

POSC 228

***Foucault: Bodies in Politics***

Fall 2011

Class Hours: MW 12:30 PM-1:40 PM, F 1:10 PM-2:10 PM

Classroom: Willis 203

*Professor:* Mihaela Czobor-Lupp

Office: Willis 418

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

### **Course Description**

In ways unaccounted for by classical political philosophy, bodily existence and life, in general, become central to modern politics. In this course we will explore several ways in which bodies become the site on which power is exerted in modern politics. We will start with a brief exploration of Aristotle's conception of politics, which situates life and bodily existence outside the realm of politics. Then, we will take a look at Arendt's critical approach to modern politics. Arendt argues that the modern public realm has been colonized by bodily experiences and by activities that have to do with biological life (*zoē*) as opposed to the life of a determinate and specific community (*bios*). Since Arendt takes the Greek view of politics as normative, she sees such colonization as a decline and even end of politics. The reason is that, in her view, politics is the realm of great deeds and speeches, of life that is narrated and remembered.

After this introduction, which aims to give us a sense of how radically modern politics moves away from its classical profile, we will move to an in-depth exploration of Michel Foucault's notion of biopolitics and biopower. This will allow us to grasp several ways in which modern forms of power act on bodies, either individually, through the disciplines, or collectively, in the guise of population, through the development of the security apparatuses. Foucault's conception of biopolitics will reveal that modern political reason, which is usually connected with sovereignty and law, relies, instead, on a deep and wide social network of disciplinary powers and security apparatuses. In making bodies productive or in organizing them in ways that aim to master the uncertain, disciplines and security apparatuses provide legitimacy for the state and for its sovereign power. In short, sovereignty and law rely on the productive, secure, and efficient organization of life and human bodies.

In the last part of the course we will explore the conceptions of Giorgio Agamben and Judith Butler, two contemporary thinkers who develop Foucault's and Arendt's conceptions of politics by further explaining and problematizing the ways in which biological life and politics, bodies and power intersect with each other. Both Giorgio Agamben and Judith Butler argue for the vulnerability and fragility of life in modern politics and analyze different ways in which politics and power, the sovereign body and its wars engage these features of life and of bodily existence.

Agamben argues that the sovereign body relies on the sacred body, more precisely, on the idea of life that does not deserve to live, of (sacred) life that can be killed without being sacrificed, as in the case of modern refugees. In a provocative manner, he claims that the concentration camp provides the paradigm for modern politics. Butler argues that matter and corporeality are

political constructions, which rely on the (normative) distinction between what counts as human and what does not count, between grievable and non-grievable life. She analyzes how the vulnerability of human bodies is framed by war in ways that both reproduce and undermine the distinction between normal and abnormal.

### **Course objectives**

1. To understand how power acts on bodies, how it makes them politically significant in ways that serve the state and sovereign power, but also in ways that transform them into sites of resistance;
2. To critically examine some of the political implications of the fact that biological life becomes central to modern politics: with specific application to the issues of human rights and to war;
3. To critically examine the complex ways in which modern politics interacts with science, administration, economy, and war/military order;
4. To explore and understand how the centrality to modern politics of vulnerable and grievable biological life transforms fundamental political categories, such as sovereignty and power, as well as, liberal politics, in general.

### **Achieving Course Objectives:**

We will learn about the different ways in which human bodies become politically significant, as places where sovereign state power is constituted and legitimized, but also as fields of resistance and change, through which alternative forms of discourse are incited, by reading the following books:

*Foucault Reader*, edited by Paul Rabinow, Random, 1984, ISBN: 9780394713403

Michel Foucault, *Society Must be Defended*, Picador, 2003, ISBN: 978031242266

Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, Palgrave, 2007, ISBN: 9781403986528

Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, Stanford University Press, 1998, ISBN: 0804732183

Judith Butler, *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable?*, Norton, 2009, ISBN: 9781844676262

Kafka, *Metamorphosis*, Random, 1972, ISBN: 9780553213690

Matei Visniec, *The Body of a Woman as a Battlefield in the Bosnian War*, Perseus, 2002, ISBN: 9780953675739

### **Course Requirements:**

1. **Two ten-page essays (25% each):**
  - (i) **The topic for the first essay (*due October 21<sup>st</sup>*): Assess the critical value for politics of Foucault's conception of the relationship between bodies/life and sovereign state power**
  - (ii) **The topic for the second essay (*due November 14<sup>th</sup>*): Assess the critical value of Agamben's argument that the camp is the paradigm of modern politics**
2. **One final take home exam (40%). The exam subjects will be posted on Moodle on Wednesday, November 16<sup>th</sup>, at 9 AM and will be due on Monday, November 21<sup>st</sup>, at 5 PM. Any late submissions will be penalized.**
3. **Class presentation (and general participation) (10%)**

### **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 12:** *Introduction: Life and Politics*

### **The Greek Answer**

**September 14:** *Politics: the art of living well*

Reading: Aristotle, *Politics*, Book I (e-reserve)

**September 16:** *Arendt: the activities that make up the human condition*

Reading: Arendt, *Labor, work, and action* (e-reserve)

**September 19:** *The modern perversion of politics: the social*

Reading: Arendt, *The Public and the Private Realm* (e-reserve)

### **The end of the Greek answer: Foucault on the modern birth of biopolitics**

**September 21:** *Docile bodies: the productive nature of power*

Reading: Foucault Reader, pages 170-213

**September 23:** *Disciplinary power and normalization*

Reading: Foucault, *Society Must be Defended*, chapters one and two

**September 26:** *Sovereignty and the war of races*

Reading: Foucault, *Society Must be Defended*, chapters three, four, and six

**September 28:** *Sovereignty reconstructed: the issue of racism*

Reading: Foucault, *Society Must be Defended*, chapters seven, nine, and ten

**October 3:** *The birth of biopolitics*

Reading: Foucault, *Society Must be Defended*, chapter eleven and *Foucault Reader*, pages 258-272

**October 5:** *Security and population*

Reading: Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, chapters one, two, and three

**October 7:** *Governmentality and the new art of government*

Reading: Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, chapter four and Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, chapter one (e-reserve)

**October 10:** *Pastoral power*

*Reading:* Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, chapters five and seven and Foucault, *Subject and Power* (e-reserve)

**October 12:** *Modern political reason (the issue of raison d'état)*

*Reading:* Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, chapters 9, 10, and 11

**October 19:** *The police state and liberal governmentality*

*Reading:* Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, chapters twelve and thirteen and Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, chapter two (and eleven and twelve, optional) (e-reserve)

**October 21:** *Interlude: The body problem and the minorities*

*Reading:* Kafka, *Metamorphosis*

**Agamben: Bare Life and Sovereignty (The deconstruction of the Greek answer)**

**October 24:** *The paradox of sovereignty*

*Reading:* Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, pages 1-48 (optional, pages 49-67)

**October 26:** *Sovereign Body and Sacred Body*

*Reading:* Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, pages 71-115

**October 28:** *The perplexities of the rights of man*

*Reading:* Arendt, *The perplexities of the rights of man* (e-reserve)

**October 31:** *Biopolitics and the rights of man*

*Reading:* Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, pages 119-153

**November 2:** *The camp as a biopolitical paradigm of the modern*

*Reading:* Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, pages 154-188

**November 4:** *Interlude: war, bodies, and vulnerable lives*

*Reading:* Matei Visniec, *The Body of a Woman as a Battlefield in the Bosnian War*

## **Butler: War and the Fragile Vulnerability of Life (Radicalizing Foucault)**

**November 7:** *Bodies that matter: toward a new ontology*

*Reading:* Butler, *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable?*, pages 1-32 and *Bodies that Matter* (e-reserve, optional)

**November 9:** *Rethinking liberalism: grievable and vulnerable life*

*Reading:* Butler, *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable?*, pages 33-62

**November 11:** *Sexual Politics and Torture*

*Reading:* Butler, *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable?*, pages 63-134

**November 14:** *Reconceptualizing the liberal subject and liberal politics*

*Reading:* Butler, *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable?*, pages 137-184

**November 16:** **Final Review**