

PL380. Do We Need Government? An Introduction to Anarchism

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Office hours by appointment



Course Description

A notable consensus obtains across political philosophy and theory in the Western tradition: government is essential for maintaining peace and fostering prosperity. Chaos and violence would inevitably become rampant without established structures of authority and dominion. Left-wing and right-wing ideologies often concur on this fundamental premise. However, an alternative political viewpoint, from the tradition of 'Anarchism,' contends that in historical reality, structures of authority and dominion have frequently failed to deliver on their promise and instead produced violence, oppression, and poverty. Anarchist theories argue that the absence of such ruling structures could usher in a better society founded on mutual assistance, non-violence, and cooperation. This course aims to explore the merits of anarchist political thought and practice for our current era of endemic crisis and capitalist hegemony.

Course Readings

All course readings will be provided as pdf files. Students are expected to print the texts and come to class with paper copies.

Students are strongly encouraged to purchase a copy of Peter Marshall: *Demanding the Impossible. A History of Anarchism* (ISBN: 978-1-60486-064-1)

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

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.

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.

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 arrangements 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).

Assignments

Students are required to complete the following assignments for this course: A **midterm essay of about 2000 words, due Friday, Oct. 25**, and a **final essay of about 4000 words, due Friday, Dec. 20**. Details about these assignments will be communicated in the first session.

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

Class participation: 30%

Midterm essay: 30%

Final essay: 40%

Schedule*

September 5	Introduction Nicolas Walter: <i>About Anarchism</i> (1969) James C. Scott: <i>Two Cheers for Anarchism</i> (2012)
September 12	States of Nature Thomas Hobbes: <i>Leviathan</i> (1651) John Locke: <i>Second Treatise of Government</i> (1689) Jean-Jacques Rousseau: <i>The Second Discourse</i> (1755)
September 19	Liberalism vs. Socialism John Stuart Mill: <i>On Liberty</i> (1859) Karl Marx: <i>Economic and Political Manuscripts of 1844</i> Karl Marx/Friedrich Engels: <i>Communist Manifesto</i> (1848)
September 26	"Government is an evil, an usurpation upon the private judgement and individual conscience of mankind" William Godwin: <i>An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice</i> (1793) Peter Marshall: <i>Demanding the Impossible</i> , Ch. 15

October 3	Federal Holiday – No Class!
October 10	“Property is Theft!” Pierre Joseph Proudhon: <i>What is Property?</i> (1840) Pierre Joseph Proudhon: <i>The General Idea of the Revolution</i> (1851) Peter Marshall: <i>Demanding the Impossible</i> , Ch. 17
October 17	“The Urge to destroy is also a creative urge.” Mikhail Bakunin: <i>God and the State</i> (1882) Peter Marshall: <i>Demanding the Impossible</i> , Ch. 18

Fall Break – Midterm essay due on Friday, October 25

Holiday reading: Ursula K. Le Guin: *The Dispossessed* (1974)

October 31	“Don't compete! – competition is always injurious to the species, and you have plenty of resources to avoid it!” Peter Kropotkin: <i>The Conquest of Bread</i> (1892) Peter Kropotkin: <i>Mutual Aid</i> (1902) Peter Marshall: <i>Demanding the Impossible</i> , Ch. 19
November 7	“Christianity in its true sense puts an end to government.” Leo Tolstoy: <i>The Kingdom of God Is Within You</i> (1894) Leo Tolstoy: <i>On Anarchism</i> (1900) Peter Marshall: <i>Demanding the Impossible</i> , Ch. 22
November 14	“If I can't dance, it's not my revolution” Emma Goldman: <i>Anarchism – What it Really Stands For</i> (1910) Emma Goldman: <i>The Tragedy of Woman's Emancipation</i> (1910) Emma Goldman: <i>My Disillusionment in Russia</i> (1923) Peter Marshall: <i>Demanding the Impossible</i> , Ch. 24
November 21	Ecology of Freedom Murray Bookchin: <i>Post-Scarcity Anarchism</i> (1971) Murray Bookchin: <i>The Ecology of Freedom</i> (1982) tbd
November 28	Anarcha-Feminism Mitchell Cowen Verter “Undoing Patriarchy, Subverting Politics” (2013) Ruth Kinna: “Anarchism and Feminism” (2017) tbd
December 5	Occupy! Mark Bray: <i>Translating Anarchy</i> (2013) tbd
December 12	Anarchism in Academia? David Graeber: <i>Fragments of an Anarchist Anthropology</i> (2004)

Completion Week – Final essay due on Friday, December 20

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