

Course Code: HUMA 4000L / HUMA 6003E [cross-listed]

Course Title: Philosophy of History and Society

Topic: Hannah Arendt and Critical Social Theory

Course Offered: Fall Semester 2022

Course Instructor: Professor Eric S. Nelson

Time: Thursdays 3:00 pm – 5:50 pm

Venue: Room 1511

Office Hours: Thursdays 12 noon to 2pm and by appointment

Office: Room 2383 (office number beginning September 1)

Course Description

This course, suitable for undergraduate and postgraduate students, offers an introductory survey of the social-political philosophy of Hannah Arendt and the project of a critical social theory associated with the Frankfurt School (Theodor Adorno, Jürgen Habermas, Axel Honneth, and Rahel Jaeggi). The key thematic of this class will be the significance of individual personal freedom, public association and participation, and the lifeworld in relation to the systematic structural forces of the state and the economy. We will explore through a mixture of lecture and discussion issues of authority and autonomy, ideology and public opinion, the lifeworld or forms of life and alienation and reification, systems of power (such as state and market) and possibilities of democratic participation and deliberation, as well as conceptions of historical progress, disaster, and critique in relation to the historical realities and consequences of the horrors of totalitarianism in Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union and the crisis-tendencies of contemporary capitalism.

Course Outline

1. September 1. Introduction: The Private, the Public, and the State

Preliminary Readings: Immanuel Kant, “What is Enlightenment?” (1784); Rosa Luxemburg on freedom, the public, and dictatorship from *The Russian Revolution* (1918).

2. September 8. Is there a “Right to Have Rights”?

Reading: statelessness and the paradox of human rights in Hannah Arendt: *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951), 267-302 (focus on pages 290-302).

3. September 15. Are there and do we need to safeguard distinctions between the state, the public, and

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the private realm?

Reading: Hannah Arendt: *The Human Condition* (1958), pp. 22-78

4. September 22. Labor, Work, and Exchange

Reading: Hannah Arendt: *The Human Condition* (1958), pp. 79-174

5. September 29. Responsibility and the Banality of Evil

Readings: Hannah Arendt: “Postscript” from *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (1964, second edition), pp. 280-298, and “Personal Responsibility under Dictatorship” (1964)

Recommended Viewing: *Hannah Arendt* (2012 film)

6. October 6. Auschwitz and the New Categorical Imperative

Readings: Theodor W. Adorno: “The Meaning of Working Through the Past”; “Education After Auschwitz”; Auschwitz and the new categorical imperative from *Negative Dialectics*, pp. 361-368

October 10 (Monday): Essay One on Hannah Arendt due on canvas

7. October 13. Ideology and the Culture Industry

Readings: Theodor Adorno: “The Schema of Mass Culture”; “Culture Industry Reconsidered”

8. October 20. The Public Sphere, Systems, and the Colonization of the Lifeworld

Readings: Selections from Jürgen Habermas: *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* and *The Theory of Communicative Action*

9. October 27. Liberal, Republican, and Deliberative Democracy

Readings: Jürgen Habermas: “Three Normative Models of Democracy”; “Popular Sovereignty as Procedure”; and (supplemental) “Struggles for Recognition in the Democratic Constitutional State”

10. November 3. Is the category of reification still meaningful?

Readings: Axel Honneth: *Reification*, pp. 17-96

11. November 10. What do alienation and ideology mean today?

Readings: Rahel Jaeggi: “Rethinking Ideology”; selection on freedom and alienation from *Alienation*, pp. 199-220

12-13. November 17 and 24. Crisis, Critique, and Transformation

Reading: selections from Rahel Jaeggi: *Critique of Forms of Life*

December 14 (Wednesday). Essay Two on Frankfurt School due on canvas

Assessment:

1. Two Reflection Essays: 70% - research questions will be assigned but can be modified in

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consultation with me. Essays should be 5-8 pages for UG students and 8-12 pages for PG students

2. Class Presentation: 10% - one short (10-15 minutes) class presentation expressing questions or insights into a class reading

3. Attendance and Class Participation: 20% - weekly involvement is encouraged and required

Course Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs):

1. Encourage skills in critical thinking and interpretation.
2. Improve abilities to understand, evaluate, and discuss ideas and arguments.
3. Learn diverse approaches and viewpoints in developing one's own perspective.
4. Foster understanding of the arguments, ideas, and the contexts and consequences of modern social-political philosophy.

Please Note:

- **Further Details can be found on CANVAS**
- **No plagiarism is allowed:** HKUST upholds academic integrity and has a no plagiarism policy. Plagiarism will result in failure of the course. For further information, see:
<http://ugadmin.ust.hk/integrity/student 1.html>
- **Pay attention to schedule changes:** Make sure that you can receive CANVAS notifications, as some classes might be changed due to external circumstances.

Course Readings: Selections available on CANVAS.