

PT140. Emancipation: Theory as Liberatory Practice

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

Course Times: Tue & Thu 17:30-19:00

Course Description

"Emancipation" originally had a passive, purely descriptive meaning, referring in Roman law to the release of a son from paternal authority. In the Enlightenment, it became a spur to intellectual responsibility and reflection, denoting the emergence from "self-incurred immaturity" (Kant), as well as a political clarion-cry, heralding the self-determination and empowerment of individuals, suppressed social classes, and even of all humanity. Its status as a fundamental ideal of modernity developed further through its application to the condition of groups disenfranchised by property-relations defended on the basis of religious, racial, ethnic, or sexual hierarchies, or by territorial forms of administrative and economic subordination (colonialism, imperialism). Precisely because it is so inextricably interwoven with Enlightenment however, the ideal of emancipation has been radically undermined by "post-metaphysical thinking," which is skeptical about the inherent value, identity, or existence of the essence to be emancipated. In this seminar, we will address the history of the theory of emancipation and its expansion beyond the category of person it originally addressed, as well as examining contemporary critiques. Our question will be: is it possible that these critiques renew and revivify rather than dismantle the notion of emancipation as a political resource?

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. Electronic devices are not allowed in class.

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

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.

To facilitate our discussions, you will be expected to regularly post questions and comments about the texts on Google Classroom before class. Details about this will be communicated in the first session.

Attendance and participation: Regular attendance and active participation is 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.

Assignments: Students are required to complete the following assignments for this course: Two short presentations (5 to 10 minutes, week 7 and week 13); A midterm essay (about 2000 words, due 21 March); A final essay (about 4000 words, due 13 May). These assignments will build on one another and deal with the question of the applicability of the theories of emancipation we discuss in class to 21st-century social and political practice. Details about the exact nature of the assignments will be communicated in the first session.

Grade Breakdown:

Class preparation and participation: 40%
Presentations: 10%
Midterm essay: 20%
Final essay: 30%

Essay Deadlines:

Midterm essay (2000 words): **Saturday, 21 March**
Final essay (4000 words): **Wednesday, 13 May**
(Submissions through Google Classroom)

Policy on Late Submission of Papers: Please note 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*

Week 1 (28 Jan. & 30 Jan.)

bell hooks: "Theory as Liberatory Practice" (1991)

Immanuel Kant: "An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?" (1784)

Week 2 (4 Feb. & 6 Feb.)

Reinhart Koselleck: "The Limits of Emancipation. A Conceptual-Historical Sketch" (2002)

Susan Buck-Morss: "Hegel and Haiti" (2000)

Week 3 (11 Feb. & 13 Feb.)

Karl Marx: "Introduction to a Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*" (1844)

Karl Marx: "On the Jewish Question" (1843)

Week 4 (18 Feb. & 20 Feb.)

Jürgen Habermas: *Knowledge and Human Interests* (1968, excerpts)

Axel Honneth: "Is There an Emancipatory Interest? An Attempt to Answer Critical Theory's Most Fundamental Question" (2016)

Week 5 (25 Feb. & 27 Feb.)

Jean-François Lyotard: "Missive on Universal History" (1986)

Ernesto Laclau: "Beyond Emancipation" (1992)

Week 6 (3 Mar. & 5 Mar.)

Michel Foucault: "The Subject and Power" (1982)

Michel Foucault: "What is Enlightenment?" (1984)

Week 7 (10 Mar. & 12 Mar.)

Student Presentations

Week 8 (17 Mar. & 19 Mar.)

Hedwig Dohm: "Women's Nature and Right" (1876)

Simone de Beauvoir: *The Second Sex* (1949, excerpts)

Midterm essays due Saturday, March 21!

Week 9 (24 Mar. & 26 Mar.)

Judith Butler: *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990, excerpts)

Week 10 (31 Mar. & 2 Apr.)

Seyla Benhabib: "Feminism and Postmodernism: An Uneasy Alliance" (1995)

Amy Allen: "Emancipation Without Utopia: Subjection, Modernity, and the Normative Claims of Feminist Critical Theory" (2015)

SPRING BREAK

Week 11 (14 Apr. & 16 Apr.)

Saba Mahmood: "Feminist Theory, Embodiment, and the Docile Agent: Some Reflections on the Egyptian Islamic Revival" (2001)

Joan Wallach Scott: "The Vexed Relationship of Emancipation and Equality" (2012)

Week 12 (21 Apr. & 23 Apr.)

Sandra Harding: "Subjectivity, Experience and Knowledge: An Epistemology from/for Rainbow Coalition Politics" (1992)

Nancy Fraser: "A Triple Movement? Parsing the Politics of Crisis after Polanyi" (2013)

Week 13 (28 Apr. & 30 Apr.)

Student Presentations

Week 14 (5 May & 7 May)

Jacques Rancière: *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation* (1987, excerpts)

Week 15

Completion week

Final essays due Wednesday, 13 May

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