

LS 812: Business, Science and Religion

Fall 2018 | Dr. Geoffrey Poitras

COURSE OUTLINE:

This course explores the religious and scientific foundations for modern business practices. The central themes to be examined in the course are: the religious foundations of current business practices, concentrating on financial activities; how modern business practices are justified, both ethically and ideologically; and, how modern business rhetoric uses the pretext of ethical superiority or scientific objectivity to promote economic, political and social objectives.

COURSE EVALUATION

The evaluation will be composed of three parts: 40% individual work (a term paper); 40% group or individual presentation; and 20% individual class participation.

The individual work component will be an essay on a topic relevant to the class themes, hopefully based on the presentation. The specifics for the essay, such as length and topic, will be determined after individual consultation with the instructor. A non-binding list of potential topics, together with an essay template, can be provided.

The topics for the group presentations will be concerned with developing the specific course themes, such as how business interests use the rhetoric of scientific objectivity to promote political and social objectives. To form groups, the class list will be divided into groups of 3 to 4 people, using a method which is agreeable to the class.

In addition to individual groups being responsible for leading class sessions, each individual will be expected to participate in the class discussions during weeks when their group is not directly responsible for that topic (20%).

REQUIRED READING

Many readings are available on-line through the class webpage. Relevant readings not available for download will be made available prior to the week of classes in which the reading is discussed. Poitras (2000) is a useful source for some readings as well as providing a bibliography for some additional background reading material.

- M. Atwood, *Payback: debt and the shadow side of wealth*, Toronto: Anansi, 2008.
- P. Bernstein, *Capital Ideas: the improbable origins of modern Wall Street*, New York: Free Press, 1993.
- D. Defoe (1719), *The Villany of Stock Jobbers Detected*.

- R. Ekelund, et al., *Sacred Trust: The Medieval Church as an Economic Firm*, New York: Oxford U. Press, 1996.
- M. Friedman, *Free to Choose*, New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1980.
- S. Haliczzer, *Between exaltation and infamy: Female mystics in the Golden Age of Spain*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2002.
- C. Haskins, *The Rise of Universities*, Cornell: Cornell U. Press, 1923.
- F. Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom*, Chicago: U of Chicago Press, 1944.
- W. Howell, *Logic and Rhetoric in England, 1500-1700*, New York: Russell and Russell, 1956.
- D. Hume, *Essays, Moral, Political and Literary*, (1742) reprint, London: Oxford UP, 1963.
- J.M. Keynes, *The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money* (1936) reprint New York: Harcourt, 1964.
- J. Kirshner (ed.), *Business, Banking and Economic Thought, Selected Studies of Raymond de Roover*, Chicago: U of Chicago Press, 1974.
- B. Levack, *The witch-hunt in early modern Europe*, New York: Longman/Pearson, 2006
- C. Mackay, *Extraordinary Popular Delusions and the Madness of Crowds* (2nd ed., 1852) reprint New York: Bonanza Books, 1980.
- J. Noonan, *The Scholastic Analysis of Usury*, Cambridge: Harvard U. Press, 1957.
- M. Olsen, *The Logic of Collective Action*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard U. Press, 1965.
- K. Pearson, *The History of Statistics in the 17th and 18th Centuries*, (E. Pearson, ed.) London: Griffin, 1978. 2
- Piketty, T., *Capital in the 21st Century*, Cambridge, MA: Belknap, Harvard University Press, 2014.
- G. Poitras, *The Early History of Financial Economics. 1478-1776*, Edward Elgar, 2000.
- W. Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*, (1600) Quiller-Couch (ed.), Cambridge: Cambridge U. Press, 1969.
- T. Sedlacek, *Economics of Good and Evil: The Quest for Economic Meaning from Gilgamesh to Wall Street*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011.
- J.Swift, *Gulliver's Travels* (1726), I. Asimov (ed.), New York: Clarkson Potter, 1980.
- Voltaire, F. (1759), *Candide*, J. Butt (trans.), Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1965.
- Voltaire, F. (1768), *The Man of Forty Crowns*, London, T.Becket and P. D.Hondt.
- M. Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, New York, Scribner, 1958