

PHL 629: The Philosophical Thinking of the Political—Walter Benjamin and Carl Schmitt
Professors Andrew Benjamin and Peg Birmingham
Winter Quarter, 2013

Course Description: This course will focus on the philosophical thought of the political, its recovery and its destruction, in the respective works of Walter Benjamin and Carl Schmitt. Key terms of the course include violence, law, justice, life, violence, religion, and fate. Professor Benjamin will begin the course with four lectures focusing on the “recovery of the political” in Walter Benjamin’s thinking. Framing his project are two key terms in Benjamin’s thought: “destruction” and “violence.” Professor Birmingham will then turn to the concept of the political in Carl Schmitt’s thought, focusing on the key terms of violence, life, and enmity in his thought. Her lectures will also focus on how these key terms in Schmitt’s thought provoked Benjamin’s response, especially his essay, “Critique of Violence.”

Required Texts:

Walter Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften*, eds, Rolf Tiedemann and Herman Schweppengrauer, [Frankfurt 1980]

Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, Four Volumes, edited by Marcus Bullock and Michael Jennings [Harvard: Cambridge, 1996-2000]

Carl Schmitt, *Politische Theologie: Vier Kapitel zur Lehre von der Souveränität*, [Berlin: Duncker & Humblot 1922 (revised edition 1934)]. *Political Theology*, translated by George Schwab and Tracy Strong, [Chicago: University of Chicago, 1985] NB: a copy of the German will be made available.

Carl Schmitt, *Der Begriff des Politischen*, [Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1932]. *The Concept of the Political*, translated by George Schwab and Tracy Strong, [Chicago: University of Chicago, 1996] NB: a copy of the German will be made available.

Carl Schmitt, *Political Romanticism*, translated by Guy Oakes, [Cambridge, Mass: MIT, 1986]

Recommended:

Walter Benjamin: *Arcades Project*, translated by Howard Erland and Kevin McLaughlin, [Harvard: Cambridge, 1999]

Walter Benjamin, *Origin of German Tragic Drama*, translated by John Osborne, [London, 1977]

Carl Schmitt, *Theory of the Partisan*, translated by G.L. Ullmen, [New York: Telos Press, 2007]

Arendt, *On Violence*, [New York: HBJ, 1970]

Course Requirements

In addition to seminar attendance and participation, students will have the option of writing a final exam or writing a paper. The paper should be between 10-12 pages, typed and double-spaced. Please note that no incompletes will be given: papers must be handed at the time of the final exam. If the paper is not finished, then you must sit for the final exam.

Course Outline

Part I: Professor Benjamin—Recovering the Political in Walter Benjamin’s Thinking

January 9: Fate and Character. SW 1. 201-206

January 16: The Meaning of Time in the Moral Universe.

January 23 : Critique of Violence. SW 1. 236-252

January 30: Critique of Violence. SW 1. 236-252

Part II: Professor Birmingham—The Concept of the Political in Carl Schmitt’s Thinking

February 6: *Political Theology*

February 13: *Political Theology*

February 20: *Political Theology*

February 27: *The Concept of the Political*

March 6: *The Concept of the Political*

March 13: *The Concept of the Political*