

University of Western Ontario
Centre for the Study of Theory and Criticism
THEOCRIT 9503A
Fall 2017
Antonio Calcagno, Ph.D.

TITLE: Political Responses to Crisis and Collapse: Hannah Arendt, Edith Stein, Rosa Luxemburg, and Simone Weil

MEETING TIMES: Thursdays 3–6pm, Somerville House Room 2348 (Theory Centre seminar room)

Contact Information: King's University College, Faculty Building, Room 213
519-433-3491 x4533

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Office Hours:

Thursdays 9:00 am–10:30 am and Fridays 12:30 pm–2:00 pm or by appointment

DESCRIPTION: Rosa Luxemburg, Edith Stein, Simone Weil and Hannah Arendt were contemporaries. They each experienced the crises and political collapse that devastated Europe in the first half of the 20th century. This course will examine how each thinker lived and conceived of the political crisis as well as their respective responses. Each thinker had a developed practical response to the crisis, but they also believed that the crisis and collapse of their society required a rethinking of politics. This rethinking produced theoretical treatises on what a new politics or political society ought to look like. Students will examine the political treatises produced by the thinkers in order to assess critically the political vision offered; students will be asked to evaluate whether what the thinkers offered can address issues in contemporary politics. We will focus on the following themes: collapse, reform, revolution in Luxemburg; politics of the *inter-esse*, speech and deed in Arendt; the state community of law in Edith Stein; the nation of obligation in Weil.

SYLLABUS:

Sept. 7: Introduction

Sept. 14: Rosa Luxemburg: Excerpts from *Reform or Revolution*: 1–73

Sept 21: Luxemburg: Excerpts from *The Accumulation of Capital*: Section 1, pages 1–143

Sept. 28: Hannah Arendt: *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, excerpts: chapters 11, 12, 13

Oct. 5: Arendt's *The Human Condition* (first half)

Oct. 12: Arendt's *The Human Condition* (second half)

Oct. 19: Fall Reading Break: No class

Oct. 26: Arendt's *The Life of the Mind* (excerpts): first 60 pages of "Thinking"

Nov. 2: *Philosophy of Psychology and the Humanities* (excerpts), 129–190

Nov. 9: Stein: *An Investigation Concerning the State* (read first half)

Nov. 16: Stein: *An Investigation Concerning the State* (read second half)

Nov. 23: Simone Weil: *Oppression and Liberty*, 1–117

Nov. 30: Simone Weil: *The Need for Roots* (read first half)

Dec. 7: Simone Weil: *The Need for Roots* (read second half)

ASSIGNMENTS:

1 seminar presentation—25%

1 short paper (5–7pp)—15%

1 final research paper (15–20pp)—50% Due one week after last class, December 15, 2017)

Class Participation—10%

SEMINAR PRESENTATION:

Each week, a student will present the reading. The seminar presentation itself should be 50-60 minutes in length. The presentation should cover or interpret an aspect of the reading that the student finds relevant. You may also choose to argue for or against a certain position discussed in the reading. Please have ready certain questions for class discussion based on your reading of the text.

SHORT PAPER: Each student will choose a second reading and write a brief essay consisting of 5-7 pages. The paper should present the key arguments of the reading and provide a critical

assessment of claims made. The paper may be organised as a response to a question, critique or argument taken up in class seminar readings or discussions.

FINAL RESEARCH PAPER: Please choose a topic that is meaningful to you and that is based on course themes or materials.

Statement on Academic Offences

Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at the following Web site:

http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_grad.pdf