

POLS 4091 3.0F

Marxism, Feminism, Poststructuralism

First expository paper

Due date: November 9

Length: 1500 words

Proposed Essay Topics

Note: *Course readings only are required for this assignment*

1. Historical materialism is often accused of engaging in an economic reductionism that trivializes the cultural and linguistic dimensions of human social life. Yet, writers in a dialectical tradition of critical theory dispute this charge. With reference to Marx and Engels, along with other Marxist writers, critically discuss this debate. How persuasive do you find the dialectical Marxist rebuttal of the charge of economic reductionism?
2. Critically assess two contributions to materialist feminism. Explain their efforts to integrate gender and class analysis and assess how successful they are in this regard.
3. A number of writers have argued that historical materialism is capable of developing a robust materialist theory of language and culture. What are some of the elements of such a theory? Do you think this approach could offer a powerful alternative to poststructuralist accounts of language?
4. In its account of difference and power, claims Carole Stabile, poststructuralist theory betrays a “marked lack of critical attention to the context of capitalism” (“Feminism without Guarantees,” p. 49 or *Materialist Feminism*, p. 396). Discuss and assess this claim. Why does Stabile believe that the theoretical orientation of poststructuralism underplays the significance of capitalism in contemporary social life? Explain your agreement or disagreement with her argument.