

PT155. Truth and Power

Seminar Leader: Hans Stauffacher (h.stauffacher@berlin.bard.edu)

Course times: Tue & Thu 9:00-10:30

Course Description

“No one has ever doubted that truth and politics are on rather bad terms with each other, and no one, as far as I know, has ever counted truthfulness among the political virtues,” wrote Hannah Arendt in 1964. Our era counts among those in which the unfriendly relation between truth and politics appears to have developed into a full-scale destructive conflict. But the relation between truth and the exercise of power has always been complicated. On the one hand, power can seem volatile, arbitrary, and illegitimate, while truth seems stable, universal, and definitive. In this regard, truth appears as a counterforce to power that is needed to keep it in check and hold those in power accountable. But on the other hand, we know that truth is itself an unstable phenomenon that is hardly ever independent from the assertion of power. In this course, we will try to shed some light on the complicated relation between the two: first, we will consider power and truth individually and discuss seminal theories and definitions of these central concepts of (political) philosophy. In a second step, we will focus on the writings of two twentieth-century philosophers: Hannah Arendt and Michel Foucault. Both of these thinkers put the complicated relation of power and truth at the center of their thought, but they come to very different conclusions. We will read Arendt’s and Foucault’s core writings on truth and power alongside works that influenced and informed them.

Course Readings

All course readings will be provided through Google Classroom. You are expected to print the texts and come to class with paper copies.

Please note that the schedule and the readings are subject to change. All changes will be communicated in class and via email.

If you would like to acquire books for this class, these are the volumes I recommend:

- *The Portable Hannah Arendt*. Ed. Peter Baehr, Penguin Classics: ISBN 978-0142437568
- *The Foucault Reader*. Ed. Paul Rabinow, Penguin Classics: ISBN 987-0241435144

Requirements

Class preparation: Preparing for class means reading thoughtfully and engaging with the texts, for instance, by thinking through the argument of a particular section and taking notes while reading. The readings for this course will be difficult and challenging. You should give yourself enough time to read them more than once. You will be expected to regularly submit short written comments or questions about the readings. Details about this will be communicated in the first session.

Attendance and participation: Regular attendance and active participation are essential to the success of this course. Therefore, attendance at all sessions and participation in all discussions is expected. Missing more than two 90-minute sessions will significantly affect the participation grade. Missing more than 30% (more than 8 sessions) would mean failing the course. Consult the Student Handbook for regulations governing periods of illness or leaves of absence.

Covid-19: Even though we hope it won't, the pandemic might again disrupt the usual way of conducting classes this semester and make it necessary to adjust teaching formats. Depending on the circumstances, class sessions will take place either in person or via Zoom. In case we will be able to meet in person, but you cannot attend class because of a Covid-19 related issue, there will always be the possibility to participate remotely.

Assignments: Students are required to complete the following assignments for this course: Two short writing exercises (about 1000 words each, due on Oct. 2 and Nov. 13) and a final essay (about 4000 words, due on Dec. 18). In addition to that, students are expected to regularly submit short written comments or questions about the readings. Details about all these assignments will be communicated in the first session.

Grade Breakdown:

Class participation: 40%
Written comments about readings: 10%
Writing exercises: 20% (10% each)
Final essay: 30%

Deadlines:

1st Writing Exercise: Saturday, Oct. 2
2nd Writing Exercise: Saturday, Nov. 13
Final Essay: Saturday, Dec. 18

Policy on Late Submission of Essays: Please note the following policy from the Student Handbook on the submission of essays: *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.*

Academic Integrity: Bard College Berlin maintains the staunchest regard for academic integrity and expects good academic practice from students in their studies. Failing to meet the expected standards of academic integrity (plagiarism, cheating) will be reported and dealt with under the Code of Student Conduct, Section 14.3 (Academic Misconduct) in the Student Handbook.

Schedule*

Tuesday, Aug. 31: Introduction
Emmanuel Alloa: “Who’s Afraid of the Post-factual?” (2017)

Ch. 1 – SPEAKING TRUTH TO POWER?

Thursday, Sept. 2 Edward W. Said: “Speaking Truth to Power” (1994)

Tuesday, Sept. 7 Plato [readings tba – probably from *Apology*, *Gorgias*, *Theaetetus*, or *Republic*]

Thursday, Sept. 9 Theories of Truth [lecture, readings tba]

Tuesday, Sept. 14 Immanuel Kant: “Answering the Question: What Is Enlightenment?” (1784)

Thursday, Sept. 16 Friedrich Nietzsche: “On Truth and Lying in an Extra-Moral Sense” (1873)

Ch. 2 – TRUTH AND POLITICS – HANNAH ARENDT

Tuesday, Sept. 21 “Labor, Work, Action” (1964)

Thursday, Sept. 23 &
Tuesday, Sept 28 &
Thursday, Sept. 30 *The Human Condition* (1958, selections)

1st Writing Exercise due on Saturday, Oct. 2

Tuesday, Oct. 5 &
Thursday, Oct 7 “On Violence” (1972)

Tuesday, Oct. 12 “What is Freedom?” (1960)

Thursday, Oct. 14 “Truth and Politics” (1967)

FALL BREAK

Tuesday, Oct. 26 “Truth and Politics” (1967)

Thursday, Oct. 28 “Lying in Politics” (1972, selections)

Ch. 3 – TRUTH AND POWER – MICHEL FOUCAULT

Tuesday, Nov. 2 &
Thursday, Nov 4 “The Order of Discourse” (1970)

Tuesday, Nov. 9 &
Thursday, Nov 11 “The Subject and Power” (1982)

2nd Writing Exercise due on Saturday, Nov. 13

Tuesday, Nov. 16 &
Thursday, Nov. 18 *The History of Sexuality Vol 1: The Will to Knowledge* (1976, selections)

Tuesday, Nov. 23 &
Thursday, Nov. 25 “Truth and Power” (1977)

Tuesday, Nov 30 &
Thursday, Dec. 2 *The Courage of the Truth, The Government of Self and Others Vol. 2* (1984, selections)

Tuesday, Dec. 7 “What is Enlightenment?” (1984)

Thursday, Dec. 9 Final Discussion

Dec. 13-17: Completion Week

Final Essay due on Saturday, Dec. 18

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