PS116 The Idea of the State

Seminar Leader: Stefania Maffeis
Course Times: Tue & Thu 9:00-10:30
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Office Hours:

Course Description

This course follows the development of the idea of the state from the Early Modern period through the critique of the state in nineteenth- and twentieth-century philosophy to contemporary debates on transnationality and cosmopolitanism. Central to our deliberations will be the questions of legitimacy, security, property, and representation that are the cornerstones of modern political thought. Most notable among the texts considered will be Machiavelli’s *The Prince* and the theories of the state elaborated by Thomas Hobbes, John Locke and Jean Jacques Rousseau. Turning to the idealist transformation of the English outline of the state in German philosophy, we consider the Hegelian concept of the absolute state and its anti-capitalist critique by Marx and Marxism. The final section of the course examines contemporary analyses of the functioning of state power, such as the Althusserian theory of ideology, Foucault’s concept of biopolitics, and de- postcolonial, and feminist conception of the state in the global era.

Requirements

Attendance is required in all classes. Absences are registered in all classes. More than two absences in a semester will affect your participation grade for the class. For periods of illness or leaves of absence consult the Student Handbook.

All texts must be read in advance before the related session. We will focus together on the main passages and arguments, using different discussion methods (for example close reading, group discussion, and silent discussion). Each student will contribute with two text presentations, a midterm and a final paper. In the class presentation, which should be no longer than 15 minutes, students are invited to expose the main thesis of the text, also referring to central quotations, and to formulate an own position or a question, in order to stimulate the common general discussion. Midterm papers should be 2,000 words (about 7 pages) and final papers 3,000 words long (about 10 pages). They should be conceived as a further development of the presentations, as a critical discussion of the presented text in relation to other readings and approaches.

Grade Breakdown

Midterm Essay 20%
Final Essay 30%
Presentation 20%
Participation 30%

Course Readings

Books to be purchased:


Michel Foucault, The Birth of Biopolitics, Picador, 2010. 0312203411; 978-0312203412.


All other readings will be made available at the beginning of the course as PDF files.

### Schedule

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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
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<tr>
<td>September 04</td>
<td>Introduction, no readings</td>
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<tr>
<td>September 06</td>
<td>Niccolò Machiavelli, <em>The Prince</em> (Chapters I-XIV)</td>
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<td>September 11</td>
<td>Has to be postponed (possibly in a double session on December 13th)</td>
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<td>September 14</td>
<td>Niccolò Machiavelli, <em>The Prince</em>, chapters XV-XXVI</td>
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<td>September 18</td>
<td>Thomas Hobbes, <em>Leviathan</em>, part II chapters 17-23</td>
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<td>September 20</td>
<td>Thomas Hobbes, <em>Leviathan</em>, part II chapters 24-31</td>
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<tr>
<td>September 25</td>
<td>John Locke, <em>Second Treatise of Government</em>, chapters I-VI</td>
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<td>September 27</td>
<td>John Locke, <em>Second Treatise of Government</em>, chapters VII-XIII</td>
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<td>October 02</td>
<td>John Locke, <em>Second Treatise of Government</em>, chapters XIV-End</td>
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October 04

October 09

October 11
G. W. F. Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, § 33 (introduction)

October 16
G. W. F. Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, selections from part I and II

October 18
G. W. F. Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, selections from part III

October 23
Karl Marx, *Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right*, introduction and selections; *On the Jewish Question*

October 25
K. Marx/F. Engels, *The German Ideology*, selections

October 30
K. Marx/F. Engels, *The German Ideology*, selections
Submission of mid term papers

November 1
Luis Althusser, *On the Reproduction of capitalism*, selections

November 06
Luis Althusser, *On the Reproduction of capitalism*, selections

November 08
Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, lectures of Jan. 10th and 17th 1979

November 13

November 15
Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, lectures of March 28th and April 4th 1980, summary

November 20

November 11

November 27  
Étienne Balibar/Immanuel Wallerstein, *Race, Nation, Class*, chapters 3 and 5

November 29  
Franz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, chapter 1

December 04  
Franz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, chapter 3 and 4

December 06  
Hanna Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, part II chapter 6

December 11  
Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, part II chapter 9

December 13  
Judith Butler/Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Who Sings the Nation-State?*

Postponed session (date to be confirmed)  

December 18  
Writing workshop on final papers

December 20  
General discussion and course overview, submission of final papers