

PT120 Introduction to Political Theory: State versus Nature

Seminar Leader: Jeffrey Champlin
Course Times: Tue & Fri 15:45-17:15
Location:
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Office Hours: and by appointment

Course Description

This course offers an historical introduction to political theory through the contrast between the political human and its “natural” other. Philosophers continually appeal to this distinction, starting with the difference between man and animal, to justify particular modes of power. We begin with Aristotle's definition of the human as the "political animal." Entering the modern period, we contrast the uses that Hobbes and Rousseau make of the "state of nature" as the precondition of the social contract that assures legitimate authority. As industrialization conquers the modern world, Marx seeks to overcome alienation through a materialism that asserts that "nature is man's inorganic body." Finally, our approach to more recent political thought will be guided by Arendt's conception of world alienation, marked by an age in which humans "seek to make life also artificial."

As we study these thinkers and others, we will see how the opposition between state and nature works both as a method of inclusion and exclusion as conceptions of rights and political participation expand. At the same time, we will consider how this powerful contrast helps us grasp the Faustian modern drive to remake the world and the potentially totalitarian consequences of this drive.

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.

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.

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.

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

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 text 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

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

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. 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 Saadawi should be purchased, along with other books as needed based on the library's holdings.

Books:

Aristotle, *The Politics*, 0140444211; 9780140444 (*)
Hobbes, Thomas. *Leviathan*, 9780872201781 (*)
Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. *On the Social Contract*, 1853267813;9781853267819(*)
---. *Discourse on Inequality*, 9781419116162 | 9781419111112 (*)
Saadawi, Ahmed. *Frankenstein in Baghdad*. Penguin Books; 2018, ISBN-10: 0143128795

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

Arendt, Hanna. "The Decline of the Nation-State and the End of the Rights of Man" from *The Origins of Totalitarianism*.
---. Prologue and chapter 1 of *The Human Condition*
Augustine. *City of God*, book 11
Derrida, Jacques. *The Sovereign and the Beast* (selections)
Haraway, Donna. "Anthropocene, capitalocene, plantationocene, chthulucene: Making kin." *Environmental humanities* 6.1 (2015): 159-165.
Keenan, Thomas. "Getting the dead to tell me what happened: Justice, prosopopoeia, and forensic afterlives." *Forensis: The architecture of public truth* (2014): 35-55.
Latour, Bruno. "Agency at the Time of the Anthropocene." *New literary history* 45.1 (2014): 1-18.
Marx, Karl and Engels, Friedrich. "Communist Manifesto" and "Estranged Labor" (From: *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*)
Mbembé, J-A., "Necropolitics," *Public culture* 15.1 (2003): 11-40.
Schellnhuber, Hans Joachim, "'Earth System Analysis' and the Second Copernican Revolution" (Nature, 1999)
Serres, Michel. *The natural contract*. University of Michigan Press, 1995. (Selections.)

Schedule

February 2 Introduction, readings provided in class.

February 5 Introduction, continued.

February 9 Aristotle. *Politics*. books 1-2.

February 11 Aristotle. *Politics*. books 3-4.

February 16 Aristotle. *Politics*, books 5-6.

February 19 Aristotle. *Politics*, books 7-8.

February 23 Hobbes. *Leviathan*, Introduction.

February 25 Hobbes. *Leviathan*, part 1.

March 2 Hobbes. *Leviathan*, part 1 (continues).

March 5 Hobbes. *Leviathan*, part 2.

March 9 Schellnhuber. "‘Earth System Analysis’ and the Second Copernican Revolution."

March 12 Locke, *Second Treatise on Government*, Chapters 2,5,8,9.

Midterm Paper Due

March 16 Rousseau. *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*.

March 19 Rousseau. *The Social Contract*, Chapter 1.

March 23 Rousseau. *The Social Contract*. Chapter 2.

March 26 Marx. "Estranged Labor."

March 29 – April 5 spring break.

March 31 Marx and Engels. "Communist Manifesto."

April 2 Arendt. Prologue of *The Human Condition*.

April 6 Arendt. Chapter 1 of *The Human Condition*.

April 9 Arendt. "The Decline of the Nation-State and the End of the Rights of Man" from *The Origins of Totalitarianism*.

April 13 Keenan. "Getting the dead to tell me what happened: Justice, prosopopoeia, and forensic afterlives."

April 16 Haraway. "Anthropocene. capitalocene. plantationocene. chthulucene: Making kin."

April 20 Mbembe. "Necropolitics."

April 23 Derrida. *The Sovereign and the Beast* (selections)

April 27 Derrida. *The Sovereign and the Beast* (selections)

April 30 Saadawi. *Frankenstein in Baghdad*. 1-141.

May 4 Saadawi. *Frankenstein in Baghdad*. 141-281.

May 7 Serres. The Natural Contract. (selections)

Final papers due for graduating students

May 11 Latour. "Agency at the Time of the Anthropocene."

May 15 Conclusion and writing workshop.

May 21 **Final papers due for non-graduating students**