International Conference:

Thinking through Crisis: Society, Psyche, and Politics

University of Crete,
Students' Cultural Center "Xenia", Nikolaou Psarrou 46, Rethymno,
June 12-14, 2019.

Conveners: Konstantinos Kavoulakos (Department of Philosophy and Social Studies, University of Crete),
Noëlle McAfee (Department of Philosophy, Emory University),
Cynthia Willett (Department of Philosophy, Emory University).

Program

12 June 2019, Wednesday

10:00-10:30 a.m. Welcome and Introductions

10:30 a.m-1:00 p.m.   Historicism, Determinism, and Crisis
- Georges Faraklas, "Retrospective explanation and the philosophy of history"
- Konstantinos Kavoulakos, "Crisis and Praxis in Lukács's Marxism of the 1920s"
- Andrew Feenberg, "A Note on Lukács's Concepts of Nature"

1:00-2:30 p.m. Lunch Break

2:30-5:00 p.m. Psyche, Society, and Time
- Denise Ferreira da Silva, "Notes Towards the End of Time"
- Noëlle McAfee, "Ghosts and their Avatars: What Haunts the Public Sphere in Dark Times?"
- Eduardo Mendieta, "Digital Kairos: The Time of the Political and Cyber-Truth"

GROUP DINNER

13 June 2019, Thursday

10:00 a.m. -12:30 p.m. Political Economy
- Christoph Henning, "Financialization and the rise of Populism: Understanding the links"
- Stavros Tombazos, "Global Crisis and economic perspectives in Greece"
- Albena Azmanova, "Populism and the Crisis of the-crisis-of-capitalism"

12:30-1:45 p.m. Lunch Break

1:45-3:30 p.m. Disaster Ethics and the End of Ontology
- Stefan Boettcher and Cynthia Willett, "The Physics of Radical Contingency and Moral Decision-Making"
- Dorothea Olkowski, "Deleuze and Peirce, Physics and the Crisis of Ontology"

3:30-3.45p.m. Coffee Break

3.45-5.30 p.m. Populism and Migration
- James Winchester, "Refugees in an Age of Anger"
- Sunita Manian, "India's Rape Crisis: At the Crossroads of Nationalism, Gender and Sexuality"

14 June 2019, Friday

10:00 a.m.-12:30 p.m. Narratives and Political Challenges of Crisis
- Yannis Stavrakakis & Antonis Galanopoulos "Discursive Uses of 'Abnormality' in the Greek Crisis"
- Angelos Kontogiannis-Mandros, "Democracy's populist moment: Remarks on the 'squares' movement' and its impact"
- Karolos Kavoulakos, "Crisis as a crisis of social movement theories"

12:30-1:00 p.m. Closing Session

ABSTRACTS (ALPHABETICAL BY FIRST AUTHOR)

1. Albena Azmanova, "Populism and the Crisis of the-crisis-of-capitalism"
In brief: I will be addressing the impasse the Left is facing in responding to the upsurge of populism. The Left is stuck on issues of equality and inclusion (what I call 'relational domination', one rooted in unequal distribution of power), inadvertently validating the socio-political model within which equality and inclusion is being sought. Thus, it is failing to address grievances related to the systemic logic of capitalism ('systemic domination') -- thus turning the crisis into a new normal ('crisis of crisis').

2. Stefan Boettcher and Cynthia Willett, "The Physics of Radical Contingency and Moral Decision-Making" The volatility of critical systems pervades economic, ecological, and even evolutionary dynamics. Yet the radical contingency of volatile human environments has not reached philosophical analyses of moral discourse. Through physical modeling, we ask: what kind of ethical agency emerges in critical systems inflected by what we define as their

inherent radical contingency? The philosophical framework that we will develop is intended to become the foundation for a more enlightened debate about the ethics of agency in volatile social, political, and legal environments. Given its pervasive impact on human experience, criticality demands from philosophical discourse new ways to think about ethics.

3. Georges Faraklas, "Retrospective explanation and the philosophy of history" If what we define as a 'crisis' is an event that the categories of thought that are available to us are unable to deal with, then it is something that we can only explain afterwards, once we acquire new concepts, the ones that this very event will eventually provide us with. Such an approach, I believe, could shed new light on what is meant by 'philosophy of history' from Hegel onwards. Given that philosophy of history is concerned with facts that we cannot foresee, every genuine historical event is a 'crisis', according to the aforementioned definition. Whilst a positivistic account of things necessarily focuses on facts we *can* predict, as is the case in natural sciences, a historical account of things focuses on crises, therefore emerging in the form of a 'critical' theory, whose aim is to open our mind to the possibility not only of non-predictable facts but of non-predictable ways of thinking, as well. Marx's concept of *praxis* seems to embody the consequences of such a point of view.

4. Andrew Feenberg, "A Note on Lukács's Concepts of Nature" This paper addresses eco-Marxist criticism of Lukács's concept of nature in *History and Class Consciousness.* Lukács is said to have proposed a dualism of nature and society incompatible with ecology and environmentalism. The paper shows that Lukács's distinction between nature and society was primarily methodological rather than ontological. It does not pose an obstacle to a Western eco-Marxism.

5. Christoph Henning, "Financialization and the rise of Populism: Understanding the links" Recent research in financial sociology, political economy and critical theory suggests that within the Neoliberal turn, which could be dated back to the coup in Chile in 1973, a more recent event was the financialization of more and more social and economic fields (production, consumption, social security, or fiscal policy in general). Is it by chance that this sea change coincides with the recent rise of populist parties, both left and (mostly) right? If not, how can we make sense of the underlying connection? In order to see those links, financialization should not be treated as a mere "economic" phenomenon. It has social and political effects as well; only to mention the return of mechanisms of "primitive accumulation". If we interpret the political effects of a financialized economy as a decline of the political powers as we used to know them, then populism seems to be a comprehensible reaction that tries to re-open the field of politics (as suggested by French theories of "the political" in particular). At the same time, as a closer look at the history of populist movements in the 1920s may show, this very coincidence carries some

dangerous reductions and ambivalences – and these ambivalences may explain why within the rising populist sentiments, the "right wing"-fractions have gained an upper hand in so many instances. How can we come up with an interpretation that takes financialization and populism seriously without giving in to those ambivalences and reductions?

6. Karolos Kavoulakos, "Crisis and Praxis in Lukács's Marxism of the 1920s" During the ongoing so-called 'crisis' of the last ten years, a series of protests have emerged around the globe, usually labeled as 'anti- austerity movements', which have developed in ways that challenge dominant social movement theories. These theories have been established in the context of the 'affluent society' placing emphasis on the one hand on organizations and on the other on the leadership of social movements. At the same time, this body of knowledge overemphasizes the political character of collective mobilizations, which is understood as a conflict with clearly defined opponents, mainly the state, and as having an impact to already existing institutions and to the deepening of democracy. These explanatory frameworks, though, cannot read and conceptualize the social movements of the last decade, which have arisen within a context of protracted austerity and deep social inequalities. These mobilizations have most often been spontaneous as not relying upon pre-existing organizations and have had both a political and cultural impact: far from being claim-based, street protests mounted against the state, they developed instead at the local level along the line of prefigurative practices. Their impact upon social change can be thus evaluated at the level of everyday life and the production of meaning, relationships and culture. Departing from this recent wave of social movements, the present paper will attempt not only to critically engage with dominant social movement theories, but also to suggest ways forward and contribute in the formulation of alternative concepts, methodologies and theories needed so as to discuss social change today.

7. Konstantinos Kavoulakos, "Crisis as an opportunity? A Lukácsian account of historical determinism and praxis" After the eruption of the Greek crisis, a good part of the Greek political elite presented the crisis as an "opportunity" to radically transform Greece into a western, modernized state. Paradoxically enough, in regard of its form this attitude is in accord with Georg Lukács's revolutionary aspirations about proletarian revolution and radical social change – although it essentially deviates from it in regard of its content. Unfortunately, the Left in the West was unprepared to understand crisis in the way the elites perceived it – namely as an opportunity for radical political action. In my talk I will reconstruct Lukács's thoughts on the phenomenon of crisis in modern society, its relation to mechanical historical becoming and to the possibility of free collective action. In Lukács's early Marxist thought crisis is understood as an expression of the deeper dissonance of the social form and the

content of life in bourgeois society. The experience of crisis reveals the violence inflicted upon life even in its "normal" condition and it can thus lead to new forms of social consciousness. However, this transition is by no way necessary. Crisis can be perpetuated and temporarily 'overcome' through the restoration of dominant power relations. At the same time, it represents a period in which system mechanisms fail and therefore the dominant social determinations can be radically questioned. These short periods of systemic instability and relative indeterminacy urge us to think about the appropriate forms of organizing collective political praxis to effectively intervene in the historical continuum, instead of letting historical automatism be restored. I will argue that this open dialectic between discontinuity and continuity is an integral part of every serious radical – "revolutionary" or "reformist" – politics.

8. **Angelos Kontogiannis-Mandros, "Democracy's populist moment: Remarks on the 'squares' movement' and its impact"** Under the impact of the 2010-2012 cycle of contention Greece's fiscal crisis mutated into a full blown organic crisis, in the Gramscian sense. In this context, the months long sit-in in Athens' Syntagma -i.e Constitutional- square marked a turning point. Out of the popular assemblies at the heart of the sit-in there emerged a discourse over "democracy" and the role of "citizenry" in its practice that in intersection with mass popular indignation against the reforms articulated a consequential claim over popular-cum-national sovereignty. At the basis of the latter there lied a simplistic but politically powerful dichotomy between the "ordinary citizen" and its rights, and the "corrupted elites" that led the country to bankruptcy and international supervision. Its "divisive" underpinnings and the raw character of its performance in the context of protest laid the ground for its labelling as populist; in the sense of being apolitical and undemocratic. Drawing from the works of Ernesto Laclau and Paolo Gerbaudo this paper aims to interrogate such an understanding of the "squares' movement" discourse and its fallacious connection with the rise of anti-politics and the far-right. Based on 80 semi-structured in-depth interviews with participants of the sit-in my research indicates that rather than a slide towards illiberalism-cum-authoritarianism the 'populism' of the anti-austerity movement in reality expressed a radical demand for the re-invigoration of democratic institutions. That being said, I aim to discuss the relation between populism and the current crisis of democratic capitalism while arguing for a distinction between right-wing/authoritarian and left-wing/democratic varieties of the former in the context the Eurozone crisis.

9. **Sunita Manian, "India's Rape Crisis: At the Crossroads of Nationalism, Gender and Sexuality"** In January of 2018 an 8-year old child, a Muslim girl, was kidnapped, drugged, raped and murdered, allegedly by Hindu men in a Hindu Temple. This is only one of about 37,000 reported cases of rape in India each year. During my own ethnographic research in Tamil Nadu I interviewed a group of boys, one of whom boasted of raping women. While the Indian rape crisis reported in the media focuses on women as victims, every one of the Men who

have Sex with Men (MSM)and *aravanis* I interviewed in the course of my research spoke of rape and torture in police custody, as well as in the hands of *rowdies* (gangs). A young man attending college in Western India spoke to me about his sexual frustration: 'I'm worried that this [sexual] repression might result in an "explosion" at a later stage. Can I handle this frustration without any "explosion" or maybe even an "implosion"?' He was one of the many young people across India who spoke to me about their frustration at being denied information about sex and sexuality. In my paper I will discuss Indian sexual norms and sexual repression, within the context of Indian nationalism, arising in opposition to colonial constructions of the sexually promiscuous colonial subject. The Indian male, within this Gandhian-nationalistic framework, has to control his sexual urges. However, the rising ideology of militant Hindu-supremacy in the last decade and the more recent constructions of India as an economic and militaristic super-power, necessitates a masculinity that is virile and libidinous. This then requires the construction of a mirror image inscribed on the bodies of the Muslim, the *dalits,* the feminine, the *hijra*, the *gandu*, and/or the *pottai* that is simultaneously cast as inferior and subject to the hegemonic power of Hindu masculinity.

10. **Noëlle McAfee, "Ghosts and their Avatars: What Haunts the Public Sphere in Dark Times?"** In politically dark times, regimes invariably do their best to empty out the public sphere: to silence dissent, to discourage unofficial public gatherings, to discredit enemies, and to control the terms of discourse. Yet more often than not, the ghosts of unmourned losses and avatars of phantasied idealizations haunt the public sphere, showing up as new social anxieties and syndromes of ideality. To understand crisis, I argue, a central task is to analyze how current troubles are reactivations of old ones, and new battles are often attempts to settle old scores. Old wounds and traumas, if not worked through, pass down through kinship networks and larger groups, through generations and even centuries. Sometimes consciously and sometimes not, they animate our current political formulations and relations. Many of these wounds are still very much open and raw, as the Black Lives Matter movement attests. The harms of racism are not matters merely of the past; they remain at work today in police brutality, mass incarceration, economic inequality, and ongoing racism. Some are no longer active, such as the Turkish occupation of the lands of the former Ottoman Empire, but suspicions and animosity persist, leading to new wounds and traumas. If not addressed and worked through, crisis repeats itself interminably.

11. **Eduardo Mendieta, "Digital Kairos: The Time of the Political and Cyber-Truth"** In this essay, I aim to explore the relationship between what I will call 'digital truth' and the new temporality of the political due to our new digital condition, which in turn I will label 'digital kairos." The key insights are that post-truth is the phantasms of digital truth and that the time of the political has become a time of imminent danger or accelerating obsolescence and forgetfulness

(digital oblivion). If we want to exorcise these malevolent apparitions, we must grapple with their etiology: the digital mediation of our social reality and the acceleration of social time. I will attempt to sketch the nature of digital truth in terms of six unique characteristics: first, pixilation; second, mega-data, or the panoramics of data; third, social life of pixilated data; fourth, entropics of both hardware and software; and fifth, what I will call Münchausen Algorithmics, by what I mean the unlimited horizon of possibilities for data correlation; and sixth, the achronicity of digitality. With these six ways of characterizing the nature of digital truth, then I return to the question of under what typology of theories of truth, does digital truth fall –is digital truth more like a correspondence theory of truth, or more like a discursive type of theory of truth? The point of asking this last question is so that we can elucidate then the ways in which digital truth is a mediated mediation of social reality, of language in relation to a digitally constituted social world. These six characteristics will be related the collapse, or evisceration, of the temporality of the political in terms foreclosure of the horizon of futurity by its reduction to crisis and imminent danger—what I call achronicity of digitality.

12. **Dorothea Olkowski, "Deleuze and Peirce, Physics and the Crisis of Ontology"** Gilles Deleuze's philosophy is frequently characterized as a science based ontology. This essay argues that it is not an ontology at all and bases this on Deleuze's interaction with the philosophy of Charles Peirce. This raises the question of the impact of abandoning ontology for what may or may not be metaphysics. It also requires an understanding of Deleuze's reading of Peirce and how this differs from Peirce's own account of his logic and pragmatics.

13. **Denise Ferreira da Silva, "Notes Towards the End of Time"** Heeding the revolts that have followed the acquittal of police officers charged with beating or killing unarmed black men, this black feminist poethical exercise moves through the debris they left in their wake to excavate the grounds of justice to expose its limits – or, put differently, I turn to the onto-epistemological pillars (separability, determinacy, sequentiality) that sustain the notion of *temporality* informing the ethico-political programs that sustain both the notion of justice and the critical arsenal. The episodes of racial violence that unleash these revolts in their recurrence tell us something about a kind of repetition that exposes the significance of time in racial subjugation. The official account of racial violence establishes a causal connection in which blackness is the origin, the efficient cause of sensory failure, impaired thinking, and stalled self-determination, which explicitly or implicitly appear in common sense and legal justifications for decisions to shoot, that took place in no time. For justice, in its modern rendering, plays out in world, the first precondition for racial justice is the end of both figurations of time, which, obviously also means a resignitication of justice without modern ontological pillars. The obliteration of the Other is also the bursting forth of The Thing, which is infinite possibilities beyond the enclosures

of separabiltiy, determinacy, and sequentiality, that sustain the Subject and its companions, the Object, the Other, the Commodity.

14. Yannis Stavrakakis & Antonis Galanopoulos "Discursive Uses of 'Abnormality' in the Greek Crisis" In crisis-ridden Greece, a strict austerity program has been applied, from 2010 onwards – when the global and mainly European economic crisis hit the shores of the Aegean – under the supervision of the European Commission, the European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund (the so-called *troika*). In order to provide an adequate framing and legitimization to this program, the crisis was discursively constructed not only as an economic one but also as a *moral* and a *cultural* crisis. Within this framework, the implementation of the austerity program became increasingly associated with discourses about 'normality'. In this paper we follow and attempt to analyze the emergence and the forms this normalizing discourse has acquired mainly between the eruption of the crisis and the elections of January 2015, paying particular attention to the construction of *abnormality* and/or *monstrosity* it involves and on which it seems to rely, which usually takes the form of 'populism'. More specifically, we survey two types of this discourse: the political and the journalistic. Utilizing a variety of theoretical resources (from discourse theory to Canguilhem, Foucault and Derrida) this argument purports to deconstruct the narrative claims involved, provide a genealogy of the discursive repertoires on which they draw, account for their distinct ideological articulations and highlight their often camouflaged political implications. Mention will also be made to the current rearticulations of 'normality' in contemporary political discourse, especially those put forward by the SYRIZA government.

15. Stavros Tombazos, "Global Crisis and economic perspectives in Greece" From the 1980s, the rate of profit recovers, but the rate of accumulation does not track the recovery in profitability. The ratio Surplus Value/Accumulation grows. An ever greater share of surplus value takes the form of money capital and, through credit, is directed to consumption. Marx's schemas of reproduction are modified to show the increasing importance of private debt in the process of realisation of value. Financial derivatives permitted the creation of an enormous volume of fictitious capital alongside an unsustainable debt. The on-going crisis is not only "financial", but the crisis of the neoliberal regime of accumulation. Economic policies prevented the collapse of the financial system and saved the euro, but they didn't lead to an exit from the crisis. The austerity policies in southern Europe establish conditions that no longer allow the return to growth rates of the initial euro period. Greece has been transformed into a debt colony.

16. James Winchester, "Refugees in an Age of Anger" We seem to be living, as Pankaj Mishra has put it, in an "age of anger." Some extraordinary people have continued to defend the humane treatment of refugees in the face of nationalist back lash around the world, but most leaders tread warily. Peter

Singer has recently argued what many including Obama, Merkel and Macron seem to think: Realpolitik demands would be cosmopolitan politicians put up barriers against refugees. Absent the walls, the radical right will ride the demonization of immigrants to power—or so the prevailing wisdom goes. I think Mishra is on to something when he argues that the anger of the present age is rooted in liberalism's failures. In particular I suspect that liberal democracy's failure to provide for their own citizens contributes to the back lash against the refugees—although racial animus clearly plays a significant role as well. In addition to recounting the problems, I will look to novel the *Exit West* to think about ways one might effectively counter the demonization of refugees.