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PH 375: Senior Seminar

Materialisms

Skidmore College
Spring Semester, 2009
wlewis@skidmore.edu

Bolton 102
x5402

Tues/Thurs 9:10-11:00 AM
9:15-11:15 AM

10:15 AM

Professor William Lewis
e-mail:

office: Ladd 216, phone

office hours: Wed

Fri 9:15-

Seminar Goals

This seminar will be animated by such questions as: "What is materialism?"; "How does materialism differ from idealism?"; "What role has materialism played in the history of philosophy"; and "What advantages do we gain by envisioning the world as material and what do we lose?" As a senior seminar, this course is designed to be an opportunity to explore a new area of philosophy and to allow for comparison and reflection upon the work that you have done over the past four years. Not only will it make use of the philosophy that you have studied, but it will

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http://www.lactamme.polytechnique.fr/Mosaic/descripteurs/Galerie_ParticleSystem.s.FV.html)

also allow you to demonstrate the synthetic, analytic, research, and argumentative skills that you have obtained. Finally, it is an opportunity to learn from and engage with your peers, many of whom have had different experiences in the program, and to interrogate texts and arguments with them at a very sophisticated level.

Required Texts

Althusser, *Philosophy of the Encounter*
 Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*
 Course Packet [CP]

Class Format and Expectations

An advanced seminar, this course demands much participation and independent initiative and research. It is imperative that you be prepared each day to discuss the assigned readings and supplemental research. As these are very difficult texts, sufficient preparation entails going over the texts multiple times. The class will consist of discussions that aim at: (a) gaining an understanding of the text(s) at hand; and (b) relating the texts to other philosophical works/philosophies with which you are acquainted

For each class meeting, it is expected that you will arrive having formulated an informal response to the reading(s) to be discussed that day. These responses should contain a brief summary of the author(s) points (noting key passages, concepts, moments, etc.) and should then extend to the formulation of original questions or comments. These can be questions regarding your own understanding of the text. Alternately, these comments can be critical of the text, supportive of its argument, or (best) can link various texts together and/or apply their insights. You should also work to compare the arguments, concepts, and methodology of that day's texts to other philosophical works with which you are familiar. Keep your philosophical libraries handy! In addition to this basic preparation, I will often direct you to reflect more deeply upon a specific aspect of a text or to compare texts for what each says about a specific idea or problem. This directed reflection should also appear in your comments.

Each day, I will call on seminar participants to relate their responses to the class. This does not mean that you need to come to class with a paper to read each day. However, a few paragraphs or—at the very least—some clear and detailed notes outlining your response will be necessary.

Many of the ideas and texts that we are dealing with in this class are hard to understand on our own. Because of this and because this class includes discussion and discussions need participants, attendance is mandatory and

you are expected to take part in all class discussions.
This aspect of your performance will be reflected in a portion of your grade that reflects its overall importance to the class and that includes the informal presentation of your "responses" to each text. This grade is based upon both the quality and quantity of your participation.

Assignments and Value

- 5% Research Assignment: "Who are materialists?"
- 10% In-Class Presentation
- 15% Class participation (see above for expectations)
- 30% Paper #1
- 40% Paper #2

To pass the class, all assignments must be completed in the order assigned. No late assignments will be accepted without express permission of the instructor obtained at least 24 hours before the assignment's due date. Violations of the Skidmore College Honor Code will result in an "F" for a class grade as well as all penalties imposed by the Honor's Council.

Note

I strongly encourage you to see me if, at any time, you are having problems with the readings, with understanding the class discussions, or if you just wish to further discuss issues raised in the class. I am willing to spend time with you in person to help you get as much out of the course as you desire.

Schedule*

(note: schedule is subject to change based on class needs and interests)

Week 1, January 18-24

Tuesday Introduction: "What is Materialism?"
 ...Research assignment: Who are the materialists?...

Thursday Weber, *The Types of Legitimate Domination* (selections) [hand-out]
 Is Weber materialist or idealist in his analysis of how one legitimately comes to rule?
 Research assignment discussion
 ...research assignment due...

Week 2, January 25-31

Tuesday Althusser, "Philosophy of the Encounter" (163-188)

Thursday Althusser, "Philosophy of the Encounter" (163-196, 271-276) [CP]

Week 3, February 1-7

Tuesday Democritus, "The Sayings of Democritus" [CP]

Thursday Epicurus, selections [CP]
 Lillegard, *On Epicurus*, selections [CP]
 Optional: Fowler, "What Sort of a Reductionist was Epicurus?" [CP]

Week 4, February 8-14

Tuesday Descartes, *Meditations* (3-6 especially) or *Principles of Philosophy*

Thursday La Mettrie, *Man a Machine* [CP]
 Smith, "Julien Offray de la Mettrie (1709-1751)" [CP]
 ...Paper #1 assigned...

Week 5, February 15-21

Tuesday Machiavelli, *The Prince* [CP]

Thursday Machiavelli, *The Prince* [CP]

Week 6, February 22-28

Tuesday Machiavelli, *Discourses*, selections [CP]

Thursday Machiavelli, *Discourses*, selections [CP]
 Optional: Althusser, *Solitude of Machiavelli*
 [CP]

Week 7, March 1-7

Tuesday Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*
 Preface, pp. 3-12
 Chapter 1: all
 Chapter 2: pp. 27-31 (§1-7), 33-35 (§12-13), 40-42 (§19-20)
 Chapter 4: pp. 57-65 (§1-10)
 •••Paper #1 due•••

Thursday Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*
 Chapter 5: pp. 68-69, [§1], 72-75 (§6-12), 78-80 (§18-20)
 Chapter 6: pp. 81-87 (§1-9)
 Chapter 7: pp. 99-104 (§5-7), 111 (§18)

Week 8, March 8-14

Tuesday Spring Break
 Thursday Spring Break

Week 9, March 15-21

Tuesday Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*
 Chapter 16: all
 Chapter 17: all
 •••Paper #2 assigned•••

Thursday Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*
 Chapter 18: all
 Chapter 19: all
 Chapter 20: all
 Optional: Althusser, *The Only Materialist Tradition*, Spinoza [CP]

Week 10, March 22-28

Tuesday Marx/Engels, *German Ideology*, selections [CP]
 Marx/Engels, *Theses on Feuerbach* [CP]

Thursday Marx/Engels, *Communist Manifesto* [CP]

Week 11, March 29- April 4

Tuesday Marx, "Preface to a Critique of Political Economy" &

"Primitive Accumulation" [CP]

...Paper #2 proposals due...

Thursday Marx, "Critique of the Gotha Program" [CP]
 Althusser, "Philosophy of the Encounter" (196-203)
 Optional: "Althusser, "Marx in His Limits" (7-61)

Week 12, April 5-11

Tuesday Sellars, "Reformed Materialists & Intrinsic Endurance" [CP]

Dewey/Hook/Nagel, "Are Naturalists Materialists" [CP]

Thursday Presentation and Paper Meetings

Week 13, April 12-18

Tuesday Hook, "Nature and the Human Spirit" [CP]

Thursday Althusser, "Philosophy of the Encounter" (163-207, 271-276) [CP]

Week 14, April 19-25

Tuesday Presentations

Thursday Presentations

Week 15, April 26-May 2

Tuesday Presentations

Week 16, May 4-10

...Paper #2 due...

*Thanks to Daniel Selcer and Michael Wittmore whose syllabus for their seminar on Late Epicureanism helped me to prepare for this course and whose influence shows up in some of this seminar's reading selections.