

PT143. The Private, the Public, and the Political

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

Course times: Tue & Thu 09:00-10:30

Course Description

The distinction between the private realm and the public sphere has always been foundational for conceptions of the political. Taking the second-wave feminist slogan “the personal is political” as a starting point, this course will explore influential and critical notions of public and private life and their impact on different conceptions of the political. We will give special consideration to how these conceptions determine obstacles and possibilities for participating in the political life of a society, especially in relation to constructions of class and gender. Reading and discussing texts from Aristotle to the 21st-century, we will ask whether political action is only possible in such a sphere, as many classic positions hold, and how that sphere—and the realm of the “private”—may be defined today.

Course Readings

All course readings will be provided as pdf files. 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.

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: A midterm essay (about 2000 words, due Oct. 22) , and a final essay (about 4000 words, due Dec. 17).

Grade Breakdown:

Class participation: 40%

Written comments on readings: 10%

Midterm essay: 20%

Final essay: 30%

Policy on Late Submission of Papers: Please note the following policy from the Student Handbook on the submission of essays: *essays that are up to 24 hours late can 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 by the agreed deadline. 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. 30 Carol Hanisch, “The Personal Is Political” (1970)

1. PUBLIC SPEECH, PRIVATE THOUGHT

Thursday, Sept. 1 Immanuel Kant: “Answering the Question: What Is Enlightenment?” (1784)

Tuesday, Sept. 6 & Thursday, Sept. 8 John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty* (1859) & *The Subjection of Women* (1869)

2. LIBERALISM AND ITS DISCONTENTS

Tuesday, Sept. 13 Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (1651)

Thursday, Sept. 15 John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government* (1689)

Tuesday, Sept. 20 Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations* (1776)

Thursday, Sept. 22 & Tuesday, Sept. 27 Karl Marx, “On the Jewish Question” (1844) & *Grundrisse* (1858)

3. PUBLIC SPHERE(S)

Thursday, Sept. 29 & Tuesday, Oct. 4 Aristotle, *Politics*

Thursday, Oct. 6 Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (1835/40)

Tuesday, Oct. 11 & Thursday, Oct. 13 Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (1958) & “Labor, Work, Action” (1964)

Tuesday, Oct. 18 & Thursday, Oct. 20 Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1962) & “The Public Sphere” (1964)

FALL BREAK

Midterm Essay due on Saturday, Oct. 22

Tuesday, Nov. 1 Nancy Fraser, “Rethinking the Public Sphere” (1992)

4. SOCIAL LIFE

- Thursday, Nov. 3** Erwing Goffman, *Behavior in Public Places* (1968)
- Tuesday, Nov. 8** Philippe Ariès, “The Family and the City” (1977)
- Thursday, Nov. 10** Richard Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man* (1977)

5. FEMINIST PERSPECTIVES

- Tuesday, Nov. 15** Jean Bethke Elshtain, *Public Man, Private Woman* (1981)
- Thursday, Nov. 17** Carole Pateman, “Feminist Critiques of the Public/Private Dichotomy” (1989)
- Tuesday, Nov. 22** Iris Marion Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (1990)
- Thursday, Nov. 24** Patricia Boling, *Privacy and the Politics of Intimate Life* (1996)
- Tuesday, Nov. 29** Susan Moller Okin, “Gender, the Public and the Private” (2008)

6. WHOSE BODY, WHOSE CHOICE?

- Thursday, Dec. 1** Catherine MacKinnon, “Abortion: On Public and Private” (2018)
- Tuesday, Dec. 6** Clara Fischer, “Feminists Redraw Public and Private Spheres” (2020)
- Thursday, Dec 8** Final Discussion

COMPLETION WEEK

Final Essay due on Saturday, Dec. 17

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