

SURVEY OF WESTERN THOUGHT: PH.D. SEMINAR

PROFESSOR KIRILL O. THOMPSON

SPRING SEMESTER 2009

COURSE PROSPECTUS

TEXTBOOK: Daniel Kolak, *Lovers of Wisdom: An Introduction to Philosophy with Integrated Readings* 2/e. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth/Thomson Learning, 2001.

MODUS OPERANDI: In this seminar, we will examine together several major figures and issues of Western thought through our textbook and related readings. During the seminar sessions, I will present the thinkers and issues in light of their context and problematic. Students should read the selections and related readings before class. Feel free to raise questions and comments during the instructor's presentations. The final thirty minutes of each seminar will be reserved for class discussion.

REQUIREMENTS: 1) Prepare well for each seminar session. Read each assignment carefully. Write down significant questions that come to mind. Read beyond the textbook. 2) Select a research topic. Clear your topic with the instructor beforehand. Write a research paper, and give a presentation of your research results to the seminar. After receiving feedback from the seminar, prepare the final version of your paper. 3) Occasionally, students will be asked to present a philosopher and related issues—with forewarning. (The format will depend on how many students attend the seminar.)

EXPECTATION: Through this seminar, it is hoped that we will not merely get to know the major figures and issues in philosophy intellectually or academically; we will attempt to engage the materials in a Socratic, perhaps existential, manner, and thus rethink them together ourselves.

SYLLABUS:

February 17. Introduction to the Seminar, Student introductions.

February 24. Chs. 0-1: The Dawn of Philosophy; the First Philosophers

March 3. Chs. 2-3. Plato; Aristotle

March 10 Chs. 4, 5.3, 7. The Epicureans, Stoics and Skeptics; St. Anselm; the Medievals

March 17. Chs. 8-9. The Renaissance; the Copernican Revolution

March 24. Chs. 10-11. Descartes (emphasize); Spinoza

March 31. Chs. 13-14. Locke; Berkeley (emphasize)

April 7. Ch. 15. Hume

April 14. Ch. 16. Kant

April 21. Chs. 17.2-18. Hegel; Kierkegaard & Nietzsche (emphasize)

April 28. Chs. 19.3, 19.4-20. Bentham, Mill; American Experience.

May 5. Ch. 21.2, 21.3 – Heidegger, Sartre; emphasize French Existentialism

May 12. Ch. 23. The Birth of Analytic Philosophy

May 19. Ch. 23. Wittgenstein.

May 26. Ch. 24. The Postmodernists-- David Foster Wallace

June 2-9. Student Presentations.

NOTE: Student research topics are not limited to the philosophers and issues covered in this syllabus. Nonetheless, the topics need to be cleared by the instructor.

Some Western philosophy is intimately related to literature, and students may explore the frontier of philosophy and literature, for example, in the aphorisms of Heraclitus, in Plato's *Dialogues*, Lucretius' *The Nature of Things*, Thoreau's *Walden*, Emerson's *Essays*, Montaigne's *Essays*, Sartre's and Camus' stories, novels and dramas, and Beckett's works, *Waiting for Godot*, in particular.

Some of David Foster Wallace's fiction and essays critique postmodernism from Wittgenstein's idea that language is a "form of human life" and sometimes from Kierkegaard's moral existential perspective.