought, and more specifically to the following idea: the refusal of beyng (die Verweigerung des Seyns) is tied to the destruction of the usual (metaphysical) priority of actuality over possibility. The guiding questions of this paper are: how does Marx’s materialism remain tied to the metaphysics of actuality? How is the refusal of beyng involved in Heidegger’s rejection of Marx’s philosophy? Are there resources in the legacy of Marxian thinking that might allow us either to counter or to integrate at least some aspects of Heidegger’s critique of Marx? In pursuing these questions, one thing must be acknowledged from the outset: there is no such thing as “Heideggerian Marxism.”

Reading suggestions:

- Martin Heidegger, Contributions to Philosophy [Beiträge zur Philosophie], §§127, 169, 267, 271.
Marie-Eve Morin (Alberta), The Time of the Im-possible in Derrida

My presentation will focus on the temporality of Derrida’s à-venir and its relation to the various figures of the Im-possible. With the help of Kierkegaard and Levinas, I will argue that the à-venir is not a kind of future but a (paradoxical) kind of “present.” The Im-possible is for Derrida a “present” without presence, a non-actual present, but one that is still effective. I will then contrast this experience of the Im-possible with that of death (as possibility) in Heidegger’s Being and Time.

Reading suggestions:
- Martin Heidegger, Being and Time, §54.
- Jacques Derrida, Aporias.
- Jacques Derrida, Rogues, especially the Preface and §8.

Pierre-François Noppen (Montréal), Adorno’s Materialist Metaphysics: Beyond the Oxymoron.

In his 1965 lecture Metaphysics: Concept and Problems, Adorno makes the striking claim that metaphysics has passed into the material layer of things. In my paper, I will try to develop what specific conception of the metaphysical can support such a claim.

Reading suggestions:
Francesca Raimondi (Frankfurt), The Potentiality of Realization: Hegelian Perspectives

The paper argues that the critique of the Aristotelian model of the relation between *dynamis* and *energeia* should not be restricted to a rethinking of potentiality; rather, it has to rethink actuality as well. More precisely, I argue that a rejection of the Aristotelian model with respect to human capacities and freedom should conceive actuality not as the proof of some pre-existing potentiality, but as the place where new potentialities are brought into being. I take the notion of “actualization” in Hegel’s *Philosophy of Right* and especially its Introduction as an attempt to give an original account of this circular relationship between potentiality and actuality. I will therefore explore the Hegelian way of conceiving the process of realization, and discuss its possible strengths but also its limits.

Reading suggestions:


Will Roberts (McGill), Heidegger’s Political Anthropology: Potentiality vs. Normativity?

Heidegger’s 1924 lecture course on the *Basic Concepts of Aristotelian Philosophy* set forth, through readings of Aristotle’s Rhetoric, Politics, and Physics, the rudiments of what I will call a political anthropology. Human existence, on this account, is prudential, in that we pursue ends that seem good to us by means that seem likely to achieve those ends. It is linguistic, in that the ends that we pursue, and the means we use to do so, appear to us as already articulated in a common system of signs, and hence both as communicable and as subject to disagreement and argument. It is political, finally, insofar as communication of, and disagreement and argument about, ends and means indicates to all that the achievement of our ends is dependent upon the actions of others, who might help or hinder us, and that there can be no certainty about how these others will act. This political anthropology, in short, draws attention both to the importance of community for human existence and to the centrality of conflict and strategy to any human community. Most normative political theorists who address this Heideggerian political anthropology take it to imply that either a) everyone ought to participate in politics, or b) that political activity is, or should be, fulfilling. But the most influenced by Heidegger’s lectures—Hannah Arendt and Leo Strauss—evidence some predilection for particularism, or at least a strong skepticism about universal prescriptive claims. I examine and defend this predilection. The upshot of Heidegger’s political anthropology ought to be an interest in institutional structure (or, what are sometimes called questions of feasibility) and a lack of interest in—or criticism of—normative theory.
Reading suggestions:
  ❖ Martin Heidegger, *Basic Concepts of Aristotelian Philosophy*, chapter 2.

**Xander Selene (Montréal), Artistic Truth-Potential (Wellmer) versus Art-Truth Potentiality (Adorno)**

In his reading of Adorno’s *Aesthetic Theory*, Albrecht Wellmer claims that the truth of art is more of a *truth potential* than actual truth. Wellmer develops the notion of the artistic truth potential in two directions. Firstly, art is faithful to a future reconciled reality that does not exist, but *could* exist and *should* exist. Secondly, art’s truth is potential only because art alone cannot register truth adequately and so requires the cooperation of philosophy, also helpless to realize truth on its own. The paper seeks to show that, despite some very convincing textual support from *Aesthetic Theory*, potentiality as Adorno understands it enters into art not in this but in a very different way.

Reading suggestions:

**Dirk Setton (Frankfurt), A Right to the Real: The Being of Potentiality in Aristotle, Heidegger, and Sartre**

Although the idea of anti-Aristotelian approaches to the concept of potentiality seems familiar, the line of reasoning which could arrive at a thought of genuine potentiality is not. The aim of this paper consists in reconstructing the outlines of such an argument against Aristotle’s claim of priority of actuality. With reference to Heidegger and Sartre, the attempt is to show that the idea of self-conscious existence implies the concept of inner negativity of this being (a being that is its own non-being), and therewith the double insight that its reality lies in its potentiality and its potentiality in a “right to the real.”

Reading Suggestions:
David Weber (Potsdam), Subject’s Potential, Breast’s Enigma: Jean Laplanche on Primal Seduction and the Afterwardsness of Translation

Elaborating a bit on Laplanche’s theory of primal repression and primal seduction as a theory of the constitution of the (psychoanalytic) subject, the paper will try to conceive of actualization not as the realization of a (pre-given) potential (as in, for instance: a mature human being would have developed the potential of her biological, phylogenetic, or generic origin), but rather as the (structurally necessary) setting up of a “front” (the “ego”), which comes about only as the result of a process (transference), that tries to cope, symbolically, with the internal foreign body (“source-object”) of the primal repressed. Actualization of subject’s potential would then never be “really,” or “fully,” accomplished but the subject would remain driven to re-actualize by re-translating its interiorized source-object. Actualization as transference, or rather: transference of transference.

Reading suggestions: