HS/PO/PH 355 POLITICS AND PHILOSOPHY OF POWER

IES Abroad Vienna

DESCRIPTION:

Politics and philosophy of power is the systematic inquiry into the nature, forms, legitimacy, and effects of power in individual, social and institutional contexts, asking how power is constituted, exercised, justified, controlled, resisted, and embedded in knowledge, norms, and material structures.

This course provides an in-depth study into the history and philosophy of concepts and ideas of power and its institutions. The first part of the course examines power structures in new-age, pre-modern Europe, with its most important theorists of power, Niccolo Machiavelli and Thomas Hobbes, both scholars are sons of a society deeply embedded in and impacted by the hegemonic institutions of Church and Aristocracy.
Enlightenment and the rise of a civil society engender new philosophies of power, new theories of the social contract, and the role – and rule – of law. In this section of the course, we will study John Locke's *Two Treatises on Government*, Montesquieu`s *The Spirit of Laws* and Jean-Jacques Rousseau`s Essay on the *Origin of Inequality*. The reciprocal relationship between philosophical theory and political action, i.e. in that context the French and American Revolutions, will be intensely discussed. In terms of power relations, we will study and examine the intrinsic entanglement of power relations between subjects and society, and the (invisible) power of culture, class, status and norms in a capitalistic world order.
This course combines European history, philosophy, and political theory and demonstrates how closely these areas are interconnected with each other.

Together, we analyze the phenomenon of power with the power of philosophy! 😊

CREDITS: 3

CONTACT HOURS: 45

LANGUAGE OF INSTRUCTION: English

INSTRUCTOR: Natascha Gruver

PREREQUISITES: none

ADDITIONAL COST: none

METHODS OF PRESENTATION:

- Short lecture input
- Presentations from students
- Close-reading sessions (mandatory reading)
- Discussions, analyses of texts, concepts and arguments
- In-class workshops and group work: mind maps, mini research, case studies, paper drafting

REQUIRED WORK AND FORM OF ASSESSMENT:

- Class participation: Journaling, submitting questions weekly - 30%
- Presentation *or* short Essay to be discussed in class - 20%
- Midterm Exam - 15%
- Final Exam - 15%
- Term paper - 20%

Course Participation
Submit questions on weekly topics and reading; participation in class discussion

Class Presentation
A short PowerPoint presentation covering one topic and/or selected reading.

Midterm Exam
The Midterm exam consists of 1) open questions based on the topics discussed in class and on the assigned readings 2) a short essay

Term Paper
A thesis or research paper (ca. 2500w, ex. Lit.) on a selected, course-related topic, is due by end of **week 12/December 06, 23:59.**

Final Exam
The Final exam consists of 1) open questions based on the topics discussed in class and on the assigned readings 2) a short essay

LEARNING OUTCOMES:
By the end of the course students will:

- understand the complex phenomenon of power
- name some dimensions and contexts of power and power dynamics (e.g. politics, economics, technology)
- understand the difference of politics of power and philosophy of power
- know and compare various theories of power: pre-modern, enlightenment, modern, Critical Theory, post-modern
- know and understand core concepts, e.g.: social contract, devine right of kings, feudalism/neo-feudalism
- have read and discussed core texts on the topic of power (e.g. Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, Arendt, Foucault, Zuboff)
- reflect on the nature of democracy, nation state, the rule of law, and forms of government and power today

ATTENDANCE POLICY:
IES Abroad Vienna requires attendance at all class sessions. Attendance will be taken every class. Students must attend at **least 60%** of their class sessions to qualify **for a passing grade**, regardless of whether their absences have been excused or not. Your attendance is required in-person unless otherwise noted in the syllabus.

Students are highly encouraged to communicate absences as soon as possible to their professors and for excused absences using the processes described in the absence policy. Please refer to the IES Abroad Vienna Absence Policy for a more precise overview of all attendance policies at IES Abroad Vienna as well as an overview of possible grade penalties.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY: At IES Abroad Vienna, we hold ourselves to the highest standards of honesty and academic integrity. Any form of academic dishonesty undermines the principles of trust and fairness essential to a thriving learning community. As such, plagiarism and cheating are considered serious violations of our code of conduct, and students found engaging in such activities will face swift and severe consequences, ranging from a failing grade on an assignment, to an academic review and possible expulsion from the program.

USE OF AI: We will conduct tests and experiments with various AI-tools in the classroom together. Students must declare their use of AI for homework and research papers.

CODE OF CONDUCT – ELECTRONIC DEVICES: (1) Please have your phones stowed away during class. Use your phone during breaks. (2) Please bring a college block for notetaking and journaling. (3) Bring your laptop for class/group work.
During lecture sessions and presentations, you may keep all electronic devices closed.
Please do not use your laptop during class sessions for activities unrelated to the course.

CONTENT: FALL 2026

Week	Content	Assignments and Readings
Week 2 (Sept 21)	**Introduction and Overview** • Introduction to the course, topics and texts • Overview of class work and homework assignments	In-class group work: MIND MAP I
Week 3 (Sept 28)	**Power in pre-modern Europe** Its most important theorists, Nicolo Machiavelli, Thomas Hobbes, and Robert Filmore are contemporaries of a society deeply embedded within two hegemonic institutions of power: Monarchy and the Church.	Mandatory reading: • Hobbes, *Leviathan:* Chapter 13,"Of the Natural Condition of Mankind" pp. 94-98. • Hobbes, *Leviathan:* Chapter 14, "Of the First and Second Natural Laws, and of Contracts" pp 99-106. optional / advanced: • Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Chapter 17 "Of the Causes, Generation, and Definition of a Commonwealth" pp. 132-141. • Robert Filmer, *Patriarcha* • John Locke, *First Treatise of Government* (contra Filmer) ❖ Homework: submit questions, reflections ❖ In-class group work: MIND MAP II ❖ Student presentation: N.N, N.N ❖ In-class Mini-research / Group work: What is / Who is? - The School of Salamanca
Week 4 (Oct 05)	**Theories of Government and the State** Philosophical theories informed by Christianity, emerge and argue, that humans are all born as equals. This becomes a core of political theses and helps to ignite the French Revolution and the Era of Enlightenment. • Theoretical Framework: Humanism, separation of powers, rule of law • What is the difference between Pre-Enlightenment and Enlightenment Europe?	Mandatory reading: Charles de Montesquieu: *The Spirit of Laws* • Book I, Chapt. 1–3 "Of Laws in General" p. 14-24. • Book II, Chapt. 1–5 "Of the Nature of the Three Governments" p. 25-34. optional / advanced: • *Spirit of Laws*, Book XI, Chapters 1–6 "Of the Laws Which Establish Political Liberty" p.171-183.

	Mini-Lecture: "China in Europe“ The first translation and reception of Confucian Philosophy in Europe inspires scholars to develop secular theories of morals, ethics and government.	• SchwitzgebeL, *Human Nature and Moral Education In Mencius, Xunzi, Hobbes, and Rousseau,* p. 147-163. ❖ Homework: submit questions, reflections ❖ In-class group work: MIND MAP III ❖ Student presentation: N.N, N.N ❖ In-class Mini-research / Group work: What is / Who is? - Olympe de Gauges, Christian Wolff, Samuel Pufendorf, Hugo Grotius
Week 5 (Oct 12)	**From Enlightenment to Modernity** The rise of a civil society, capitalism and industrialization negotiate power in a new way. Political /philosophical theories of democracy, social contract and the nation state in Enlightenment Europe reflect a new social order. New power players: capitalism and industrialization	Mandatory reading from: Jean Jacques Rousseau: *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality* • Preface p. 7-10. • Part I p. 17-20. • Part II p. 29-32. optional / advanced: • Jean-Jacques Rousseau: *On the origin of language* (exzerpt) ❖ Homework: submit questions, reflections ❖ Student presentation: N.N, N.N ❖ In-class Mini-research / Group work: What is / Who is? - Charles Fourier, Robert Owen and New Harmony Discussion: ➢ concepts of social contracts and civil society ➢ concepts for the distribution of wealth and property; what is equality / inequality?
Week 6,7 Oct 19, Oct 26	**Midterm Week & Fall Break**	
Week 8 (Nov 02)	**Post-War Power Analysis: The Frankfurt School** A Trauma of Reason: World Wars I and II left catastrophic marks on European societies The “failure of reason” vis-à-vis a highly developed ethics in (German) philosophy is analyzed by the The Frankfurt School – Critical Theory • Hannah Arendt: The Origins of Totalitarianism • Theoretical Framework: Modern Philosophy	Mandatory reading: • Hannah Arendt: *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Part III: Totalitarianism: o *The Masses,* p. 305-320 o *On Loneliness*, p. 475-479. optional / advanced: • Immanuel Kant: *Perpetual Peace*

		Discussion: ➢ What is Critical Theory? ➢ Hannah Arendt and the relevance of her work today ❖ Homework: submit questions, reflections ❖ Student presentation: **Anna, Miles**
Week 9 (Nov 09)	**Democracy Today – Democracy in Crisis? The Age of "Post-Truth"** • Democracies in crisis? The Age of Post-Truth • The rise of populism, authoritarianism and civil resistance • Democracy, Education, Information: Social Media, Fake News, etc. in the age of Post-Truth • Democracy and/or Monarchy – is it even a question? • Discussion: What is "Autocratic breakthrough"?	Mandatory reading: Helen Landemore*: Debating Democracy* ❖ Introduction, "*How to fix what ails Democracy"* ❖ Chapter 2, *"Maybe Less is More"* ❖ Chapter 8*, "Do We Need More or Less?"* optional / advanced: ❖ Chambers, *Contemporary Democratic Theory* ❖ Homework: submit questions, reflections ❖ Student presentation: **Sesi** ❖ In-class Mini-research - Case Study: SURPRISE (for didactical reasons not disclosed yet)
Week 10 (Nov 16)	**Power in a global World - Where are we now, today** The entanglements of power: politics, capital and technology in a global world. Global Institutions of power regulation: United Nations / International Court of Justice / Human Rights Watch Discussion of Kant`s core concepts and ideas Charta of United Nations, founded 1949	Mandatory Viewing: • Video: Shoshana Zuboff: *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism* • Video: Nick Couldry: *The Cost of Connection* optional / advanced: • Shoshana Zuboff: *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*, pp. 12-37. ❖ Homework: submit questions and reflections ❖ Student presentation: **Sanjar**
Week 11 (Nov 23)	**The Power of Data and AI - Where are we going?** Data Power, Populism, new power player: Big Data, Digitalization, Social Media, Artificial Intelligence	Mandatory Reading: • Newspaper articles (t.b.a.) on AI and its impact on society and humanity ❖ Homework: submit questions, reflections ❖ Student presentation: N.N, N.N ❖ In-class Case study: Power of Silicon Valley and Venture Capital

Week 12 **(Nov 30)**	**The Power of Culture and Society** • the power of social norms, culture, class and society • Power and Knowledge: institutions and systems of knowledge production and transfer • Identity, Subjectivation Philosophical framework: Arthur, Schopenhauer, Friedrich Nietzsche, Postmodern Philosophy	<u>Mandatory reading:</u> • Gerd Christensen: *Three Concepts of Power - Foucault, Bourdieu, and Habermas,* p. 182–195. • Hangning, *Foucault's Study of Power,* p. 1-6. <u>optional / advanced:</u> • Michel Foucault: *Discipline and Punish*, Chapt 1. "Docile Bodies", p. 31-56. ❖ Homework: submit questions, reflections ❖ Student presentation: N.N, <u>In-class discussion:</u> The power of discourses on person & identity formation ❖ Peer feedback on Term papers
Week 12 **(Dec 04)**	**Make-up Session** • Course wrap-up, Summary, • Term-Paper Writing Workshop • Preparations for Final Exam (Dec 07)	Summary, discussion; Q & A In-class writing workshop on Term paper Peer feedback on Term papers In-class preps for Final Exam

COURSE-RELATED TRIPS: not yet specified // no field trip

REQUIRED READINGS:

CLASSICS:

- HOBBES, Thomas (1668): *Leviathan, sive De materia, forma, & potestate civitatis ecclesiasticae et civilis.* EN Leviathan, ed.by Rogers, G. A. J., Schuhmann, Karl, London: Bloomsbury Publishing (2006).
- LOCKE, John (1689): *Two Treatises on Government*, ed. Peter Laslett. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (1988).
- ROUSSEAU, Jean-Jacques (1762) *Du Contrat Social ou, Principes du Droit Politique // The Social Contract*, Paris.
- MONTESQUIEU, Charles de (1748): *The Spirit of Laws*, G. Bell & Sons, Ltd., London.
- ARENDT, Hannah (1951): *On The Origins of Totalitarianism,* Schocken Books, New York.
- FOUCAULT, Michel (1977): *Discipline and Punish. The Birth of the Prison,* Pantheon Books, New York.

CONTEMPORARY:

- LANDEMORE, Helene / BRENNAN, Jason (2021): *Debating Democracy. Do We Need More or Less?,* Oxford Univ.Press.
- HANGNING Liu (2023): *Foucault's Study of Power*, in: Proceedings of the 3rd International Conference on Literature, Language, and Culture, Malang, Indonesia.

RECOMMENDED – OPTIONAL AND FURTHER READING:

- CHAMBERS, Simone (2024): Contemporary Democratic Theory, Springer Nature: London, New York.
- CHRISTENSEN, Gerd (2024): *Three Concepts of Power - Foucault, Bourdieu, and Habermas*, in: Power and Education 2024, Vol. 16(2) 182–195.
- COULDRY, Nick / MEJIAS, Ulises (2019: The Cost of Connection. How Data Is Colonizing Human Life and Appropriating It for Capitalism, Routledge, New York.
- FOUCAULT, Michel (1977): *Discipline and Punish. The Birth of the Prison,* Pantheon Books, New York.
- FILMER, Robert (1640): Patriarcha, or The Natural Power of Kings, Westminster Hall: London.
- KANT, Immanuel (1795): *Zum ewigen Frieden // Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch,* Friedrich Nicolovius, Königsberg.
- MACHIAVELLI, Niccolo (1550): *De Principatibus //* The Prince, Blado d'Asola Publishing: Rome.
- SCHWITZGEBEL, Eric (2007): Human Nature and Moral Education In Mencius, Xunzi, Hobbes, and Rousseau, in: History of Philosophy Quarterly, 147-163.
- ZUBOFF, Shoshana (2015): *Surveilance Capitalism. The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power*, Hachette, Chicago.

Filmography: Educational and Intro Videos (YouTube) – see moodle.

INSTRUCTOR BIOGRAPHY:

Dr. Natascha Gruver is a philosopher and historian, and a long-term faculty member at the Department of Philosophy at the University of Vienna. After an expansive period of study and research at the University of California, Berkeley (2005-2019), Natascha's areas of research and teaching currently focus on the history of European / Western philosophy, the history of ideas, epistemology, and political philosophy.