An/Soc 331: Prejudice and the Human Condition (Spring, 2006)

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Associate Professor of Sociology   Office hrs: T and TR 12:15-2pm; W 3-5pm

Seminar Statement

This seminar examines interpretation and understanding in search of insights regarding the problem of meaning as it relates to human existence. We will begin our investigation by reading Philip K. Dick’s intriguing novel The Man in the High Castle and use our shared, interpretations of the text to map the dimensions of the hermeneutic problem. Next we will examine one of the most compelling arguments regarding the social basis of epistemology, Durkheim’s The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life, exploring the sense in which Durkheim’s work provides a theoretical basis to conceptualize a collective ontological view of the human condition. Our attention then turns to phenomenology by way of Berger and Luckmann’s classic work, The Social Construction of Reality. Next we will read Richard Palmer’s Hermeneutics and his explication of the Continental tradition running from Schleiermacher to Dilthey to Heidegger to Gadamer. We will then read Victor Frankl’s Man’s Search For Meaning before embarking on our close reading of Gadamer’s Truth and Method. We will conclude the semester by codifying the features of ontological hermeneutics and identifying guidelines for cultivating an ontologically astute and responsible way of being in the world.

Seminar discussions will include reference to essays written in response to questions that will be completed prior to our weekly seminar meetings (essays should be 4-5 pages in length, double spaced). Weekly assignments should take approximately 10-12 hours to complete.

Attendance, Grading and Required Texts

Class attendance is mandatory, and two unexcused absences will qualify you for an automatic “F.” Seminar participation will equal 25% of your final grade; weekly preparatory essays 75%.


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<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
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| Wednesday 1/11 | In search of the ontological pearl  
Plato’s *cave*, the disclosure theory of truth and the problem of Meaning. |
| Wednesday 1/18 | Mapping the hermeneutic problem  
Discuss Richard K. Dick’s *The Man in the High Castle*  
Discussion of preparatory assignment #1 |
| Wednesday 1/25 | Durkheim’s epistemological project  
Discuss pp. 1 – 241 in Durkheim  
Discussion of preparatory assignment #2 |
| Wednesday 2/1 | Durkheim’s collective ontology  
Discuss pp. 242 - 448 in Durkheim  
Discussion of preparatory assignment #3 |
| Wednesday 2/8 | The Social Construction of Reality  
Discuss Berger and Luckmann’s *The Social Construction of Reality*  
Discussion of preparatory assignment #4 |
| Wednesday 2/15 | An introduction to hermeneutics  
Discuss chapters 1, 2, and 3 in Palmer’s *Hermeneutics*  
Discussion of preparatory assignment #5 |
| Wednesday 2/22 | Phenomenology and hermeneutics  
Discuss chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8 in Palmer’s *Hermeneutics*  
Discussion of preparatory assignment #6 |
| Wednesday 3/1 | Heidegger’s ontological contribution  
Discuss chapters 9 and 10 in Palmer and excerpts from Heidegger’s *Being and Time*  
Discussion of preparatory assignment #7 |
| Wednesday 3/8 | Gadamer’s critique of aesthetic and historical consciousness  
Discuss chapters 11 and 12 in Palmer’s *Hermeneutics*  
Discussion of preparatory assignment #8 |
| Wednesday 3/15 | Spring Break  

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| Wednesday 3/22 | Mapping our ontological investigation  
[There is no essay assigned for this meeting] |
| Wednesday 3/29 | Signification as a condition of existence  
Discuss Frankl’s *Man’s Search for Meaning*  
Discussion of preparatory assignment #9 |
| Wednesday 4/5 | An ontological critique of aesthetic consciousness  
Discuss Part I of Gadamer’s *Truth and Method*  
Discussion of preparatory assignment #10 |
| Wednesday 4/12 | Hermeneutics as a way of being in the world  
Discuss Part II of Gadamer’s *Truth and Method*  
Discussion of preparatory assignment #11 |
| Wednesday 4/19 | Linguisticality and the disclosure of being.  
Discuss Part III of Gadamer’s *Truth and Method*  
Discussion of preparatory assignment #12 |
| Wednesday 4/26 | Thirty theses and *The Ontological Pearl*  
Discuss pp. 242 – 253 in Palmer’s *Hermeneutics*  
Discussion of preparatory assignment #13 |