COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This is a recurring graduate seminar on the political theory of Hannah Arendt, which combines close reading of a rotating selection of her works (it is not a comprehensive survey) with intensive reconstruction of the intellectual and political settings in which she wrote, as well as some consideration of the subsequent reception and criticism of her thought in political theory and related fields. In 2019, the seminar will focus on the changing conceptions of freedom and unfreedom reflected in Arendt’s work between the completion of the first edition of *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (published in 1951) and the appearance of *The Human Condition* (1958)—the period during which Arendt initiated systematic critiques both of the so-called “tradition of political philosophy” (influenced by but also departing sharply from Heidegger) and of the dark sides of the so-called “Golden Age” of postwar capitalism (both in criticism of and in debt to Marx and Marxism). Notwithstanding this general thematic focus, we will also discuss many other topics raised by Arendt’s writings, largely in response to the interests and preoccupations of the members of the seminar. Both those who are new to Arendt’s thought and those who have prior familiarity with these texts are welcome.

TEXTS:

The main texts for the course are *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (Schocken, 2004) and *The Human Condition* (Chicago, 1958), which have been ordered at the Cornell Bookstore. Please be sure to use *this edition only* of *Origins*, since its contents and pagination are significantly different from all other editions of the book. You may use any University of Chicago Press edition of *The Human Condition*. Other readings (marked with an *) will be available electronically via Blackboard.

GRADES AND WRITING ASSIGNMENTS:

Your grade for the seminar will be based on a seminar paper of 20–25 pages, on a topic of your choice, approved in advance by me no later than April 12. Papers are due **Monday, May 13, by 5pm**. Please submit papers electronically to markell@cornell.edu.

DISTRACTION-FREE ZONE:

You’re welcome to use a laptop or tablet to access course materials or to take notes during the seminar, but you may *not* use these devices for any other purpose, including “research,” in the
seminar. In fact, I’d prefer that you disable your wireless connections. Cell phones should be silenced—fully silenced, not put on “vibrate”—and kept in a bag or pocket while in seminar.

WEEKLY READING ASSIGNMENTS:

WEEK 1 (January 24): Introduction (no assigned reading)

WEEK 2 (January 31): Antisemitism

Arendt, *Origins*, Part I, chapters 1–4 (pp. 1, 11–155)
*Arendt, “Herzl and Lazare,” in The Jewish Writings*
*Lida Maxwell, “A Public Taste for Truth,” in Public Trials*

WEEK 3 (February 7): Imperialism, I

*Arendt, “Parties, Movements, and Classes,” Partisan Review* (Fall 1945)
*Karl Marx, “The Eighteenth Brumaire,” in Surveys from Exile, selections*
*Carl Schmitt, “Further Development of the Total State in Germany,” in Four Articles*

WEEK 4 (February 14): Imperialism, II

Arendt, *Origins*, Part II, chap. 3 (pp. 242–286)
*Kathryn Gines, “Race-Thinking and Racism in The Origins of Totalitarianism,” in King and Stone, eds., *Hannah Arendt and the Uses of History*
*Karuna Mantena, “Genealogies of Catastrophe,” in Benhabib, ed., *Politics in Dark Times*
*Michael Rothberg, “At the Limits of Eurocentrism,” in Multidirectional Memory*

WEEK 5 (February 21): Imperialism, III

Arendt, *Origins*, Part II, chapter 5 (pp. 341–84)
*United Nations, “Universal Declaration of Human Rights” (1948)*

WEEK 6 (February 28): Totalitarianism

Arendt, *Origins*, Concluding Remarks (pp. 618–32)
*Giorgio Agamben, “Introduction” and “The Camp as the Nomos of the Modern,” in Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*
WEEK 7 (March 7): From Origins to The Human Condition

Arendt, “Ideology and Terror: A Novel Form of Government” (Origins, pp. 593–616)

WEEK 8 (March 14): Introducing The Human Condition

Arendt, The Human Condition, pp. 1–21
*Daniel Lang, “Earth Satellite,” in Hiroshima to the Moon
*Cathryn Carson, Heisenberg in the Atomic Age, selections (pp. 310–33).
*Peter Frase, “Introduction: Technology and Ecology as Apocalypse and Utopia,” in Four Futures

WEEK 9 (March 21): Public and Private

Arendt, HC, pp. 22–78
*Aristotle, Politics, Reeve trans., book 1

WEEK 10 (March 28): Labor and Work

Arendt, HC, pp. 79–135
*Nicole Loraux, “Ponos: Some Difficulties Regarding the Term for ‘Labor’,” in The Experiences of Tiresias

WEEK 11: SPRING BREAK

WEEK 12 (April 11): Use and Beauty

Arendt, HC, pp. 136–174
*Arendt, “The Crisis in Culture,” in Between Past and Future
*Harold Rosenberg, “The Herd of Independent Minds,” in Discovering the Present
*Mary McCarthy, “An Academy of Risk,” in On the Contrary
*Clement Greenberg, “Modernist Painting,” in Collected Essays & Criticism, vol. 4
WEEK 13 (April 18): NO CLASS

WEEK 14 (April 25): Deeds and Power

Arendt, HC, pp. 175–247
*Arendt, “Totalitarian Imperialism,” Journal of Politics (February 1958)
*Thucydides, History of the Peloponnesian War, trans. Lattimore, pp. 90–97

WEEK 15 (May 2): World and Earth

Arendt, HC, pp. 248–325
*Martin Heidegger, “The Question Concerning Technology,” in The Question Concerning Technology
*Caitlin Rosenthal, “Introduction” and “Forms of Labor,” in Accounting for Slavery
*Laura Ephraim, “Earth to Arendt,” in Who Speaks for Nature?