Contemporary Political Theory

Michel Foucault said that the 21st century will be the century of Giles Deleuze, thus highlighting the importance of Deleuze as a postmodern thinker and the seminal importance of postmodernism to modernity. Whether or not Foucault’s insight is accurate, there is no denying the growing influence of Deleuze in the social sciences and the humanities. This seminar will try to understand the importance of Deleuze by examining his work on cinema, a central area of his contribution to political theory and philosophy and currently being discussed more than any other aspect of his thought. As background to the study of Deleuze’s work, we will consider the philosophy of another French philosopher, Henri Bergson, who was perhaps the most important influence on the development of Deleuze’s thought and who, independently of Deleuze, has begun to exercise a strong influence on political theorists.

Specifically, since democratic societies facilitate the circulation of cinematic images, an interest of the seminar is in whether we can speak of forms of enlightenment associated with cinematic images in modern Western democracies, but also in democratic and non-democratic non-Western societies where cinematic images have become a prominent source of entertainment.

Course Requirements

There are four requirements for this seminar:

1. Each student will prepare a set of notes on each of the required texts that are to be submitted at the conclusion of the semester. Students’ collected notes can vary in form and format, but should (a) be developed with an interest in recording and explicating a text’s key arguments; (b) develop a set of theoretical problems that arise as each text is engaged from the dual standpoints of seminar discussions and other texts as they are read and studied in and outside of the seminar; (c) explore ways each text helps to illuminate and make progress on theoretical problems of interest and importance to the student developing the notes. Notes of this sort are one of the most valuable resources for their future work that students can develop during the course of their graduate studies.

2. A term paper of 20 pages on the concept of “freedom” in the thought of either Bergson or Deleuze, due on May 8.
3. Students are required to make in-class presentations on the reading material, the number of presentations to be made by each student depending on the number of students in the class. Students are encouraged to make presentations based on their seminar notes, but are not to read their presentations or to circulate printed materials that summarize their presentations. Presentations are to:
1) summarize the argument of the reading for the day;
2) pose critical questions about the reading in relation to the course theme;
3) relate the reading and questions posed to earlier discussions in the semester, in that way contributing to a cumulative understanding of texts, issues, and theoretical problems and insights.

4) Regular class participation is expected of every student.

**Required Texts (available at Mary Jane Books)**

Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory*

______________, *Creative Evolution*

Giles Deleuze, *Cinema I*

______________, *Cinema II*

**Reading Assignments**

**January 24. Thursday: Course Introduction**

**January 31, Thursday**
(presenter: _____________________)

**February 7, Thursday**
(presenter: _____________________)

**February 14, Thursday**
Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, chapter 4 & “Summary and Conclusion”
(presenter: _____________________)

**February 21, Thursday**
Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, “Introduction” and chapter I.
(presenter: _____________________)

**February 28, Thursday**
Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, chapter II.
(presenter: _____________________)
March 6, Thursday:
Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, chapter III.
(presenter: _____________________)

March 13, Thursday
Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, chapter IV.
(presenter: _____________________)

March 20, Thursday
Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, chapter 1. (presenter: Schoolman)
(presenter: _____________________)

March 27, Thursday: No class, Spring Break
(presenter: _____________________)

April 3, Thursday
Giles Deleuze, *Cinema I*, chapters 5-8.
(presenter: _____________________)

April 10, Thursday
Giles Deleuze, *Cinema I*, chapters 9-12.
(presenter: _____________________)

April 17, Thursday
Giles Deleuze, *Cinema II*, chapters 1-4.
(presenter: _____________________)

April 24, Thursday
Giles Deleuze, *Cinema II*, chapters 5-7.
(presenter: _____________________)

May 1, Thursday
Giles Deleuze, *Cinema II*, chapters 8-10.
(presenter: _____________________)