

PL115 Foundations of Political Thought

Seminar Leader: Riaz P Khan
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Office Hours: Wed & Fri 14:00-16:00 and by appointment

Course Description

In his lectures on geography and anthropology as “propaedeutic for knowledge of the world,” Kant draws explicit connection between global (spherical) “unity of all places” and universal laws of civil society. This course surveys the development of modern political thought from global and historical perspectives. Our exploration of salient themes in political theory will proceed from 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, practice, and institutions that continue to animate political behavior and societies. The course will trace the development of political thought on a global scale from 16th century onward, shaped by conquest and occupation, colonization and slavery, empires and states, liberal democracy, revolutions and wars, and nation-state formations. Some of the critical themes include nature and society, global and universal, autonomy and authority, liberty and justice, empire and race, state and violence, rule and contestation, democracy and colonies.

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 group discussions and projects 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 a final essay. 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) 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) or Maria Anderson-Long (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 about a particular week's readings of their own 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.

Two Analytical Essays (40%). Students will write three short (1000-1200 word) analytical essays based on suggested topic questions.

Multimedia project (20%). Students will undertake a multimodal group project that explores ideas or themes from the course topics and readings.

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?

Recommended

Leo Strauss, "What is Political Philosophy?" in *History of Political Philosophy*.
Richard Rorty, "Trotsky and the Wild Orchids" in *Philosophy and Social Hope*, 3-20.

GLOBAL POLITICAL THEORY

1b. September 6 Political Theory on Global Scale

Immanuel Kant, *Physical Geography*, § 1-4.
Immanuel Kant, *The Metaphysics of Morals*, Part I, "Private Right," § 13.
Carl Schmitt, "The First Global Lines," in *The Nomos of the Earth*, pp. 86-101.

2a. September 11 Free Seas and Just Wars

Francisco De Vitoria, "On the Law of War," in *Political Writings*, selections.
Hugo Grotius, *The Laws of War and Peace*, Bk 1, Bk 3 (selected chapters).
Carl Schmitt, *The Nomos of the Earth*, 159-168, 172-175.

2b. September 13 Conquest and Colonization

Francisco De Vitoria, "On American Indians," in *Political Writings*, selections.
Hugo Grotius, *The Laws of War and Peace*, BK 2 (selected chapters).
Inca Garcilaso de la Vega, *The Royal Commentary of the Inca*, Bk 10.

SOCIAL CONTRACT THEORY

3a. September 18 State of Nature and Absolute Sovereignty

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

3b. September 20 State of Nature and Consent

John Locke, *The Second Treatise of Government*, Ch 2-5, 9.
John Locke, *The First Treatise of Government*, §42.

ENLIGHTENMENT & POLITICAL IDEALISM

4a. September 25 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.

4b. September 27 Autonomy and Cosmopolitan Purpose

Immanuel Kant, *Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose*, selections.
Immanuel Kant, *Toward Perpetual Peace*, selections.
Immanuel Kant, *The Metaphysics of Morals*, Part II, "Cosmopolitan Right," § 62.

5a. October 2 Enlightenment and Global Possession

Immanuel Kant, *The Metaphysics of Morals*, Part I, "Private Right," § 11-17.
Alice Pinheiro Walla, "Common Possession of the Earth and Cosmopolitan Right," *Kant Studien* 2016;
107(1): 160-178.

5b. October 4 Enlightenment and Colonization

William Apess, "Eulogy on King Phillip," in *On Our Own Ground*, 277-310.
Denis Diderot, "Extracts from the Histoire des Deux Indes," § 1-2, 6-9.

6a. October 9 Enlightenment and Slavery

Susan Buck-Morss, "Hegel and Haiti," *Critical Inquiry* 26 (Summer 2000), 821-865
David Brion Davis, "The Boundaries of Idealism," in *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution*,
selected pages.

LIBERALISM AND REVOLUTION

6b. October 11

Karl Marx & Friedrich Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, 473-483.
Karl Marx, "The Class Struggles in France, 1848-1850," in Tucker, 586-593.

7a. October 16

John Stuart Mill, *Considerations of Representative Government*, Ch 3, 8, 16.
John Stuart Mill, *The Subjection of Women*, Ch 1.
John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*, Ch 1, 4.

7b. October 18

Mary Wollstonecraft, *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, Introduction, Ch 1, 2.
Rokeya Begum, *Sultana's Dream*, 3-14.

October 21-27 FALL BREAK

EMPIRE, RACE, AND POLITICAL THEORY

8a. October 30 Political Theory and Empire

Uday Singh Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire*, Ch 1, 2.
Jennifer Pitts, "Political Theory of Empire and Imperialism."

8b. November 1

Edward Said, *Orientalism*, selections.
Ranjit Guha, *Dominance Without Hegemony*, selections.

9a. November 6

W.E.B. DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folks*, Ch 1, 2.
W.E.B. DuBois, *Color and Democracy: Colonies and Peace*, selections.

9b. November 8

Franz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, Ch 5 (selected pages)

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

LAW, VIOLENCE AND STATE

10a. November 13 Right to Use Force

Max Weber, "Politics as Vocation," in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, 77-79.
Walter Benjamin, "Critique of Violence," in *Reflections*, selections.

10b. November 15 State of Exception

Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology*, 1-15.
Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy*, § 34.

11a. November 20 Governmentality and Biopower

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

THEORIES OF DEMOCRACY

11b. November 22 TBD

12a. November 27 Republicanism and 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*, Ch 9 (selections).

12b. November 29 Democracy as Rule

Cornelius Castoriadis, "Democracy as Procedure and Democracy as Regime," *Constellations* 4 (1), 1-16.
Jürgen Habermas, "Popular Sovereignty as Procedure," in *Facts and Norms*, selections

13a. December 4 Democracy as Contestation

Sheldon Wolin, "Fugitive Democracy," in *Fugitive Democracy and Other Essays*, 100-113.
Étienne Balibar, *Citizenship*, Ch 1, 3 (selections).

TOPICS IN CONTEMPORARY POLITICS

13b. December 6 Neoliberalism and Political Theory

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

14a. December 11 Politics and Performative Theory

Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender*, Introduction.
Judith Butler, "Bodies in Alliance and the Politics of the Street," in *Notes Towards a Performative Theory of Assembly*, selections

14b. December 13 Politics and Affect Theory

Laurent Berlant, "On the Desire for the Political," in *Cruel Optimism*, selections.

December 16-20 Completion Week