

PT130 Introduction to Political Theory: Plural Action

Seminar Leader: Jeffrey Champlin

Course Times: Fri 14:00-17:15

Location: P98-0, Room 1

Email: j.champlin@berlin.bard.edu

Office Hours: Fri 17:30-18:30 and by appointment

The history of political theory projects not just ideal images of state sovereignty, but also versions of the subject that correspond to its construction of power in each case. Following the golden age of Greek thought, the modern emphasis on the individual in this tradition leads to continued conflicts between private reflection as a means of overcoming prejudices and the need to find meaning in a common world. As Hannah Arendt puts it, humans are fundamentally plural beings who are both equal and distinct. Through this lens, this class first asks what kind of animal, multitude, or citizen can make a political difference in the world in the canonical views of Aristotle, Hobbes, and Rousseau. Then we consider critiques of this tradition through such authors as Marx, Arendt, and Hardt and Negri that bring in additional questions of class, party, plurality, and the subaltern. Throughout, we will ask how challenges to representative government and ideals of active citizenship help examine, and perhaps transform, difficulties of political agency today.

Academic Integrity

Bard College Berlin maintains the staunchest regard for academic integrity and expects good academic practice from students in their studies. Instances in which students fail to meet the expected standards of academic integrity will be dealt with under the Code of Student Conduct, Section III Academic Misconduct.

Requirements

We will make the most of the liberal arts seminar format by developing ideas and analysis through a process of discussion and writing. Toward that end, each student will contribute a short presentation and write a midterm and final paper. Overall class participation is also essential, and will be evaluated based on consistently preparing the readings and class engagement. Since this is a double class meeting once a week, I recommend pacing your reading to cover the material.

Attendance

Attendance at ALL classes is expected. Please consult the Student Handbook for regulations governing periods of illness or leaves of absence.

Class presentations: Students will present on one text as per a sign-up sheet. Each presentation of about 15 minutes will examine key passages of your choice as guided by a commentary handout that I will provide. In turn, you will provide your own handout for the class that focuses your reading of the text. You are encouraged to write your **midterm or final papers** on the text that you present on. In this manner, your essay can expand on the insights and questions that arose from your class contribution and the discussion that follows your readings.

Writing Assignments

Students will write two papers. The first will be focused on one author and the second will develop a longer comparative analysis of two texts we have studied in the class. The midterm paper will be 2,000 words, the final will be 3,000 words.

Policy on Late Submission of Papers

From the Student Handbook: *essays that are up to 24 hours late will be downgraded one full grade (from B+ to C+, for example). Instructors are not obliged to accept essays that are more than 24 hours late. Where an instructor agrees to accept a late essay, it must be submitted within four weeks of the deadline and cannot receive a grade of higher than C. Thereafter, the student will receive a failing grade for the assignment.*

Grade Breakdown

Class participation (quality and quantity): 25%

Presentation: 20%

Midterm essay (2000 words): 25%

Final essay (3000 words): 30%

Course Materials

The course will have a reader that all students should purchase. In addition, you will need the following books. The texts marked with an (*) are available at the library for students on financial aid and then on a first come, first served basis. The Arendt and Fanon should be purchased, along with other books as needed based on the library's holdings.

Aristotle, *The Politics*, 0140444211; ISBN: 9780140444 (*)

Arendt, *The Human Condition*, ISBN: 0226025934

Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, "On Violence," "On National Culture," ISBN: 0802150837

Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ISBN: 9780872201781 (*)

Rousseau, *On the Social Contract*, ISBN: 1853267813;9781853267819(*)

The following texts will be provided in the course reader or provided in class:

Derrida, "Declarations of Independence"

Graeber, *Debt* (selections)

Harari, *Sapiens* (selections)

Hardt and Negri, *Multitude*, (selections)

Marx and Engels, "Communist Manifesto"

Schellnhuber: "'Earth system' analysis and the second Copernican revolution"

Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?"

Suggested Readings on Google Classroom:

Rancière, "Ten Theses on Politics"

Edward Said, "Collaboration, Liberation, and Independence" From: *Culture and Imperialism*

Schedule

September 6 Plural Action in Context

Selections from Harari, *Sapiens*

Selections from Graeber, *Debt*

Aristotle, *Politics*, book 1

September 13 Aristotle: The Political Animal

Aristotle, *Politics*, book 2

Aristotle, *Politics*, books 3-4

September 20 Aristotle: The Political Animal (continued)

Aristotle, *Politics*, books 5-6

Aristotle, *Politics*, books 7-8

Suggested additional reading on Google classroom site: Rancière, "Ten Theses on Politics"

September 27 Hobbes: The Multitude

Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Introduction, part 1

Hobbes, *Leviathan*, part 2

October 4 Rousseau: The Citizen

Rousseau, *On the Social Contract*, book 1

Rousseau, *On the Social Contract*, book 2

Rousseau, *On the Social Contract*, book 3- 4

October 11 Midterm Paper Due

No class due to another commitment of mine, to be made up in completion week unless we choose an earlier date.

October 18 Marx and Engels: The Proletariat

Marx and Engels, "Theses on Feuerbach"

Marx and Engels, "Communist Manifesto"

October 25 Hannah Arendt: The Newcomer

Arendt, *The Human Condition*, "Prologue," "Chapter 5: Action"

Fall Break Mon, Oct. 28 – Sun, Nov. 3, 2019

November 8 Fanon: The Colonized and the New Man

Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, "On Violence"

Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, "On National Culture"

Suggested additional reading on Google classroom site: Edward Said, "Collaboration, Liberation, and Independence" From: *Culture and Imperialism*

November 15 Derrida: We the People

Fanon (Continued)

Derrida, "Declarations of Independence"

November 22 Hardt and Negri: Multitude (part 2)

Hardt and Negri, *Multitude*, Selections

November 29 Spivak: The Subaltern

Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?"

December 6 Schellnhuber: The Global Subject

"'Earth system' analysis and the second Copernican revolution"

December 13 Completion Week

Conclusion and sharing student work

NOTE: Plan to have a class on completion week to make up for the missed class on October 11.

Papers due December 13 by email.

