

TESP 193 Seminar

THEOLOGY AND THE RISE OF MODERN ATHEISM

Winter Quarter 2010

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Class Hours: T – TH, 11:50-1:35, Kenna Hall - 214
Office Hours: Crowley: By Appointment, Kenna 323 H
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or by appointment

This seminar constitutes a collaborative inquiry that explores the emergence in the nineteenth century of the most significant challenges to any assertion of the reality of God: the understanding of God as the anti-human and the consequent conviction that the affirmation of the human necessarily entails the denial of the divine.

In general, this historic development raised many of the great problems that counter religious conviction: how was such a radical and unprecedented religious revolution possible in modern culture, what character did it assume, what religious issues does it raise, and what resources does it offer for contemporary theological reflection? In its investigations of these questions, the seminar will follow arguments that dialectically generated their own contradictions and trace the development of common antinomic themes, such as freedom and dependence, as these are given different values in the reflections of the nineteenth century.

The seminar studies this dialectical process as it was advanced in modernity, and consequently, the intellectual developments from Ludwig Feuerbach into the urgency of the atheism that followed: Karl Marx and Friedrich Nietzsche. It is here, in this "golden age of atheism," that the concept of God was transposed into the satanic "enemy of our human nature."

This seminar moves its focus from the classic atheists of the mid-nineteenth century to those at the end of the following century. Here it engages the lines of various disciplines and sciences in which atheistic thought was embodied or by which it was sustained. The seminar concludes with a study of the effects worked within modernity by the "new disbelief" and the growth of the atheistic consciousness within the intellectual culture of the United States. The development of these investigations will not be so much chronological as thematic, devoting its attention to pertinent works of such diverse thinkers as Friedrich Nietzsche, Charles Darwin, Sigmund Freud, Emile Durkheim, John Dewey, and Richard Dawkins.

GOALS OF THE SEMINAR.

(For RS Department course goals, and Core course goals, please see Angel website)

This seminar has five goals:

1. To understand the various meanings carried by the affirmation and denial of God and the humanistic implications of these assertions as they arise in one working-inquiry and cross over into another; to explore the intellectual context in which the issues of the divine existence and the value of the human are raised; to determine the evidence or grounds accepted for the resolution of these issues; and to examine the methods by which such questions are raised, evidence adduced, arguments advanced, and conclusions verified.
2. To discover the mutual implications of the affirmations or negations of the divine and of the human. How do these involve one another? Is there any pattern traced out by the variant resolutions of this question in modernity?
3. To determine what contemporary religious reflection or theology has to learn from this history, both in method and in content.
4. To study representative inquiries by influential philosophers and theologians of the modern period as they converge upon a single topic, the mutual implication of the divine and the human.
5. To foster skills in critical analysis and scholarly research as well as habits of theological reflection.

The first three goals deal directly with the subject-matter of the seminar and its questions; the last two propose to advance the general knowledge and the appropriate skills of the members of the seminar.

Attendance Policy

Consistent attendance is essential to the success of the seminar. Two absences will drop your grade by a half-grade (e.g., A- to B+). If you miss more than three meetings, you should drop the seminar. Generally, legitimate excuses for an absence are illness, or a family emergency. Consistent tardiness will result in a reduction of your grade.

Disability Policy

To receive academic accommodations for a disability, students must contact Disability Resources located in Benson 216. The phone number is 408-554-4109 or inquiries can be emailed to Robin Cole, Administrative Associate, rcole@scu.edu. Students must register with Disabilities Resources and provide documentation of a disability to Disabilities Resources prior to receiving academic accommodations.

Academic Integrity

Please view the SCU policy at: www.scu.edu/studentlife/resources/integrity.cfm.

PROCEDURE OF EACH SEMINAR MEETING.

1. The seminar will meet in Kenna Hall every Tuesday and Thursday from 11:50-1:35. All students are expected to have completed the requisite reading and be prepared for its analysis and discussion by the beginning of the class.
2. Each meeting of the seminar will be conducted either by the professor (initially) or by a student under the guidance of the professor. During each meeting, students will be questioned about the text under consideration.
3. As the quarter goes on, the students will assume increasing responsibility for the conduct of the seminar and they will be assigned portions of key texts to present to the seminar. When a student presents to the seminar, he or she will lay out the text in its major parts and then propose three questions about the text that will lead to an analysis and discussion of the subject matter by the entire seminar.
4. Position Papers: For each meeting, students will be required to formulate and advance a judgment about the truth of what has been argued by the text. This should be formulated in no more than one typewritten page (approximately 250 words) and turned in at the end of each meeting.
5. A take-home midterm examination will be given on February 9, due on Monday, February 11.
6. Each student will compose a research paper of 10-12 pages (excluding bibliography) which explores a serious question that is cognate with the work of the seminar. These papers will be due Tuesday, March 16. A proposed topic, along with a key question guiding your research and an initial bibliography will be due on February 16.

Grading

The grade of each student will be calculated from the requirements of the course: from his or her contribution to the seminar discussion, from the midterm and final examinations, and from the quality of the term paper. The students should pick a significant problem for the analysis of their term paper, which should not exceed twelve pages.

- A = Outstanding
- B = Very Good
- C = Average
- D = Well below average and unacceptable

Discussion: 40% (includes position papers and seminar presentation)

Midterm: 30%

Term Paper: 30%

INITIAL SCHEDULE *(subject to revision)*

Class Dates – Class Content

- 1-5 Initial Lecture – Slouching towards Feuerbach (MJB)
- 1-7 Charles Darwin: *On The Origin of Species*. “An Historical Sketch,” Introduction (MJB); chapters 1-4 (PGC)
- 1-12 Charles Darwin: *On The Origin of Species*. Chapter 9 (MJB); 13-14 (PGC)
- 1-14 Feuerbach - *The Essence of Christianity*. “Preface,” pp. 1-12 (MJB)
- 1-19 Feuerbach - *The Essence of Christianity*, pp. 12-32, 33-44 (PGC)
- 1-21 Marx – *On Religion*: “Forward to Doctoral Thesis,” “Thesis on Feuerbach,” “Capital” book one extracts, “*Kolnische Zeitung*” (MJB)
- 1-28 Marx– *On Religion*: “Hegel’s Philosophy of Right” (PGC)
- 2-2 Nietzsche: *The Genealogy of Morals*. “Good and Evil,” pp. 13-56 (PGC)
- 2-4 Nietzsche: *The Genealogy of Morals*, pp. 57-96 (PGC)
- 2-9 Nietzsche: *The Gay Science*. “Preface to 2nd Edition”, Book 3, paragraphs 108-353 (MJB)
- 2-11 *Midterm Examination over the first part of the course due today*
Sigmund Freud: *The Future of an Illusion* (MJB)
- 2-16 Sigmund Freud: *The Future of an Illusion* (PGC)
Research Paper topic and bibliography due
- 2-18 John Dewey: *A Common Faith* (MJB)
- 2-23 John Dewey: *A Common Faith* (PGC)
- 2-25 James Turner: *Without God, Without Creed*. 1-5 (MJB)
- 3-2 James Turner: *Without God, Without Creed*. 6-7 (PGC)
- 3-5 Richard Dawkins: *The God Delusion*. Chapter 2-4 (MJB)
- 3-9 Richard Dawkins: *The God Delusion*. Chapter 5, 7, 8 (PGC)
- 3-11 Last Day of Class: Overview of the work of the seminar
- 3-16 *Research Papers Due*

BOOK LIST

Required:

- Darwin, Charles --- *On The Origin Of Species By Means of Natural Selection or The Preservation of Favored Races In the Struggle for Life.* Penguin Classics.
- Richard Dawkins --- *The God Delusion.* Houghton Mifflin.
- John Dewey --- *A Common Faith.* Yale.
- Ludwig Feuerbach --- *The Essence of Christianity.* Harper Torch Books.
- Sigmund Freud --- *The Future of an Illusion.* Norton.
- Karl Marx --- *On Religion (Selected Essays).* Schocken Books.
- Friedrich Nietzsche --- *The Genealogy of Morals* (Trans. Walter Kaufmann). Vintage.
--- *The Gay Science* (Trans. Walter Kaufmann). Vintage.
- James Turner --- *Without God, Without Creed.* Johns Hopkins University.

Recommended:

- Buckley, Michael J. --- *Denying and Disclosing God.* Yale.