AGAMBEN’S POLITICAL THOUGHT

Political Science 42015
Spring Quarter 2016
Wednesdays, 1:30–4:20 pm, Pick 506

This graduate seminar will be devoted to understanding the political thought of the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben, and will be centered on a careful reading of three of the books that make up the long-term project he has pursued under the general rubric of *Homo Sacer*. These are *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life; The State of Exception; and The Kingdom and the Glory*. We will also read a selection of shorter essays by Agamben, selections from some of his most important theoretical interlocutors (including Arendt, Aristotle, Benjamin, Foucault, and Schmitt), and a selection of critical engagements with Agamben’s thought by contemporary theorists and scholars. Prior familiarity with Agamben not required; prior advanced work in political theory and philosophy strongly recommended.

**ADMISSION:** This is a limited-enrollment, by-consent-only seminar, open to graduate students. If you wish to apply for a place in the course, you must attend the first session; no decisions about admission will be made before then.

**TEXTS:** Four required texts have been ordered at the Seminary Coop. All other required readings will be available through the course’s Chalk site.

Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*
Giorgio Agamben, *State of Exception*
Giorgio Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*
Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology*

**ASSIGMENTS:** (1) One brief oral presentation on a subset of one week’s material, which should identify an interpretive crux or conceptual puzzle in the reading, explain its larger stakes, and propose and defend a productive response to the problem. (2) One seminar paper, 15–20 pages, due June 6 (June 1 for graduating students) unless you’ve made other arrangements in advance (which is easy: just ask!), on a topic of your choice discussed with me by mid-May.

**GRADES:** Paper 75%; presentation 25%. Any student absent for more than two sessions of the seminar, except for medical or other documentable emergencies, will be graded pass/fail only.

**POLICY ON ELECTRONIC DEVICES:** “Shun electric wire. / Communicate slowly. Live / a three-dimensional life; / stay away from screens. / Stay away from anything / that obscures the place it is in” (Wendell Berry). That said: while I prefer that you use paper copies of the books, you may use a laptop or tablet to access the other readings and to take notes. If you do, please keep the wireless off, and please don’t use those devices for anything else in class. Please also keep your phones silent—really silent, not on “vibrate”—and keep them in a pocket or a bag.

The electronic version of this syllabus can be found at [http://patchenmarkell.wordpress.com/classroom/](http://patchenmarkell.wordpress.com/classroom/)
WEEKLY MEETINGS AND READING ASSIGNMENTS:

Week 1 (March 30): Introduction (no reading)

Week 2 (April 6): Potentiality


Week 3 (April 13): Homo Sacer, I


Week 4 (April 20): Homo Sacer, II

1. Agamben, Homo Sacer, 119–188.

Week 5 (April 27): State of Exception, I


Week 6 (May 4): State of Exception, II

2. Carl Schmitt, Political Theology, 1–66.

Week 7 (May 11): Inoperativity

Week 8 (May 18): Critical Interlude


Week 9 (May 25): The Kingdom and the Glory, I

Agamben, The Kingdom and the Glory, 1–143.

Week 10 (June 1): The Kingdom and the Glory, II

Agamben, The Kingdom and the Glory, 144–287.