

Alchemy of Air – Socratic Seminar: Part I

For Thursday – February 19th, 2015

Class will begin w/ a 15-20 minute introductory lecture on the history of N cycling before Haber.

Then we will have our first Socratic Seminar. A Socratic Seminar is a scholarly discussion of a question. In this discussion you will share your opinions, debate them, and refine these ideas through dialogue with each other.

To prepare for this seminar please read the Introduction through Part 1 of the Alchemy of Air (pages xi through 63).

The Question:

Do you think Wealth or War is the primary driver of the early history of N Cycling?

Guidelines for Participants in a Socratic Seminar

1. Refer to the text when needed during the discussion. A seminar is not a test of memory. You are not "learning a subject"; your goal is to understand the ideas, issues, and values reflected in the text.
2. It's OK to "pass" when asked to contribute.
3. Do not participate if you are not prepared. A seminar should not be a bull session.
4. Do not stay confused; ask for clarification.
5. Stick to the point currently under discussion; make notes about ideas you want to come back to.
6. Don't raise hands; take turns speaking.
7. Listen carefully.
8. Speak up so that all can hear you.
9. Talk to each other, not just to the professor.
10. Discuss ideas rather than each other's opinions.

¹From Straz, S. (2015)

Dialogue is characterized by:

- suspending judgment
- examining our own work without defensiveness
- exposing our reasoning and looking for limits to it
- communicating our underlying assumptions
- exploring viewpoints more broadly and deeply
- being open to disconfirming data
- approaching someone who sees a problem differently not as an adversary, but as a colleague in common pursuit of better solution.

Expectations of Participants in a Socratic Seminar

When I am evaluating your Socratic Seminar participation, I ask the following questions about participants. Did they....

- Speak loudly and clearly?
- Cite reasons and evidence for their statements?
- Use the text to find support?
- Listen to others respectfully?
- Stick with the subject?
- Talk to each other, not just to the me?
- Paraphrase accurately?
- Ask for help to clear up confusion?
- Support each other?
- Avoid hostile exchanges?
- Question others in a civil manner?
- Seem prepared?

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