PHL 210: The Just Society
Alienation, Reification, and Real Abstraction
Fall 2008

Instructor: Eric Lambert
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Office: HH 202
Office hrs: Th 2:30—5:30

Texts:

Contemporary Political Philosophy: An Introduction, 2nd ed., Will Kymlicka (Oxford University Press)

Reification: A New Look at an Old Idea, Axel Honneth (Oxford University Press)

Coursepack (available through coursepacks.com)

Course description
The objective of The Just Society is to survey and become acquainted with themes, concepts, and arguments in contemporary political philosophy. While we will look at different approaches to political theory and practice, liberalism remains the most influential political theory, and so will provide the background against which alternative approaches are examined. But the course is designed and intended as a critique of liberalism, especially liberal conceptions of subjectivity, agency, and social relations; the majority of our readings will thus consist of critical reflections on liberal social ontology (i.e., understandings of individuality, relationality, equality, and so on, in liberal-capitalist societies). To this end, we will spend the second half of the quarter studying the Marxian concepts of alienation, reification, and real abstraction, which concepts pose a direct challenge to liberal theory. The chief goal of The Just Society is to gain facility with these concepts with a view to analyzing and evaluating liberalism, in discussion and in your writing, and especially in connection with contemporary phenomena.

Grading
60% three (3) essays
- First essay (4-6 pages), worth 15% of final grade
- Second essay (4-6 pages), worth 20% of final grade
- Final essay (8-10 pages), worth 25% of final grade

30% four (4) short papers (2 carefully written pages), worth 7.5% each
10% participation

Attendance
Attendance is required. Since class meets only once a week, and since there are only ten weeks per quarter, each class session is important. For these reasons, two or more unexcused absences will result in 0.5 points being immediately subtracted from a student’s final grade (so if your final grade is 2.75 and you have three unexcused absences, you will receive a 2.25). Lateness should also be avoided. Since tardiness is (usually very) disruptive, excessive lateness (two or more times arriving late) will result in one unexcused absence.

Late papers
Unless prior arrangements are made, late papers will be marked down 0.5 points each day the paper is late. Late papers will not be penalized only if prior arrangements are made, appropriate documentation is provided, and the reasons are consistent with Kalamazoo College policy.

Academic Integrity
Per the Kalamazoo College Honor System: “The term "plagiarism" includes, but is not limited to, the use, by paraphrase or direct quotation, of the published or unpublished work of another person without full and clear acknowledgment. It also includes the unacknowledged use of materials prepared by another person or agency engaged in the selling of term papers or other academic materials.” Simply put, do not plagiarize. If you are not sure what plagiarism consists of, talk to me. Plagiarized work will result – at minimum – in a failing grade for that assignment or exam, and possibly in a failing grade for the course.

Schedule of readings

Week 1
Sep 25: Kymlicka:
Chapter 1, Introduction, 1-9
Chapter 2, Liberal Equality, 53-75; 88-96

Week 2
Oct 02: Kymlicka:
Chapter 6, Communitarianism, 208-228; 244-261
Chapter 8, Multiculturalism, 327-347; 365-370
Week 3
Oct 09: Kymlicka:
   Chapter 5, 166-195
   Chapter 9, 377-386; 398-420

Week 4
Oct 16: Marx:
   Excerpt from *1844 Manuscripts*, on alienation (handout)
   Excerpt from *Grundrisse*, on alienation (handout)
   Excerpt from *Capital, v.1*, on commodity fetishism (handout)

Week 5
Oct 23: Lukács:
   “Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat,” section 1, “The Phenomenon of Reification” (coursepack)

Week 6
Oct 30: Morris and Zizek:
   “Habermas and the Critique of Reification” (coursepack)
   Excerpts from Zizek’s *The Sublime Object of Ideology* and *For They Know Not What They Do* (coursepack)

Week 7
Nov 06: Honneth:
   Introduction, by Martin Jay, 3-12
   “Reification and Recognition,” Honneth, 17-52

Week 8
Nov 13: Honneth:
   “Reification and Recognition,” Honneth, 52-85
   “Philosophical Anthropology and Social Criticism,” Geuss, 120-128

Week 9
Nov 20: Honneth:
   “Taking Another’s View: Ambivalent Implications,” Butler, 97-119
   “The Slippery Middle,” Lear, 131-143
   “Rejoinder,” Honneth, 147-158

Week 10
Nov 27: Thanksgiving Break

NOTE: The final paper will be due December 3. Students are to deliver the final paper to Humphrey House 202, no later than 4:00 pm.