

THEORY AND CRITICISM 9347B – French Enlightenment Thought and the Rise of Materialism

Revised Course Description:

This course explores how the Epicurean notion of matter as *the* fundamental substance in nature was re-discovered in the eighteenth-century by the French Enlightenment thinkers La Mettrie, Helvétius, Diderot, D'Holbach, and Destutt de Tracy. The French interpretation of materialism – especially its anti-Christian and atheistic components – was further advanced in the early nineteenth century in Germany by Bauer and Feuerbach, before being critically transformed by Marx and Engels into what we know today as 'materialist' thought. Starting from Cartesian rational doubt, the French Enlightenment thinkers radically combined Epicurean natural philosophy with a Humean anthropocentric reading list:

Blom, Philipp. 2011. *A Wicked Company: The Forgotten Radicalism of the French Enlightenment*. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart. ISBN 978-0-7710-1649-3.

Descartes, René. 1986. *Meditations on First Philosophy with Selected Writings*. Translated by John Cottingham. Introduction by Bernard Williams. ISBN 0-521-33857-3.

Diderot, Denis. 1976. *Rameau's Nephew and D'Alembert's Dream*. Translated by George Y. Tancock. London: Penguin Books. ISBN-10: 0140441735 or ISBN-13: 978-0140441735

Marx, Karl. 2012. *The Holy Family*