Bard College Berlin
A LIBERAL ARTS UNIVERSITY

IS303 Origins of Political Economy

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Office hours: Provided by individual seminar leaders

Course Description

This course explores the intellectual history of the contemporary disciplines of economics, political science and sociology, by examining the historical origins of the discourse and practice known as "political economy": the means and processes by which societies and populations provide for their own survival and development. It offers an introduction to the reach and implications of this endeavor, its relationship to questions of law, sovereignty and political representation. It equally addresses changing state-market relationships and normative discourses about the best ways to organize societies as they echo in the liberal and critical traditions of Western political thought. In keeping with its attention to the formative history of modern categories and disciplines of knowledge, the course also addresses the ways in which changes in the (understanding of) political economy have led to disciplinary specializations and certain blind spots in analytically linking development and underdevelopment, enlightenment and exclusion. It allows students to understand, draw upon and critique the historical formulation of contemporary problems and concerns such as the foundations of political freedom, the nature of markets, the sources and circulation of wealth, the social impact of inequality and racism, and the connection and differentiation between the economic and political spheres.

Requirements

Required Textbooks

- Course Reader

Academic Integrity

Bard College Berlin maintains the highest standards of academic integrity and expects students to adhere to these standards at all times. 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 and Participation requirements

Attendance at all classes is a crucial part of the education offered by Bard College Berlin. To account for minor circumstances, two absences from this course will not affect the participation grade or require documentation. Beyond that, each further absence will lead to a subtraction of 5 percentage points from the overall participation grade. There is no option of remote participation and electronic devices are not permitted in class. Absences cannot be substituted through extra work. Accommodation letters need to be submitted in the first week of the term and cannot be used retroactively.

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

Policy on Late Submission of Papers

Written assignments (i.e., the ten response papers) that are up to 24 hours late will be downgraded by 5 percentage points. For every additional 24 hours, five additional points will be subtracted from the grade. Instructors will not accept essays that are more than 96 hours late. 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.

Assignments and Grade Breakdown

- Classroom Participation 30% (2*15%)
  This seminar involves thoughtful and active participation in class discussions and working groups. The classroom is a protected space and you should feel free to voice your arguments and comments. Please do not hesitate to address the seminar leaders if you feel that this is not the case.
- Group Film Presentations 20%
  Groups will create a film (i.e., a filmed presentation, sketch, mini-documentary, etc.) which will be discussed in the lecture hall during the closing session. In their presentations, groups will look back at the term and revisit one pertinent tradition of thought or problem of political economy in more detail. Clips will be no longer than 5 minutes. Details and formats will be discussed with seminar leaders in the respective sections.
- 10 Response Papers (each ~500-600 words; 10*5%) 50%
  Each student is required to write 10 response papers (1.5-spaced, 12 pt., Times New Roman) on sessions of their choice (i.e., five of which before, and five after the fall break).
  Response papers should include a short abstract of the primary texts' main tenets, an analysis (not simply your personal reaction) that embeds the reading in earlier class discussions, and the articulation of one central synthetic question that engages the issues and debates addressed in the reading as a starting point for broader discussion.
  - Response papers need to be submitted per email (as a Word-document) at 6pm on the night before the respective session.
  - Indicate your name, the number of the response paper, and the date of submission in the header of the document.
  - In consultation with the instructor students may have the option to give a 20-minute class presentation to substitute for two response papers.

Schedule

Highlighted sessions will be held jointly in the Lecture Hall

Week Beginning	Session 1	Session 2	Assignments
	I. The Idea of Society and the Birth of Liberalism		
1 Sept 4	**Introduction** What is Political Economy? Slater and Tonkiss, *The Emergence of Market Society* (2004), ch. 1	**Sovereignty and Mercantilism** Bodin, *Six Books* (1606), ch. 8 Mun, *England's Treasure* (1628) De Las Casas, *Brief Account* (1689)	
2 Sept 11	**The Commonwealth** Hobbes, *Leviathan* (1651), Letter Dedicatory, Intro, chs. 13, 17, 18	***Lecture hosted by Aysuda Kölemen*** **Bourgeois Liberty** Locke, *Second Treatise* (1689), chs. 2, 3, 4, 5, 9	
3 Sept 18	**Government and Commerce** Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws* (1748), Bks. 3, 7, 20	***Lecture hosted by Jeffrey Champlin*** **Civilization as Degeneration** Rousseau, *Second Discourse* (1755), Pt. 2 Rousseau, *Social Contract* (1762), Bk. 1	
4 Sept 25	**Harmonious Orders** Smith, *Wealth of Nati.* (1776), chs. 1.1-3 Smith, *Theory of Moral Sen.* (1759), ch. 1.1	**Utilitarianism** Bentham, *Principles of Morals and Legislation* (1789), chs. 1, 2, 4, 13 Bentham, *Panopticon Lett.* (1787), 1, 2, 5	Five Response Papers until fall break
5 Oct 2	**The Dismal Science** Godwin, *Of Avarice and Profusion* (1797) Malthus, *On Population* (1798), chs. 1, 5, 10, 15	**Foreign Trade** Hume, *On the Balance of Trade* (1752) Ricardo, *On Foreign Trade* (1817)	
	II. Challenges and Reconfigurations of Liberalism		
6 Oct 11	**Liberalism and Women's Rights** Wollstonecraft, *Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792), Introduction, chs. 1, 2	**Industrialization and Inequality** Mill, *Employment of Children* (1832); *On Liberty* (1859), ch. 1; from *Principles of Political Economy* (1870)	
7 Oct 18	**National Political Economy** List, *The National System of Political Economy* (1841), chs. 11, 14, 15	**Historical Materialism** Marx, *Estranged Labor* (1844) Marx & Engels, *Communist Manifesto* (1848)	

Fall Break
Mon, Oct. 23, - Sun, Oct. 29, 2023

8 Oct 30	***Lecture hosted by Kai Koddenbrock*** **Kapital** Marx, *Value, Price & Profit* (1865)	**Imperialism** Luxemburg, *The Accumulation of Capital* (1913), ch. 27	
9 Nov 6	**Capitalism and Race** James, *The Black Jacobins* (1963), Prologue, ch. 2	**Reconstruction and Its Retelling** DuBois, *Black Reconstruction* (1935), chs. 1, 17	
	III. States and Markets		
10 Nov 13	**Saving Capitalism from Itself** Keynes, *Econ. Conseq. of the Peace* (1919); *End of Laisser-Faire* (1926); *Open Letter to the President* (1933); *General Theory of Employment* (1937)	**Capitalism as Creative Destruction** Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy* (1942), chs. 7, 8, 13	Five Response Papers in second half of the term
11 Nov 20	***Lecture hosted by Boris Vormann*** **Embedded Markets** Polanyi, *The Great Transformation* (1944), chs. 6, 12	**Markets and Information** Hayek, *Use of Knowledge in Soc.* (1945) Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom* (1962), ch. 1	
	IV. Development and Underdevelopment		
12 Nov 27	**Critique of Eurocentrism** Amin, *Eurocentrism* (2009), chs. 1, 4	**Development of Latin America** Prebisch, *Economic Development of Latin America* (1950), excerpt & secondary text	
13 Dec 4	**Underdevelopment of Africa** Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (1972), Preface, ch. 6	***Lecture hosted by Gale Raj-Reichert*** **The Developmental State in Asia** Amsden, Asia's Next Giant (1992), chs. 1, 2, 6	
14 Dec 11	**End of the Liberal Order?** Held, *Central Persp. on the Modern State* (1989) Watch Fukuyama, Can Liberalism Save Itself?	***Group Film Presentations***	

Course Overview, with study questions

For all readings, please familiarize yourself with the biographical background of the authors and the historical context of their writing. Who are the audiences they were trying to reach? Why were their claims important in that particular moment in time? How do they refer back to earlier discussions in political economy? (Consider doing this in small groups in order to share tasks and generate questions to bring with you to seminar.)

I. The Idea of Society and the Birth of Liberalism

After the discovery of the so-called New World, European societies began to question their own feudal hierarchies and political set-up. How should states be organized? Who should have the right to govern? These are just two of the central questions that social contract theorists posed in the 17th and 18th century to legitimate and, ultimately, transcend absolutist state power. By contrast, economic liberty, political freedom, and individual self-determination were central tenets of liberalism -- and most liberal authors of the 18th and 19th century would have agreed that it is markets that are best suited to bring about these objectives. While an earlier strand of liberalism emphasized the economic dimension of the market and its liberating potential in the context of bourgeois revolutions and the overcoming of the absolutist state, later liberal thinkers that have witnessed the social upheavals and environmental problems brought about by the industrial revolution added a more social dimension to economic life and the people who led it.

Study Questions

- Social contract theorists assumed a hypothetical state of nature to better fathom the contours of a state of society -- and to legitimate their critique of it. How do the conceptions of the state of nature and the state of society differ among the authors? And for what precise purpose?
- In the different readings: Who is included by the authors to belong to civil society and who is not? On which basis are inequalities among humans legitimate, according to the different authors? What types of liberties do the authors envisage, and at what point can they become a social problem?
- How do, or may, markets produce social order? When are they conducive to democracy? What legitimates market order?
- What are the limits of democracy? Should it be reined in? What are the institutions beyond the market that make democracy work?

II. Challenges and Reconfigurations of Liberalism

The critical tradition can be traced back to Jean-Jacques Rousseau whom we have already read in the context of the early social contract theorists. From his perspective, the division of labor and the transition toward market society is seen much more skeptically than in the liberal tradition. Authors we encounter in this section point out the contradictions between the theory of universal liberal values and the practices of capitalism. As such, by highlighting the discrepancy between the actual and the possible, critical thinkers in the mid-19th century all the way to the mid-20th century sought more emancipatory forms of social organization to recapture the potential for human creativity -- and think about ways to get there.

Study Questions

- What are the basic assumptions about the driving forces of history? And how do these assumptions differ among the authors in this section? How is social change brought about? And what is the role of the intellectual in making that happen?
- Alienation -- not being in control of one's existence -- is a central concept in critical thought. How does its definition change over time? How is it used by different authors?
- How can society be viewed differently, according to the different authors, in order to critique existing conditions?
- What would happen if all aspects of life were marketized? Is full out commodification theoretically and practically feasible?
- What implicit assumptions about human nature do the different thinkers in this section have in mind? In which ways do they echo earlier debates?