

THEORIES OF POLITICAL ACTION

POLS 520, Spring 2013

Professor Bradley Macdonald
 Office: C366 Clark
 Office Hours: TW 2-3:30 or by appointment
 Telephone #: 491-6943
 E-mail: bradley.macdonald@colostate.edu

Preliminary Remarks:

The character of political theory is intimately related to the diverse political practices in which the theorist wrote. Particularly in the contemporary period, theorists have increasingly recognized this political nature to their enterprise by clarifying the linkages of their theory to politics and by rethinking the way in which their ideas may promote social and political change. This critical reassessment has become particularly important in the wake of the dissolution of both classical liberalism and classical Marxism as political ideologies guaranteeing universal human emancipation, not to mention providing conceptual tools to understand the unique political dilemmas facing political actors in the 21st century.

If there have been differing ideologies and theories that have confronted new conditions, there are also different strategies and tactics that have been increasingly revamped and rearticulated to engage our contemporaneity. If anything, the present century increasingly gives rise to issues associated with the nature of the “political.” How do we define political action and political knowledge? In what way is politics related to cultural practices (be they art, popular culture, or informational networks)? In what way is political action imbricated within economic practices? How has politics changed given the processes associated with globalization? This course will attempt to explore some of the more important developments within recent theory associated with defining differing positions on the nature of politics and the political.

Required Reading:

1. (CSU Bookstore)

- Georgio Agamben, *State of Exception* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), ISBN # 0226009254.
- Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), Second Edition, ISBN # 0-226-02598-5.
- Stephen Bronner, *Ideas in Action* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999), ISBN # 0-8476-9387-2.
- Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Declaration* (Argo Navis, 2012), ISBN # 978-0786752904.
- Eugene Holland, *Nomad Citizenship: Free-Market Communism and the Slow-Motion General Strike* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2011), ISBN # 978-0816666133.
- Margaret Kohn and Keally McBride, *Political Theories of Decolonization: Postcolonialism and the Problem of Foundations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), ISBN # 978-0-19-539958-5.
- Herbert Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), ISBN # 0807005959.

—Charles Mills, *The Racial Contract* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), ISBN # 978-0-8014-8463-6.

2. (e-mail readings): ER

Requirements:

I. Writing Assignments:

a) One **10 page analytic/critical paper** on Arendt's *The Human Condition*. This paper will not require outside reading or research, but will rather ask you to deal with issues and readings we encountered in class. **Due in class on Feb. 27.** Worth **25 %** of your grade.

b) One **20 page final paper** on a topic of the student's choice. Either the student can do a critical paper on a particular approach/theorist/issue discussed in class, or may attempt to apply such approaches/theories to a topic of interest. **Due on May 15th.** Given the nature of this assignment, I expect a brief paragraph describing your topic at class on the 13th week, as well as a meeting with each student to discuss their topic. Worth **50 %** of your grade.

II. Participation:

Not only will students be required to attend classes, do all the readings, and engage in discussions, but they will also be responsible for the introduction of readings to the class for critical discussion. These presentations will entail a brief summary of the main points of the reading, its relation to previous readings and ideas discussed in class, and the leading of discussion of the reading. One should plan to take approx. 15 minutes to present one's reading and then lead discussion. Worth **25%** of grade.

Course Outline and Readings:

Week 1:

Jan. 23 **Introductions**

Week 2:

Jan. 30 **Theories in Action: Overview of Twentieth-Century Political Discourses.**

readings: Bronner, *Ideas in Action* (Parts I and II).

Week 3:

Feb. 6 **Theories in Action** (cont.)

readings: Bronner, *Ideas in Action* (Parts III and IV).

Week 4:

Feb. 13 **Retrieving the Political: Arendt and Politics as Action**

readings: Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chapters I-IV).

Week 5:

Feb. 20 **Retrieving the Political** (cont.)

readings: Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chapters V and VI).

Week 6:

Feb. 27 **Marcuse, Critical Theory, and Radical Politics in Advanced Capitalism.**

readings: Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation* (all).
 Marcuse, "Repressive Tolerance," via ER.

critical essay on Arendt due in class

Week 7:

March 6 **Foucault, Genealogy, and Questions of Power, Truth, and Resistance**

readings: Foucault, "Two Lectures" via ER.
 Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* (selections) via ER.
 Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History" via ER.

Week 8:

March 13 **Foucault, Genealogy and Questions of Power, Truth, and Resistance**

readings: Foucault, "Governmentality," via ER.
 Foucault, "The Subject and Power," via ER.
 Foucault, "The Ethics of the Concern for the Self as a Practice of Freedom,"
 via ER.

March 20 SPRING BREAK!

Week 9:

March 27 **No Class/Reading Day**

Week 10:

April 3 **Agamben, Biopower, and the State of Exception**

readings: Agamben, *State of Exception* (all).

Week 11:

April 10 **Social Contracts and Racist Politics**

readings: Mills, *The Racial Contract* (all).

Week 12:

April 17 **Postcolonial Theory and Decolonization**

readings: Fanon, "On Violence" via ER.
Said, *Orientalism* (selections) via ER.
Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" via ER.

Week 13:

April 24 **Postcolonial Theory and Decolonization** (cont.)

readings: Kohn and McBride, *Political Theories of Decolonization* (all).

Week 14:

May 1 **Deleuze, Guattari, and Nomad Politics**

readings: Holland, *Nomad Citizenship* (all).

Week 15:

May 8 **Empire and Its Discontents: Towards a Global Constitution?**

Readings: Hardt and Negri, *Declaration* (all).

Final Paper due on May 15th