

POSC 261

***Power, Freedom, and Revolution***

Fall 2016

Class Hours: T TH: 10:10-11:55

Classroom: Weitz 132

Professor: Mihaela Czobor-Lupp

Office: Willis 418

**Office Hours: Tuesday: 3:10-5:00 and Wednesday: 3:30-5:00**

### **Course Description**

Politics can be defined as struggle for power. However, what power means is neither self-evident nor a non-controversial issue. In this course we will explore the conceptions that Michel Foucault, a French thinker, and Hannah Arendt, a Jewish American thinker, entertained on the issue of power. We will address questions such as: Is the grip of power total or are resistance and freedom intrinsic components of power? What distinguishes power from violence and force? What is the relationship between critique, reason, and philosophy, on the one hand, and power, on the other hand? What is the relationship between power and revolution? What are revolutions and in what sense are they entirely modern phenomena? What ethos should modern societies cultivate in order to keep the revolutionary spirit alive? What ethos is required, in turn, for turning revolutionary effervescence into stable democratic institutions?

### **Course objectives**

To understand the conceptions that Arendt and Foucault entertained on the meaning of power;  
To understand the cultural assumptions on which the Western notion of power relies;  
To understand the differences between power, violence, and strength;  
To grasp the connections between power and freedom;  
To explore and understand the notion of revolution and its role in politics;  
To become better readers, thinkers, speakers, and writers

### **Achieving the Course Objectives:**

We will learn about the specific nature of power, freedom, and revolution by carefully and closely reading the following books:

Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, University of Chicago Press, 1998

Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution*, Penguin Books, 1990

Michel Foucault, *The Government of Self and Others*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2010

Michel Foucault, *The Courage of Truth*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2011

*The Foucault Reader*, editor Paul Rabinow, Vintage Books, 2010.

**Film Screening:**

**The Square, November 12 and 13, 7:30pm in room 305, Gould Library.**

**Course Requirements:**

**Two short (three-page) papers (20% each):** one paper on Foucault (**due on October 12**) and one on Arendt

- (i) For the paper on Foucault you can choose one of the following topics:
- Do you think Foucault's late conception of power values more individual agency and freedom than the view he develops in *Discipline and Punish*? Do you find his argument about the relationship between the government of the self and the government of others compelling? Defend your position.
  - Some critics accuse Foucault of focusing too much on the "aesthetics of existence" in ways that favor excessively the subject and the individual, thus neglecting larger political concerns about others and the world. In light of Foucault's two last courses at Collège de France, particularly, the idea of *parrhēsia* or free political speech, do you find this criticism to be correct?
- (ii) For the paper on Arendt (**due on November 8**) you can choose one of the following topics:
- In her critical discussion of the French and American Revolutions, Arendt distinguishes between violence, force, and power, as well as between liberation and freedom. Do you find her argument and the distinctions she makes between these different notions compelling. Defend your position.
  - Arendt praises to a high degree "the revolutionary spirit" while Foucault talks in connection with the Cynics and their philosophy about the public and political relevance of life as revolutionary militancy. Do you find the argument about the importance of the revolutionary spirit and of life as revolutionary militancy compelling? Do you think that aspects of contemporary politics confirm or infirm the arguments of Arendt and Foucault? Explain and defend your position.

**Final Take-Home Exam(35%)**

**Active and informed class participation:** This includes: (i) attending classes; (ii) doing the readings for the day; (iii) in-class assignments that will test your degree of familiarization with and understanding of the readings that you were requested to prepare for the day **(10%)**

**Class presentations:** You will be required to prepare 20 minutes presentations of four different revolutions: The Iranian Revolution, the Hungarian Revolution, the Russian Revolution, and the Arab Spring in Egypt (Tahir Square). These will be group presentations (the number still to be

determined). However, the expectation is that you will come up with an exact division of labor in your group, which should be clearly reflected in your class performance (15%).

**The Iranian Revolution:** besides putting together a chronology of the revolution, a portrait of Khomeini, and a report on the way the revolution ended, you need to check Foucault's writings on the Iranian Revolution. Also, a good source is Marjane Satrapi's book, *Persepolis*.

**The Hungarian Revolution:** besides putting together a chronology of the revolution and a report on its outcome, you need to check Arendt's piece on the Hungarian Revolution and explain why she was so enthusiastic about this event. I will provide the Arendt piece on the Hungarian Revolution.

**The Russian Revolution:** besides putting together a chronology of the revolution and a report on its outcome, you need to check Orlando Figes, *A People's Tragedy: The Russian Revolution 1891-1924* and Vasily Grossman, *Everything Flows* (I will indicate the pages and chapters to be read by the students)

**The Egyptian Revolution:** besides putting together a chronology of the revolution and a report on its outcome, you are in charge of leading the discussion about the documentary movie, *The Square*, which all the students will be required to see.

### **What is Expected from the Students?**

Students will be expected to read, think, form arguments and counter-arguments, understand the fundamental concepts, and participate (in a critical and creative manner) in class discussion. That means that students must keep up in their reading assignments and attend class regularly.

Students must be fully prepared *at all times* to discuss the arguments and concepts from the previous readings. The best students will be knowledgeable, critical but balanced in their critical assessments, and will develop coherent and sound arguments that they can defend in their essays, in their exams, and in class discussion.

### **Academic dishonesty:**

"All assignments, quizzes, and exams must be done on your own. Note that academic dishonesty includes not only cheating, fabrication, and plagiarism, but also includes helping other students commit acts of academic dishonesty by allowing them to obtain copies of your work. You are allowed to use the Web for reference purposes, but you may not copy material from any website or any other source without proper citations. In short, all submitted work must be your own.

Cases of academic dishonesty will be dealt with strictly. Each such case will be referred to the Academic Standing Committee via the Associate Dean of Students or the Associate Dean of the College. A formal finding of responsibility can result in disciplinary sanctions ranging from a censure and a warning to permanent dismissal in the case of repeated and serious offenses.

The academic penalty for a finding of responsibility can range from a grade of zero in the specific assignment to an F in this course."

## **SCHEDULE OF CLASSES AND READINGS:**

**September 13:** *Introduction: Power, freedom, resistance, and revolution: Why Foucault and Arendt?*

**September 15:** *Foucault: the productive nature of power, discipline, and the carceral society*  
*Reading: Foucault Reader, pages 170-213*

**September 20:** *Is there a way out of the carceral society?*  
*Readings: Foucault Reader, What is Enlightenment? and The Government of Self and Others, Lecture Two and Four, and Nine*

**September 22:** *Parrhēsia: the culture of political courage between law and politics*  
*Reading: Foucault, The Government of Self and Others, Lectures Ten, Eleven, Twelve, and Thirteen*

**September 27:** *Politics, Philosophy, and Rhetoric*  
*Reading: Foucault, The Government of Self and Others, Lectures Sixteen, Seventeen, Eighteen, Nineteen, and Twenty*

**September 29:** *Truth, power, and subject: forms of truth-telling*  
*Reading: Foucault, The Courage of Truth, Lectures One, Two, Three, and Four*

**October 4:** *Parrhēsia and ethics*  
*Reading: Foucault, The Courage of Truth, Lectures Five, Seven, Eight, and Nine*

**October 6:** *The object of Socratic parrhēsia*  
*Reading: Foucault, The Courage of Truth, Lectures Ten, Eleven, and Twelve*

**October 11:** *Life as revolutionary activity*  
*Reading: Foucault, The Courage of Truth, Lectures Thirteen, Fourteen, Fifteen, Sixteen, Seventeen, and Eighteen*

**First Student Presentation: Foucault and the Iranian Revolution**

**October 13:** *Arendt: the human condition, the public realm, and the issue of freedom*  
*Reading: Arendt, Labor, Work, Action (copies to be provided)*

**Second Student Presentation: the Arendt and the Hungarian Revolution**

**October 18:** *Politics, power, and freedom*

Reading: Arendt, *The Human Condition*, pages 7-12, 50-58, and 175-212

**October 20:** **No Class** (I will attend the Annual Conference of the Association of Political Theory, where I will present a paper on Foucault and Arendt)

**October 25:** *World alienation and its political consequences: life as the highest good*

Reading: Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 220-268, 273-325

**October 27:** *The Meaning of revolution*

Reading: Arendt, *On Revolution*, pages 11-59

**November 1:** *The Social question*

Reading: Arendt, *On Revolution*, 59-114

**Third student presentation: The Legacy of the French Revolution and the Russian Revolution**

**November 3:** *Liberation and freedom*

Reading: Arendt, *On Revolution*, 115-140

**November 8:** *Power and force*

Reading: Arendt, *On Revolution*, 141-214

**November 10:** *The revolutionary tradition and its lost treasure*

Reading: Arendt, *On Revolution*, 215-281

**November 15:** Final review and discussion: revolutions today

**Fourth student presentation: The Arab Spring and Egypt**