

# PL110 Introduction to Political Theory

Seminar Leader: Thomas Raysmith  
Email: t.raysmith@berlin.bard.edu  
Office Hours: Wednesdays 12:30-13:30 or by appointment

## Course Description

This course takes a global and historical approach to political theory. We will address questions such as those concerning the forms and legitimacy of political institutions, the nature and scope of political authority, the rights and responsibilities of individuals, and the relations between states. In doing so, we will cover many of the core topics of both historical and contemporary political theory, including justice, rights, law, religion, equality, property, industrialization, capitalism, globalization, colonialism, historical injustice, race, gender, sexuality, immigration, and human-nonhuman relations. Our focus each week will be the analysis of two to three primary texts. This will provide an in-depth understanding of the debates, positions, and arguments in political theory. Yet students will also develop a broad overview of the field by reading texts from contemporary analytic and Continental philosophy, African philosophy, Arabic philosophy, as well as ancient Indian, Chinese, and Greek philosophy.

## Requirements

Students are expected to attend all classes unless there are extenuating circumstances. Classes will be run as seminars, with students expected to read materials and contribute to the discussion. Students are also expected to submit all assignments by the due date.

As seminar leader, I will make myself available for meetings if they are requested. If you are struggling with the material, need help coming up with ideas for your essays or talks, etc., please do not hesitate to request a meeting.

### 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

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.

Students should not attend class when they test positive for COVID-19. It is the student's responsibility to contact the seminar leader regarding the content of missed classes. Remote participation in classes will not be offered.

Bard College Berlin may 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.

**Assessment**

Students will be required to submit 2 essays (1<sup>st</sup> essay due March 18, 2<sup>nd</sup> essay due May 6). Students must present essay plans for both essays to the seminar leader no later than 1 week before their respective due dates.

Students will also be required to give a 10–15-minute introductory talk to 1 class.

**Assignments**

Students are required to submit 2 essays. Each essay must focus on a topic covered in class, up to and including the class of the week of submission. The word count of each essay must be 2000 (+ or – 10%). Each essay must reference at least 10 sources.

Students are also required to deliver an introductory talk to 1 class that covers the thinkers and material of that class. The talk must be 10-15 minutes in duration.

**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 a professor agrees to accept a late assignment, it should be submitted by the new deadline agreed upon by both parties. 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**

- 1<sup>st</sup> essay = 25% of total grade
- 2<sup>nd</sup> essay = 25% of total grade
- Introductory talk = 20% of total grade
- Seminar preparation and participation = 30%

**Schedule**

Class date	Readings	Assignments
January 31	Kautilya, <i>Arthashastra</i> : selections  Bisht, Medha, <i>Kautilya’s Arthashastra</i> : selections.	
February 7	Confucius, <i>The Analects</i> :	

	<p>selections</p> <p><i>The Mozi</i>: selections</p>	
February 14	<p>Plato, <i>Republic</i>: selections</p> <p>Aristotle, <i>Politics</i>: selections</p>	
February 21	<p>Oluwole, Sophie, 'Culture, Gender, and Development Theories in Africa'</p> <p>Wamala, Edward, 'Government by Consensus: An Analysis of a Traditional Form of Democracy'</p> <p>Masolo, D. A., 'Western and African Communitarianism: A Comparison'</p>	
February 28	<p>Aquinas, Thomas, <i>Treatise on Law</i>: selections</p> <p>Stump, Eleonore, <i>Aquinas</i>: selections</p>	
March 6	<p>Ibn Khaldun, <i>The Muqaddimah</i>: selections</p> <p>al-Farabi, <i>On the Perfect State</i>: selections</p>	
March 13	<p><b>Guest Lecturer: James Clarke (University of York)</b></p> <p>von Günderrode, Karoline, 'The Idea of the Earth'</p> <p>Nassar, Dalia, 'The Human Vocation and the Question of the Earth: Karoline von Günerrode's Philosophy of Nature'</p> <p>Plumwood, Val, <i>Environmental Culture: The Ecological Crisis of Reason</i>: selections</p>	
March 20	<p>Zetkin, Clara, 'For the Liberation of Women!', 'Women's Suffrage'</p> <p>Luxemburg, Rosa, <i>Introduction to Political Economy</i>: selections</p>	First essay due <b>March 18</b>

April 3	Fanon, Frantz, <i>The Wretched of the Earth</i> : selections  Gandhi, Leela, <i>Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction</i> : selections	
April 10	de Beauvoir, Simone, <i>The Second Sex</i> : selections  Connell, Raewyn, 'Rethinking Gender from the South'  Haraway, Donna, 'A Cyborg Manifesto': selections	
April 17	Butler, Judith, <i>The Force of Nonviolence</i> : selections  Song, Sarah, <i>Immigration and Democracy</i> : selections	
April 24	Rawls, John, <i>A Theory of Justice</i> : selections  Nussbaum, Martha, <i>Frontiers of Justice: Disability, Nationality, Species Membership</i>	
May 8	Dembroff, Robin, 'What is Sexual Orientation?'  Srinivasan, Amia, <i>The Right to Sex</i> : selections	Second essay due <b>May 6</b>

## Essay Deadlines

1<sup>st</sup> essay: March 18

2<sup>nd</sup> essay: May 6

Essays must be submitted via Google Classroom

## Grades Submission

Grades for the 1<sup>st</sup> essay will be submitted by 25 March 2024

Final grades will be submitted by 10 May 2024 for graduating students and 3 June 2024 for all other students.

## Library and Book Purchase Policies

Digital versions of all reading materials will be provided to students by the seminar leader.