

**DISTINGUISHED VISITING PROFESSOR IN THE HUMANITIES  
SEMINAR OFFERING  
FALL 2001**

The Distinguished Visiting Professor Advisory Committee is pleased to announce that Peter Dews will be the first Distinguished Visiting Professor in the Humanities during the Fall Semester 2001.

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In Fall 2001, the first Distinguished Visiting Professor in the Humanities, Professor Peter Dews, will be on campus. Professor Dews is Professor of Philosophy at the University of Essex, UK. He is the author of *The Limits of Disenchantment: Essays on Contemporary European Philosophy* (1995) and *Logics of Disintegration: Post-Structuralist Thought and the Claims of Critical Theory* (1987), and has edited several others, including *Habermas: A Critical Reader* (1999) and (in collaboration with Simon Critchley) *Deconstructive Subjectivities* (1997).

One of the primary responsibilities of the Distinguished Visiting Professor in the Humanities is to offer an upper-level interdisciplinary seminar open to juniors and seniors. It is the goal of this program to be able to offer an upper-level course that can have pre-requisites from several different departments so that the students in the class can reflect a broad range of disciplines. The topic of Professor Dews seminar will be "Modernity and the Problem of Evil." A brief description follows:

**HUMANITIES 395: Special Topic: Modernity and the Problem of Evil**

For many thinkers after Nietzsche, the concept of evil is simply a residue of an outdated theological perspective on the world. For others it remains an indispensable part of our ethical vocabulary, especially when we confront the moral atrocities of the twentieth century, including the Holocaust. In this seminar we will explore modern uses of the concept of 'evil', and some of the major problems which they raise. Right at the beginning of the continental philosophical tradition, Kant's *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone* raises three crucial questions which have remained central to debates about evil: 1) Can the use of this concept be justified in purely philosophical terms, or does it require a rethinking of the relation between religious and philosophical discourse? 2) Can human beings be motivated by the sheer perverse desire to do harm or wrong, or must there always be some underlying motive of self-interest, as Kant claims? 3) Can evil be 'explained' or at least made intelligible (for example, psychoanalytically or sociologically)? Or is our notion of evil essentially intertwined with a sense of ultimate resistance to comprehension? In this seminar, we will track philosophical debates around these issues through a range of nineteenth and twentieth-century thinkers, including Schelling, Nietzsche, Hannah Arendt, Hans Jonas, Emil Fackenheim and Emmanuel Levinas.

Readings will drawn from the following texts:

Immanuel Kant, *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*  
F. W. J. Schelling, *Philosophical Inquiries into the Nature of Human Freedom*  
Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra*  
Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*  
Hans Jonas, 'The Concept of God after Auschwitz'  
Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being, or Beyond Essence*  
Emil Fackenheim, *To Mend the World*

Students interested in enrolling in this class should have taken at least one of the following courses as a pre-requisite, and should consider this as they pre-register for Spring 2001 classes: English 390; Gender and Women's Studies 249; History 238, 239, or 242; Humanities 246; Philosophy 234, 235, 242, 267, or 268; Political Science 255, 256, 263, or 264; Religious Studies 213, 216, 318. Other courses may serve as pre-requisites if approved by the Distinguished Visiting Professor Advisory Committee.

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Questions should be directed to Alan Schrift, Philosophy Department ([schrift@grinnell.edu](mailto:schrift@grinnell.edu)).