

## Contemporary Political Theory Political Science 80

Professor Dumm  
Spring, 2008

This course will focus on works of political theory of the second part of the 20th and beginning of the 21st century. We will be devoting ourselves to the close reading of texts by thinkers associated with what one political theorist, Stephen White, has called "the ontological turn" in political theory. Our use of these theorists is not simply to familiarize you with European theory of a certain sort -- though admittedly these writers, regardless of accidents of birth and circumstance, may be categorized in that way -- but to allow you to explore ideas that may be most pertinent for thinking about the conditions of politics in the contemporary era.

### Evaluation

Starting in week three of the course, each week you will be expected to hand in a one to two page paper summarizing your sense of the week's reading, and posing at least one question for us to consider during seminar. These papers will be collected at the end of class and returned to you the following week. These papers constitute 10% of your course grade. You will also be expected to write two longer papers in response to themes of the seminar. I hope to remain flexible regarding the topics of these papers, which will be developed individually, as essay questions to which you will respond. These two papers will constitute the remaining 90% of your course grade.

Because this course is a small seminar, your presence and active participation is crucial to its success. Therefore, attendance is mandatory and absences will be penalized. Please do not schedule appointments or extracurricular affairs in conflict with this course.

### Texts

The following books are available at Amherst Books in beautiful downtown Amherst.

Hannah Arendt, The Human Condition  
Carl Schmitt, The Concept of the Political  
Carl Schmitt, Political Theology  
Theodor Adorno, Minima Moralia  
Michel Foucault, Security, Territory, Population  
Giorgio Agamben, Homo Sacer  
Judith Butler, Precarious Life

As we proceed, it is likely these books will be supplemented with other readings.

## Calendar

Week One, January 29: Introduction: Truth and Politics

Reading: Martin Heidegger, "On the Essence of Truth," "The Question Concerning Technology"

### I. The Politics of Being

February 5: Thinking What We Are Doing

Reading: Arendt, The Human Condition, Prologue through Chapter Three

February 12: Labor, Work, Action

Reading: Arendt, The Human Condition, Chapters Four and Five

February 19: The Question of Modernity

Reading: Arendt, The Human Condition, Chapter Six

### II. Representation

February 26: The Problem of Sovereignty

Reading: Schmitt, Political Theology

March 4: Friends and Enemies

Reading: Schmitt, The Concept of the Political **Attention: Depending on flight schedules, this class may be rescheduled.**

March 11: Representation, Violence and Justice

Reading: Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility," "Critique of Violence."

## *Spring Break*

March 25: Damage

Reading: Adorno, Minima Moralia

### III. Society

April 1: Biopower, Part I

Reading: Foucault, Security, Territory, Population lectures 1 through 6

April 8: Biopower, Part II

Reading: Foucault, Security, Territory, Population, lectures 7 through 11

April 15: The Persistence of Sovereignty, I  
Reading: Agamben, Homo Sacer, Parts One and Two

April 22: The Persistence of Sovereignty, II  
Reading: Agamben, Homo Sacer, Part Three

#### IV. Our Condition

April 29:  
Reading: Judith Butler, Precarious Life

May 6: Conclusion: Grieving  
Reading: Dumm, "Grieving," from Loneliness as a Way of Life