

From Political Theology To International Political Anthropology: What (And How) We Talk About When We Talk About International Politics

Fall Term, 2024-25

PhD

2 credits (4 ECTS)

Instructor: Alexander Astrov (astrova@ceu.edu)

Just as in the mirror of a horrific night
A man is possessed and does not want
To recognise himself,
Along the legendary embankment
The real - not the calendar -
Twentieth Century draws near.

.....
... And behind it will enter a man,
He will not be a beloved husband to me
But what we accomplish, he and I,
Will disturb the Twentieth Century.

Anna Akhmatova, *Poem Without A Hero*

The course explores one question: What is the relation between (international) politics, truth-telling and the condition often defined as 'postfoundationalism.' It does so through close reading of three book-length texts. The first defines and examines postfoundationalism in its relation to the political. The second discusses the meaning of post-truth and truth-telling in politics. The third provides a dramatic empirical case of truth-telling, which was politically divisive in its time (almost a century ago) and its place (Stalinist Soviet Union) and remains divisive today in Putinist Russia.

What makes this course different from many others (apart from its focus on close reading of longer arguments) is that, instead of focusing on the detection or combatting of falsehoods characteristic of the post-truth political discourse, it focuses on the activity of truth-telling. This assumes that even under the conditions of postfoundationalism, political discourse should not be reduced to a collection of opinions and a search for compromises and consensus but should also involve a notion of truth. At the same time, this notion of truth cannot be reduced in politics to empirically given facts (or fact-checking). Consequently, the question of truth in politics requires an approach which is closer to political theory than the neoempiricism of the current fascination with methodology.

Learning outcomes

- Students are expected to follow the development of longer, book-length arguments, rather than just surveying articles and/or book-chapters.

- The course will clarify (or further problematise?) for them the relationship(s) between various post's; e.g., postmodernism, postfoundationalism, poststructuralism, post-truth, etc.

In its empirical case, the course will emphasise the importance of context, intertextuality and the various shades of a 'tone of voice' in discourse-analysis.

Learning activities and teaching methods

The course is structured into twelve sessions to be held over six weeks. The first session of each week is a seminar based on assigned readings. The second session of each week is a presentation by the instructor followed up by discussion.

Assessment

The course has three assignments:

- Active participation in discussions: 15%
- Presentation of one of the seminars: 25%
- Final paper: 60%

The final paper should answer one question: What is political and international about my doctoral project? (The exact titles of the paper may, of course, vary, but the question is the same.) More details on all assignments will be provided during the first session through questions and answers.

Week 1

Seminar 1

Introduction of the course

Seminar 2

Introductions of students' projects and distribution of assignments

Week 2

Seminar 3

Oliver Marchart, 'Introduction: On the Absent Ground of the Social' and 'The Contours of "Left Heideggerianism": Post-Foundationalism and Necessary Contingency' in *Post-Foundational Political Thought: Political Difference in Nancy, Lefort, Badiou and Laclau* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), pp. 1-34.

Sergei Prozorov, 'Introduction: The word of the year' and 'The regime of equivalence' in *Biopolitics after Truth: Knowledge, Power and Democratic Life* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2022), pp. 1-52

Seminar 4

From political theology to international political sociology: what we talk about when we talk about prudence in IR

Week 3

Seminar 5

Oliver Marchart, 'Politics and the Political: Genealogy of a Conceptual Difference' and 'Retracing the Political Difference: Jean-Luc Nancy' in *Post-Foundational Political Thought*, pp. 35-84.

Sergei Prozorov, 'Subject to truth' in *Biopolitics after Truth*, pp. 53-89

Seminar 6

Contextual interlude. 'Golden-mouthed Anna of all Russians': politics, poetics and the creation of the people

Week 4

Seminar 7

Oliver Marchart, 'The Machiavellian Moment Re-Theorized: Claude Lefort' and 'The State and the Politics of Truth: Alain Badiou' in *Post-Foundational Political Thought*, pp. 85-133.

Sergei Prozorov, 'The Russification of the West' in *Biopolitics after Truth*, pp. 90-145.

Seminar 8

A cursed profile, 'not a woman's, not a man's, but full of mystery': signifiers floating between shadows and reflections.

Week 5

Seminar 9

Oliver Marchart, 'The Political and the Impossibility of Society: Ernesto Laclau' and 'Founding Post-Foundationalism: A Political Ontology' in *Post-Foundational Political Thought*, pp. 134-178.
Sergei Prozorov, 'The truth won't tell itself' and 'Coda: On error' in *Biopolitics after Truth*, pp. 146-182.

Seminar 10

From international political sociology to international political anthropology: "being-with my people, there, where my people were being-toward non-communion"

Week 6

Seminar 11

Writing on foul papers: activity as rare as it is excellent

Seminar 12

Concluding discussion