

## **PL115 Foundations of Political Thought**

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Office Hours: Wed & Fri 14:00-16:00 and by appointment

### **Course Description**

*“The days before and after the first World War are separated not like the end of an old and the beginning of a new period, but like the day before and after an explosion ... The first explosion seems to have touched off a chain reaction in which we have been caught ever since and which nobody seems to be able to stop.” (Hannah Arendt)*

The demise of political theory seemed apparent in the wake of two world wars. The past images of “neat political orders” could no longer offer solace amid the horrors of recent events. Since the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, the field has undergone a dramatic “revival,” in large part invigorated by critical contributions from diverse geographical, historical, and disciplinary approaches to the study of the political.

This course surveys the development of modern political thought from global, historical, and interdisciplinary perspectives. Our exploration of the foundations of political theory will proceed from a close reading and critical analysis of a reconstructed field of study informed by contemporary reception of the “great texts” of the past. Taking our cue from Kant’s view of geography, history, and anthropology as “propaedeutic knowledge of the world,” the course will seek to draw explicit connections between the global “unity of places” and the conceptual understanding of the political. Our exploration of salient themes in political theory will rely on the close reading and critical analysis of original texts that are presented conceptually and, for the most part, chronologically. The aim is to examine the historical and spatial foundations of the central ideas, practices, and institutions that continue to animate political behavior and societies. The course will trace the spread of political thought on a global scale from 16<sup>th</sup> century onward, shaped by experiences and ideas of conquest, colonization, slavery, empires, states, democracy, revolutions, and current political issues. Some of the dialogic themes include nature and society, global and universal, autonomy and authority, liberty and slavery, empire and race, state and violence, rule and contestation, and democracy and dictatorship.

### **Course Requirements**

Students are expected to complete readings, attend class sessions, participate in discussions, and submit timely assignments. Performance will be assessed on the basis of **class participation**, familiarity with **assigned readings**, and **writing assignments**.

(1) **Active Participation** in class discussions and group activities constitute an important component of the course. This course is designed as a collaborative and shared enterprise.

(2) The course is **reading-intensive**. Students will demonstrate familiarity with the readings by means of (a) comments on weekly readings, (b) in-class presentation on selected reading, and (c) class discussions.

(3) The course is **writing-intensive**. Students will write weekly comments, reflection papers, and two short analytical essays. You are encouraged to utilize the tutorial services at the Learning Center for assistance with your essays.

### **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.

### **Accessibility**

Bard College Berlin is committed to inclusion and providing equal access to all students; we uphold and maintain all aspects of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, and the ADA Amendments Act of 2008, and Section 3 of the German Disability Equality Act of April 27, 2002 (Federal Law Gazette I p. 1468). If you have a disability, or think you may have a disability, please contact the Disability Accommodation Coordinator, Atticus Kleen, ([accommodations@berlin.bard.edu](mailto:accommodations@berlin.bard.edu)) to request an official accommodation.

Requests for longer-term accommodations should be made as early as possible to ensure adequate time for coordination and planning. Please note that accommodations are not retroactive and may require advance notice to implement.

If you have already been approved for accommodations with the Disability Accommodation Coordinator, please arrange to meet with me outside of class so that we can develop an implementation plan.

Students may face extenuating circumstances related to various personal or external factors, which impact their academic performance. While these circumstances often do not fall within the legal framework of Disability Accommodations, Bard College Berlin is committed to supporting students experiencing such circumstances. A student needing a short extension or a replacement assignment because of an extenuating circumstance is encouraged to make arrangement directly with instructors if possible. If further support is needed, please visit the Bard College Berlin Accessibility page.

Questions about this process can be directed to James Harker ([j.harker@berlin.bard.edu](mailto:j.harker@berlin.bard.edu)) or Maria Anderson-Long ([m.andersonlong@berlin.bard.edu](mailto:m.andersonlong@berlin.bard.edu)).

### **Attendance Policy**

Attendance at all classes is a crucial part of the education offered by Bard College Berlin. A maximum of two excused absences during the semester may be granted to account for minor circumstances. Further absences are granted under exceptional circumstances, and require supporting documentation. No unexcused absences are permitted. Unexcused absences will adversely affect participation grade in the course. In case of authorized absences, students are responsible for making up any missed work.

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.

### **Assessment & Grade Breakdown**

Student performance and final grades are evaluated on the basis of timely and satisfactory completion of course requirements. The main components of assessments are listed below:

- **Class Participation (20%).** Active participation evaluated on the basis of regular attendance, completion of readings, and frequency and quality of engagement.
- **Class Presentations (20%).** Each student is expected to make one 15 minute presentation on a particular text of their choice. Presentations should address the author, central question and argument of the work, methodology used, and three critically engaging questions and concluding thoughts posed to the class to spark discussion.
- **Four Reflection Papers (20%).** Students are expected to write short reflection papers (300-350 words) on selected texts from the course syllabus.
- **Two Analytical Essays (40%).** Students will write two short analytical essays (1200-1500 words) based on topics of their choosing.

### **Policy on Late Submission of Papers**

All assignments must be submitted by the assigned deadlines. Essays that are up to 24 hours late can be downgraded up to one full grade (from B+ to C+, for example)

### **Course Materials**

All course readings are available in the *PL115 Course Reader*.

**PL 115 Foundations of Political Thought**  
**Spring Semester 2023**  
Schedule of Topics and Readings

**1a. September 4      What is Political Theory – Normative, Historical, Ontological**

Class Handout: Reading “Great Texts”

Leo Strauss, “What is Liberal Education?” in *Liberalism: Ancient and Modern*, selected passages.

**1b. September 6      Globalizing/Decolonizing Political Theory**

Immanuel Kant, *The Metaphysics of Morals*, Part I, “Private Right,” 414-415.

Immanuel Kant, *Physical Geography*, § 445-451.

Carl Schmitt, “The First Global Lines” in *The Nomos of the Earth*, 86-101.

POLITICAL THEORY AND THE AMERICAS

**2a. September 11      Just War/Unjust Enemy**

Francisco De Vitoria, “On the Law of War” in *Political Writings*, selected pages.

Francisco De Vitoria, “On American Indians” in *Political Writings*, selected pages.

Class Handout

Inca Garcilaso de la Vega, *The Royal Commentary of the Inca*, selected passages from Bk 10.

**2b. September 13      Theorizing Discordant Voices**

Alexis de Tocqueville, “Some Considerations of the Present State and Probable Future of the Three Races ... of the United States” in *Democracy in America*, 321-335 (pdf pages)

William Apess, “Eulogy on King Phillip” in *On Our Own Ground*, selected pages.

Class Handout

Baron de Lahontan, “A Conference or Dialogue between the Author and Adario, a Noted Man among the Savages” in *New Voyages to North America*, selected passages.

**3a. September 18      Commentary on Indigenous Critiques**

William Connolly, “Tocqueville, Religiosity, and Pluralization” in *The Ethos of Pluralization*, 168-178.

David Graber & David Wengrow, “Wicked Liberty” in *The Dawn of Everything*, selected pages.

SOCIAL CONTRACT THEORY

**3b. September 20      Nature and Sovereignty**

Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Ch 13-17.

**4a. September 25      Nature and Consent**

John Locke, *The Second Treatise of Government*, Ch 2-5, 9.

John Locke, *The First Treatise of Government*, §42.

ENLIGHTENMENT AND ITS OTHERS

**4b. September 27      Alienation and Social Contract**

Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discourse on the Origin and Foundation of Inequality*, Part II.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Of the Social Contract*, Bk 1.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Preface to Narcisse*, selections.

**5a. October 2            Autonomy and Cosmopolitanism**

Immanuel Kant, *Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose*, 41-53.  
Immanuel Kant, *Toward Perpetual Peace*, 322-331.  
Immanuel Kant, *The Metaphysics of Morals*, Part II, "Public Right," 386-389; 482-489.

**5b. October 4            Enlightenment and Original Acquisition**

Immanuel Kant, *The Metaphysics of Morals*, Part I, "Private Right," 401-421.  
Denis Diderot, "Extracts from the *Histoire des Deux Indes*," in *Political Writings*, 169-173; 175-179.  
Denis Diderot, "The *Supplément au Voyage de Bougainville*" in *Political Writings*, 41-46.

Class Handout

Carl Schmitt, "Kant's Unjust Enemy" in *The Nomos of the Earth*, 168-171.

**6a. October 9            Enlightenment and Slavery**

Denis Diderot, "Slavery and Liberty" in *Political Writings*, 185-188.  
David Scott, "Antinomies of Slavery, Enlightenment, and Universal History," *Small Axe* 30, 152-162.  
David Brion Davis, "The Boundaries of Idealism," in *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture*, selected pages.

**6b. October 11          Enlightenment and Revolution**

Karl Marx & Friedrich Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, in Robert Tucker (ed.), *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 473-483.  
Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 594-617.

**7a. October 16          Enlightenment and Exclusion**

Mary Wollstonecraft, *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, Introduction, Ch 1, 2.  
John Stuart Mill, *The Subjection of Women*, Ch 1.

Class Handout

Rokeya Begum, *Sultana's Dream*, 3-14.

EMPIRE, RACE, AND POLITICAL THEORY

**7b. October 18          Political Theory and Empire**

Uday Mehta, "Strategies: Liberal Conventions Imperial Exclusions" in *Liberalism and Empire*, 47-76.

Class Handout

Jennifer Pitts, "Political Theory of Empire and Imperialism," selected passages.

**October 21-27            FALL BREAK**

**8a. October 30          Race and Recognition**

W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 7-15  
Franz Fanon, "The Lived Experience of the Black Man" in *Black Skin, White Masks*, 89-119.

**8b. November 1        The Colonial State-Form**

Partha Chatterjee, "The Colonial State" in *The Nation and its Fragments*, 14-34.  
David Scott, "Colonial Governmentality" in *Refashioning Futures*, 23-52

STATE AND VIOLENCE

**9a. November 6      Legal Violence and Political Theory**

Max Weber, "Politics as Vocation," in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, 77-79.  
Walter Benjamin, "The Right to Use Force," in *Selected Writings* Vol. I, 231-233.  
Walter Benjamin, "Critique of Violence," in *Selected Writings* Vol. I, 236-252.

**9b. November 8      Legal Violence and the Colonies**

Franz Fanon, "On Violence" in *The Wretched of the Earth*, selected pages.

**10a. November 13    State of Exception**

Carl Schmitt, "Commissary Dictatorship and State Theory" in *Dictatorship*, 1-18.  
Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology*, 1-15.  
Walter Benjamin, "Theory of Sovereignty" in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, 65-71.

Class Handout

Niccolò Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy*, 73-75.

**10b. November 15    Governmentality and Biopower**

Michel Foucault, "Right of Death and Power Over Life," in *History of Sexuality*, Vol. 1, pp. 135-158.  
Michel Foucault, "Governmentality," in *The Foucault Effect*, pp. 87-104.

THEORIES OF DEMOCRACY

**11a. November 20    Republican Revolution**

Hannah Arendt, "The Meaning of Revolution," in *On Revolution*, 28-35.  
Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 175-181.  
Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 290-302.

**11b. November 22    Democracy as Rule**

J. Schumpeter, "Another Theory of Democracy" in *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*, 269-282.  
Jürgen Habermas, "The Three Models of Democracy" in *The Inclusion of the Other*, 239-252.

**12a. November 27    Democracy as Contestation**

Sheldon Wolin, "Fugitive Democracy," in *Fugitive Democracy and Other Essays*, 100-113.  
Jacques Rancière, "Ten Theses on Politics" in *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*, 27-44.

THEORIZING CONTEMPORARY POLITICS

**12b. November 29    Neoliberalism and Political Theory**

Wendy Brown, "Neoliberalism and the End of Liberal Democracy," in *Edgework: Critical Essay in Knowledge and Politics*, 37-59.

**13a. December 4     Intersectionality and Political Theory**

Kimberley Crenshaw et al, "Toward a Field of Intersectional Studies," *Signs* 38, 2-13.  
Saba Mahmood, "Feminism, Democracy and Empire" in Herzog & Braude (eds.), *Gendering Religion and Politics*, 193-215.

