

HIST 7230-301

Politics and Intellectuals in Modern Europe: A Research Seminar

Spring 2025

Location TBA

Wednesday 5:15-8:15

WARREN BRECKMAN

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The relationship between intellectuals and politics has been a vexing question of the twentieth century. From at least the time of Emile Zola, intellectuals have claimed an important role in public debate; at the same time as they have often asserted a privileged position as the ‘conscience’ of the age, the voice of reason, or the theoretical ‘vanguard’ of a political movement, their actual status with respect to power remains ambiguous. Are they central or peripheral to political processes? What are the modalities of intellectual involvement in politics in the twentieth century? What is the morality of intellectual engagement? And alongside the high profile instances of singularly creative intellectuals, what are the political roles, possibilities and constraints of the institutions within which most intellectuals work? While these questions open up philosophical debates about the nature of intellectuals and their activities, they also underlie historical attempts to study concretely the place of intellectuals in the great age of ideologies. The course will begin with several weeks of common readings focused on ‘case studies’ of intellectuals claiming and/or playing a role in politics and the public sphere. The aim of these readings is NOT to provide anything like a “comprehensive” overview. Rather, they aim to help you formulate an independent research project by exploring concrete examples and various approaches.

Roughly half of the seminar will be devoted to independent research and writing of an original work of historical scholarship. The selected topics in the first part of the course are quite narrowly focused on France, Germany, and to a small extent, England and the United States. In choosing your research topic, do not feel bound by these parameters; you are free to select a topic within any specific national context and any period in the nineteenth or twentieth centuries. (Indeed, you may even choose a topic outside of European history, though I would ask that you seek additional guidance from a relevant faculty member.) Moreover, your project can take numerous forms: a close analysis of a specific political thinker; the study of the ‘politics’ of a writer; the politics of cultural activity and/or institutions; an intellectual movement; the involvement of intellectuals in

politics. Through the second part of the semester, we will have a number of ‘milestones’ to help everyone move forward on their research projects.

The final essay is due on May 14th.

Course Materials:

The following books are available at **Penn Book Center**, 130 S 34th St:

Edward Said, *Representations of the Intellectual*

Jan-Werner Müller, *Contesting Democracy: Political Ideas in Twentieth-Century Europe*

Max Weber, *Charisma and Disenchantment: The Vocation Lectures*

Wendy Brown, *Nihilistic Times: Thinking with Max Weber*

Jean-Paul Sartre, *No Exit and Three Other Plays*

Noam Chomsky and Michel Foucault, *The Chomsky-Foucault Debate: On Human Nature*

Other readings will be posted in Canvas in the relevant weekly module. If possible, print these out and read them in hard copy. Have them readily available for use during our meetings. My experience, for what it’s worth, is that students get more out of a text when they have it “in hand” and can annotate it.

For general context and relevant discussions of the intellectual history of the nineteenth and twentieth century, you should look at Warren Breckman and Peter Gordon, eds, *Cambridge History of Modern European Thought*, vols I and II. These volumes are available in E-Book form through Van Pelt Library:

www-cambridge-org.proxy.library.upenn.edu/core/books/cambridge-history-of-modern-european-thought/BA66987D51FE2C4868D3553BAF329FBA

****Each week, one of you will be responsible for introducing the topic of the week ****

January 22: Introduction

January 29: What is an ‘Intellectual’?

Stefan Collini, *Absent Minds. Intellectuals in Britain*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006, pp. 15-65

Edward Said, *Representations of the Intellectual*, New York: Vintage, 1996

February 5: The Dreyfus Affair

Jeremy Jennings, “Mandarins and Samurais: The Intellectual in Modern France,” in *Intellectuals in Twentieth-Century France. Mandarins and Samurais*, ed.

Jeremy Jennings, London: St. Martin’s Press, 1993, pp. 1-32

Gordon Wright, *France in Modern Times*, 3rd Ed., New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1981, pp. 252-255, 267-268

Emile Zola, "J'Accuse," in *France and the Dreyfus Affair. A Documentary History*, ed. Michael Burns, New York: Bedford, 1999, pp. 93-103
Maurice Barrès, "Scènes et Doctrines du Nationalisme," in *The French Right from de Maistre to Maurras*, ed. J.S. McClelland, New York: Harper and Row, 1970, pp. 159-179
Emile Durkheim, "Individualism and the Intellectuals," in *Emile Durkheim on Morality and Society*, ed. Robert Bellah, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973, pp. 43-57

February 12: Politics and Ideas in Europe, 1900-1945

Jan-Werner Müller, *Contesting Democracy: Political Ideas in Twentieth-Century Europe*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011, pp. 1-124.

February 19: Politics and Science

Max Weber, "Science as a Vocation" and "Politics as a Vocation," in *Charisma and Disenchantment: The Vocation Lectures*; Wendy Brown, *Nihilistic Times: Thinking with Max Weber*

February 26: Nazism and Academic Life: Institutions, Collaborators, Dissent

Steven P. Remy, *The Heidelberg Myth. The Nazification and Denazification of a German University*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002. (Please be sure to secure a copy, either through purchase or borrow direct)

March 5: No Class: You should be working on your research project!

March 12: Spring Break

March 19: Politics and Ideas in Europe, 1945-1990

Jan-Werner Müller, *Contesting Democracy*, pp. 125-242

March 26: Cold War Visions

Jean-Paul Sartre, "Dirty Hands," in *No Exit and Three Other Plays*, New York: Vintage International, 1989; Ludwig von Mises, "The Resentment and the Anti-Capitalistic Bias of American Intellectuals," in *The Intellectuals: A Controversial Portrait*, ed. George B. Huszar, New York: The Free Press, 1960, pp. 365-370; F.A. Hayek, "The Intellectuals and Socialism," in *The Intellectuals: A Controversial Portrait*, ed. George B. Huszar, New York: The Free Press, 1960, pp. 371-384; Noam Chomsky, "The Responsibility of Intellectuals," in *The Essential Chomsky*, ed. Anthony Arnone, New York: The New Press, 2008, pp. 39-62

April 2: Postmodern and Postmarxist Positions of the Intellectual

Noam Chomsky and Michel Foucault, *The Chomsky-Foucault Debate: On Human Nature*, New York: The New Press, 2006, pp. 1-67; Foucault, "Critical Theory/Intellectual History," in *Politics, Philosophy, Culture: Interviews and Other Writings, 1977-1984*, ed. Lawrence D. Kritzman, New York: Routledge,

1988; Warren Breckman, “The Post-Marx of the Letter: Laclau and Mouffe between Postmodern Melancholy and Post-Marxist Mourning,” in *Adventures of the Symbolic: Post-Marxism and Radical Democracy*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2013, pp. 183-215

April 9: Brief Presentations of Topics. Prospectus is Due

April 16: Informal Discussion of Research

April 23: No Class

April 30: First Draft is Due

May 14: Essay is Due