

## PL325 Giorgio Agamben: The Homo Sacer Project

Seminar Leader: Dr. Damiano Sacco  
Email: D.Sacco@berlin.bard.edu  
Office Hours: By appointment

### Course Description

Giorgio Agamben has developed in nine volumes, written over two decades from 1995 to 2015, one of the most ambitious and comprehensive philosophical projects of the last years. By means of a thorough and extensive analysis of the Western philosophical tradition, Agamben has attempted to put forth a novel framework that would enable us to think anew the indissociable link that connects the dimensions of metaphysics, language, and politics in the West. The *Homo Sacer* project aims to carry out this task by means of a philosophical archaeology that traces the historical unfolding of the notions of being, language, and life, from their first appearance in Ancient Greece to their contemporary value and significance in our society. In this course we will focus in particular on extracts from the first and last volumes of the collection, namely *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* and *The Use of Bodies*, but also on writings published by Agamben beyond the framework of the *Homo Sacer* project. The principal aim of the course is to understand the dynamic between sovereign power and 'bare life', and to outline the way in which, according to Agamben, metaphysics, language, and politics have developed unitarily throughout the Western philosophical and political experience. Through a comparative study of these three dimensions, we will see how, according to Agamben, the mechanism of exception (or inclusive-exclusion) operates by excluding a certain element (pure being, the non-linguistic, 'bare-life') from a specific domain, and, in the same gesture, by including this excluded element *as* the very ground and foundation of the respective domain. By the end of the course, we will be in a position to assess some of the most contentious and discussed claims put forth by Agamben, in particular with respect to the state of exception and its instantiations in the concentration camp, the figure of the refugee, and the ongoing pandemic.

Where possible students should purchase the following two books:

1. Agamben, Giorgio. *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. Trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998.
2. Agamben, Giorgio. *The Use of Bodies*. Trans. Adam Kotsko. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016.

### Requirements

Regular class attendance is essential as is preparation of the readings and active participation during the seminar. Students are required to thoroughly prepare for the weekly class by working through the readings and attempting to formulate questions or answer the ones provided by the instructor. Where possible bring paper copies of the readings as electronic devices are allowed in class only for disability accommodation.

### 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 14.3 (Academic Misconduct) in the Student Handbook.

### Attendance

Attendance at all classes is a crucial part of the education offered by Bard College Berlin. To account for minor circumstances, two absences from twice-per-week courses or the equivalent (e.g. one absence from a once-per-week course) should not affect the participation grade or require documentation. Missing more than two classes without providing appropriate documentation will reduce the course grade. Similar considerations apply for late arrivals.

Bard College Berlin does not offer credit for any course in which a student has missed more than 30% of classes, regardless of the reasons for the absences, whether excused or unexcused.

The full Bard College Berlin attendance policy can be found in the Student Handbook, Section 2.8.

SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR SPRING 2021: Some students might need to begin the semester remotely due to travel restrictions caused by the pandemic. In addition, all students and instructors must refrain from in-person attendance if they are feeling ill. Instructors should make efforts to offer alternatives to in-person attendance where needed, including remote participation or asynchronous options.

### Assessment

Assessment of the course is based on two essays, class participation and presentation. See below: 'Assignments', 'Grade Breakdown'.

### Assignments

Midterm Essay: 1800-2500 words. The essay will focus on your understanding of a specific aspect of the material addressed in class without particularly relying on any secondary literature.

Final Essay: 2800-3500 words. The final essay will draw from any aspect addressed in the readings and in the discussion and will allow you to put forth an original argument by relying on a wider range of sources.

### Policy on Late Submission of Papers

Essays that are up to 24 hours late can be downgraded up to 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. Thereafter, the student will receive a failing grade for the assignment. Grades and comments will be

returned to students in a timely fashion. Students are also entitled to make an appointment to discuss essay assignments and feedback during instructors' office hours.

Students receive mid- and end-of-semester grades for their seminar work. Students are entitled to make an appointment with an instructor to discuss seminar participation, or may be asked to meet with the instructor at any stage in the semester regarding class progress.

## Grade Breakdown

Seminar Participation: 30%

Midterm Essay: 30 %

Final Essay: 40%

## Schedule

Week 1

Tuesday, February 2

Giorgio Agamben, *Means Without Ends: Notes on Politics*, pp. 3-45.

Giorgio Agamben, "From the State of Control to a Praxis of Destituent Power"  
(Extra Reading—Hannah Arendt: "We Refugees")

Week 2

Tuesday, February 9

Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, pp. 1-38

Week 3

Tuesday, February 16

Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, pp. 39-67

Week 4

Tuesday, February 23

Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, pp. 71-115

Week 5

Tuesday, March 2

Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, pp. 119-153

Week 6

Tuesday, March 9

Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, pp. 154-188

Week 7

Tuesday, March 16

Giorgio Agamben, *State of Exception*, pp. 1-40

Week 8

Tuesday, March 23

Giorgio Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, pp. 3-58

Week 9

Tuesday, March 30. Spring Break

Week 10

Tuesday, April 6

Giorgio Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, pp. 58-108

Week 11

Tuesday, April 13

Giorgio Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, pp. 111-175

Week 12

Tuesday, April 20

Giorgio Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, pp. 176-233

Week 13

Tuesday, April 27

Giorgio Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, pp. 234-279

Week 14

Tuesday, May 4

Giorgio Agamben, *The Coming Community*

Week 15

Tuesday, May 11

Giorgio Agamben on Covid-19 Pandemic, translated excerpts from his blog 'Una Voce'

Completion Week

Tuesday, May 18

Scheduled class times will be available online under the relevant course heading:  
<https://berlin.bard.edu/academics/courses/>

## Essay Deadlines

Midterm Essay: Due Friday, March 19, 23:59

Final Essay: Due Thursday, May 13, 23:59