

POSC 276: *Arendt: Imagination and Politics*

Spring 2012

Class Hours: MW 1:50PM- 3:00AM, F 2:20PM-3:20AM

Classroom: Willis 203

Professor: Mihaela Czobor-Lupp

Office: Willis 418

Office Hours: MW: 3:00 PM-5:00 PM or by appointment

### **Course Description**

In this course we will explore the conception of the German philosopher, Hannah Arendt, of the relationship between imagination and politics. The course will be divided into three parts. In the first part of the course we will explore Arendt's analysis of the elements that contributed to the genesis of totalitarian movements and political regimes. The reason for this first object of study is that, for Arendt, imagination plays a decisive role in actions of political mobilization and in the formation of extreme political ideologies such as anti-Semitism, racism in general, and tribal nationalism.

In the second part of the course we will study Arendt's conception of the three activities that constitute the human condition: labor, work, and action. The reason for approaching Arendt's conception of the human condition is to grasp her normative approach to the relationship between culture and politics. According to this conception, imagination and culture are central to politics. However, the conundrum to be solved is: How to engage imagination and culture, in ways that serve political action, as this was understood by Arendt, rather than undermine it, as the analysis of totalitarianism showed to be the case? Thus, there is the need to explore, in the second part of the course, Arendt's prescriptions about the political engagements of culture, works of art, and imagination, in general.

In the third part of the course we will read different interpretations by Arendt of the works of artists, as different as G. E. Lessing, Heinrich Heine, Franz Kafka, Isak Dinesen, and Bertolt Brecht. The intention will be to provide concrete examples of how literature can engage imagination in ways that enhance both the capacity for political thinking and for political action.

### **Course objectives**

To understand Arendt's conception of the complex and ambiguous role that imagination can play in politics;

More specifically, to grasp the role that, according to Arendt, imagination can play in mass mobilization and in the genesis of (extreme) political ideologies, which are conducive to forms of totalitarian rule;

To understand Arendt's conception of the human condition, more precisely, her view of the central role that culture and imagination play in politics, as well as her prescriptions for benignly engaging imagination and works of art in politics;

To grasp different ways in which works of art can enhance both people's capacity for political thinking and for political action.

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

We will learn about Arendt's conception about the relationship between imagination and politics by reading the following books:

Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, A Harvest/HBJ Book, 1973

Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, University of Chicago Press, 1958

We will also read Franz Kafka's novel, *The Castle*, two plays, by E.G. Lessing, *Nathan the Wise*, and by Bertolt Brecht, *The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny*, and a short story by Isak Dinesen, *The Poet*.

We will also watch Leni Riefenstahl's Nazi propaganda movie, *The Triumph of the Will*

### **Course Requirements:**

#### **Two short essays (6 double-spaced pages), 25% each:**

- (i) Drawing on Arendt's discussion of totalitarian movements and of totalitarian propaganda and on Leni Riefenstahl's movie, *The Triumph of the Will*, analyze and discuss the manner in which Nazis used imagination and images in Germany for purposes of mass mobilization and indoctrination, **due on May 2**
- (ii) Explain the reasons for which you agree or disagree with Arendt's prescriptions for the role that works of art and imagination should play in politics, in both political thinking and action, **due on May 30**

#### **Final take-home exam (30%)**

**Class presentations** (the topics will be chosen from the third part of the class) (15%). You are expected to summarize the reading(s) for the day, to provide your colleagues with points that will structure the class-discussion, and to do so in ways that connect the work of the artist that is discussed that day with Arendt's interpretation of it.

#### **Active and informed general class participation (5%)**

### **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:**

**March 26:** *Introduction*

**March 28:** *Why Hannah Arendt?*

*Reading:* Hannah Arendt, "What Remains? The Language Remains": A Conversation with Günter Gauss" (e-reserve)

**March 30:** *Why Imagination and Politics?*

*Reading:* George Kateb, "The Canon of Political Theory" (e-reserve)

*I. The Origins of Totalitarianism: Facets of Ideological Imagination*

**April 2:** *Anti-Semitism: The Social Imagining of the Exotic*

Reading: Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, pages 56-88

**April 4:** *The imperialist character and its irresponsible and escapist imagination*

Reading: Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, pages 185-197 and 207-221

**April 6:** *Tribal Nationalism and its Imaginary*

Reading: Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, pages 222-249

**April 9:** *Totalitarian Propaganda and Ideological Imagination*

Reading: Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, pages 341-164

**April 11:** *Totalitarian Organization; Who I am to Judge?*

Reading: Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, pages 364-388 and *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (An Expert in the Jewish Question and The Wannsee Conference, or Pontius Pilate)

**April 13: No Class** (I will be attending the Annual meeting of The Midwest Political Science Association in Chicago)

**April 16:** *Nazi Propaganda and the Totalitarian Movement*

Visual Assignment: Leni Riefenstahl, *The Triumph of the Will*

**April 18:** *Total Domination*

Reading: Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, pages 437-459

**April 20:** *Ideology and Terror*

Reading: Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, pages 460-479

## *II. The Human Condition: Culture and Politics*

### **April 23:** *The Conditions of Human Existence*

Reading: Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, pages 7-21 and 50-58

### **April 25:** *Labor*

Reading: Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, pages 79-109

### **April 27:** *Work*

Reading: Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, pages 136-167

### **May 2:** *The Character of Political Action*

Reading: Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, pages 175-198 and 199-212

### **May 4:** *The Frustrations of Action: Temptations and Remedies*

Reading: Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 220-247

### **May 7:** *Why Is the Work of Art a Privileged Artifact in Relationship to Politics?*

Reading: Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, pages 167-174 and “The Permanence of the Work of Art”

### **May 9:** *What Can Culture Do for Politics?*

Reading: Hannah Arendt, “Culture and Politics,” pages 179-187

### **May 11:** *What Can Culture Do for Politics?*

Reading: Hannah Arendt, “Culture and Politics,” pages 188-202

## *III. Artists and Politics*

### **May 14:** *The Nature of Political Thinking and Understanding*

Reading: Hannah Arendt, “Truth and Politics” and “Understanding and Politics”

### **May 16:** *Imagination and Friendship*

Reading: Hannah Arendt, “On Humanity in Dark Times: Thoughts about Lessing”  
G.E. Lessing, *Nathan the Wise*

**May 18:** *Artists and Politics: Imagination and Political Resistance*

Reading: Hannah Arendt, “The Jew as Pariah: A Hidden Tradition,” “Stefan Zweig: Jews in the World of Yesterday,” and start reading Franz Kafka, *The Castle*, chapters 1-8

**May 21:** *Artists and Politics: Imagination’s Power to Change the World*

Reading: Franz Kafka, *The Castle*, chapters 9-19

**May 23:** *Artists and Politics: Imagination’s Power to Change the World*

Reading: Hannah Arendt, “Franz Kafka, Appreciated Anew” and Franz  
Franz Kafka, *The Castle*, chapters 20-25

**May 25:** *Artists and Politics: The Promises and the Dangers of Storytelling*

Reading: Hannah Arendt, “Isak Dinesen, 1885-1962” and Isak Dinesen, *The Poet*

**May 28:** *Artists and Politics: Poetry’s Power to Illuminate the World in Dark Times*

Reading: Hannah Arendt, “What is Permitted to Jove...: Reflections on the Poet Bertolt Brecht and His Relation to Politics” and Bertolt Brecht, *The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny*

**May 30:** *Final Discussion: Imagination and Politics*