

PL213 Plurality: Philosophy and Politics from Kant to Arendt

Seminar Leader: Jeffrey Champlin
Course Times: Mon 13:30 - 15:00, Thu 13:30 - 15:00
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Office Hours: Thu: 15-16

Course Description

Western philosophy insists that by thinking alone we can better learn to live together. Yet the modern emphasis on the individual in this tradition leads to continued conflicts between private reflection as a means of overcoming common prejudices and the need to find meaning in a common world. In this course we will explore questions of justice, liberty, and authority in Enlightenment texts before turning to the early 20th century. In considering the post-war moment, we explore how Existentialist lines of thinking, with intense focus on individual experience, provide Hannah Arendt with surprising resources for conceptualizing humans as fundamentally plural beings who are both equal and distinct. Authors read in the class include Kant, Marx, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Sartre, Arendt, and Butler.

Specifically, after recalling Plato's story of the philosopher's departure from society in pursuit of the good, we turn to Kant's modern renewal of idealism. In the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant proposes a way to integrate morality through a new conception of idealism that rescues humanity from the dangers of subjectivism in an age of weakening authority. In his view, people can reason toward universal structures that provide the condition of possibility of social life. We will examine objections to the conception of freedom that follows from Kant's proposal, and then transition through selections from Marx and the Existentialists, for whom experiences of alienation and the inauthentic open new futures. We then focus on Hannah Arendt's *The Human Condition* as an alternative way to approach a plural world that enables unexpected and original action.

Assessment

We will make the most of the liberal arts seminar format by developing ideas and analysis through a process of discussion and writing. Toward that end, each student will present on two different authors and write a final paper. Overall class participation is also essential, and will be evaluated based on consistently preparing the readings and class engagement.

Class presentations: Students will present on two authors as per a signup sheet. Each presentation of about 20 minutes will examine key passages of your choice as guided by a commentary handout that I will provide. A written essay of approximately 1000 words will be due in class following each presentation. This essay should be an expansion of the insights

and questions that arose from your close reading and the class discussion of your readings. One of these presentations must be completed before the spring break.

Final Writing Assignment: A final essay of approximately 3000 words will be due on May 18, 2017. Students will receive suggested prompts for this essay, but are also strongly encouraged to formulate their own questions. I also encourage students to discuss their paper ideas and drafts with me in class or in office hours. Please format all written work as 12pt, Times New Roman, double spaced.

Participation: Please prepare each reading with annotations. This will allow you to contribute productively to class discussions and raise questions that will help our common interpretive work.

Attendance: Attendance at ALL classes is expected. More than two absences in the seminar will significantly affect the grade for the course.

Policy on Late Submission of Papers: All written work must be submitted as a printout and on time. As per the policy from the Student Handbook: essays that are up to 24 hours late will be downgraded one full grade (from B+ to C+, for example). Instructors are not obliged to accept essays that are more than 24 hours late. Where an instructor agrees to accept a late essay, it must be submitted within four weeks of the deadline and cannot receive a grade of higher than C. Thereafter, the student will receive a failing grade for the assignment.

Grade Breakdown

Class participation (quality and quantity): 20%
Presentation and presentation essay #1 (1000 words): 25%
Presentation and presentation essay #2 (1000 words): 25%
Final essay (3000 words): 30%

Texts

These texts should be purchased:

Kant, Immanuel, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (Cambridge University Press, 1998)
ISBN: 9780521626958.

Arendt, Hannah, *The Human Condition* (University Of Chicago Press, 1998) ISBN: 0226025985

Butler, Judith, *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly* (Harvard University Press, 2015) ISBN: 9780674967755

Others texts are in the reader or will be provided as handouts:

Kant, "What is Enlightenment?"

Kant, "The End of All Things"

Marx, "Alienation and Social Classes"; "Society and Economy in History"

---. "Theses on Feuerbach"

---. *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* (Selections)
Marx and Engels, "Manifesto of the Communist Party"
Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety* (Selections)
Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols* (Selections)
Heidegger, Martin, *Being and Time* (selections)
Arendt, "What is Existential Philosophy?"
Sartre, "Existentialism is a Humanism"
Arendt, "French Existentialism"
Ronell, "What was Authority?"
Derrida, "The Ends of Man"

Schedule

Week One

Monday, January 30

Introduction. Kant, "What is Enlightenment?" *Perpetual Peace, and Other Essays on Politics, History, and Morals*, 41-48

Thursday, February 2

Kant, "What is Enlightenment?" *Perpetual Peace, and Other Essays on Politics, History, and Morals*, 41-48

Week Two

Monday, February 6

Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, Preface and Ch. 1, 1-18

Thursday, February 9

Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, Ch. 2, 19-52

Week Three

Monday, February 13

Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, Ch. 3, 52-66

Thursday, February 16

Kant, "The End of All Things"

Week Four

Monday, February 20

Marx, "Alienation and Social Classes"; "Society and Economy in History"

Thursday, February 23

Marx, "Theses on Feuerbach"; *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*: "Estranged Labor"

Week Five

Monday, February 27

Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*: "Estranged Labor"

Thursday, March 2

Marx, "Manifesto of the Communist Party"

Week Six

Monday, March 6

Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety* (Selections)

Thursday, March 9

Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols* (Selections)

Week Seven

Monday, March 13

Heidegger, *Being and Time*, sections 25-26, pp. 149-163

Thursday, March 16

Heidegger, *Being and Time*, section 27, pp. 163-168

Arendt, "What is Existential Philosophy?"

Week Eight

Monday, March 20

Sartre, "Existentialism is a Humanism"

Thursday, March 23

Sartre, "Existentialism is a Humanism"

Arendt, "French Existentialism"

Week Nine

Monday, March 27

Heidegger, "Letter on 'Humanism'"

Thursday, March 30

Heidegger, "Letter on 'Humanism'"

Week Ten

Monday, April 3

Arendt, *The Human Condition*, "Prologue"; Ch.1

Thursday, April 6

Arendt, *The Human Condition*, Ch. 2

Spring Break April 8-16

Week Eleven

Monday, April 17 [Holiday]

Thursday, April 20

Arendt, *The Human Condition*, Ch. 3; Ch. 4

Week Twelve

Monday, April 24

Arendt, *The Human Condition*, Ch. 5

Thursday, April 28

Arendt, *Human Condition*, Ch. 6

Ronell, "What was Authority?"

Week Thirteen

Monday, May 1 [Holiday]

Thursday, May 4

Derrida, "The Ends of Man"

Week Fourteen

Monday, May 8

Butler, *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly*

Thursday, May 11

Butler, *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly*

Final paper due May 18

Completion week is from May 12 to 19
(Students are required to be on campus during completion week.)