

THEORIES OF THE PUBLIC SPHERE

Dr. Alma Itzhaky

Spring Semester

almaitzhaky@gmail.com

Office Hours: by appointment

Short description:

The public sphere is a key concept in political theory, designating the field of civic life and activity as distinct from both the private sphere and the sphere of government. For philosophers such as Hannah Arendt, Jürgen Habermas and their followers, the public sphere is the life-breath of democracy, and the source of all legitimate political authority. They describe it as a place of egalitarian and free communication, accommodating a plurality of agents and opinions. On the other hand, Marxist and feminist thinkers have criticized their theories for ignoring the structural inequalities and power-relations that shape the public sphere.

The course will be dedicated to studying this controversy about the role, possibilities and limits of the public sphere, with an emphasis on its relevance to present day politics. We will inquire into the ways in which the public sphere is changing with the implementation of new technologies such as social media, the “Internet of Things”, high-tech surveillance and more, and try to account for these changes in light of the various theories under consideration.

Assessment*:

Midterm:

An essay, 15% of the final grade.

Final requirement:

Take-home exam, 70% of the final grade

Participation:

15% of the final grade.

Attendance:

Attendance is mandatory. Students are permitted a maximum of three absences without penalty. Any additional absences will affect the final grade and may result in failure of the course.

Academic conduct:

Plagiarism is taken extremely seriously. Any instance of academic misconduct which includes: submitting someone else's work as your own; failure to accurately cite sources; taking words from

* Please note that if distance learning is required, the assessment procedure, modes of assessment and weightings may be changed.

another source without using quotation marks; submission of work for which you have previously received credit; working in a group for individual assignments; using unauthorized materials in an exam and sharing your work with other students, will result in failure of the assignment and will likely lead to further disciplinary measures.

Additional requirements:

Students are required to keep phones turned off during class.