

M.Phil Theory of Politics
Hilary Term 2022
Sam Bagg and Lois McNay

Seminars will be on Thursdays, 2-4pm, Skills Lab, DPIR (COVID permitting)

Format

This term's core class is organised around a series of themes that are central to the study of politics. It focuses on thinkers outside the 'analytic' tradition of political theory.

The aim is both to introduce you to several different ways of approaching political theory, and to help you develop certain skills that are central to good scholarly practice more generally—including careful, close reading of texts, as well as attentive listening and the ability to engage in productive exchange with your peers.

This term, you should continue to meet in your groups before the seminar to discuss the week's texts. We will also continue with presentations, but with some modifications. For each week, there are two sets of Core Readings, designated as (A) and (B). Some Core Readings consist of a single book, while others consist of several related texts. In two of the weeks, there is also a third set of Core Readings, designated as (C).

This makes for a total of 18 (sets of) Core Readings, corresponding to the 18 students in the seminar—each of whom will present one set of Core Readings. That presenter should, in a brief 5-7 minute presentation, focus on introducing the text(s) and thinker(s) to the group. In doing this, we encourage presenters to draw on their group discussions.

Here are some topics presenters might cover:

1. Context. How might the social and intellectual background of the author(s) have shaped the text(s)? What are the author(s) known for, and do the text(s) reflect or challenge that reputation? (This won't be relevant for every text.)
2. Overall Argument. What are the central claims of the text? How do they compare to the claims made by other texts we have studied, or with which you are familiar? What is distinctive about the specific way these claims are presented?
3. Close Readings. Are there any passages of the text you think we need, as a group, to read together in order to understand the core claims? Are there questions you think it would be useful for us to address in order to get on top of the text?

Of course, a 5-7 minute presentation will not be able to address all of these questions, or even any one of them in any great detail. The main purpose of the presentations is for you to offer a sense of the points of difficulty or intrigue that you encountered in the text, as a spark for further discussion—and in that regard, we hope you will draw extensively on your smaller group discussions. Crucially, the aim is *not* to plunge straight in with (what you perceive to be) devastating criticisms of the author(s). We will of course discuss such critiques in the course of the seminar, and you may bring them up in presentations if you wish, but any persuasive critique must be preceded by a charitable reading.

After the two (or three) student presentations, we will make our way through the texts as a group. Everyone is responsible for reading all of the Core Readings, and should come to the seminar prepared to discuss the claims they make and the questions they raise.

In addition, we have also provided Supplementary Readings for each week. This is simply to allow you to read further, should a particular topic interest you. In some cases, they may help to situate the Core Readings, and may thus be of special interest to presenters. However, these are entirely optional, including for the presenters: our focus is on the Core Readings, and no one will be expected to discuss the Supplementary Readings in class.

Guidelines for Discussion

In this seminar, we are committed to certain norms of discussion. As such, we ask the following of you:

- Try to be generous interlocutors. People are not always as clear as they wish to be when making a point out loud, especially if it is something that has only just occurred to them. Practice charitable reading in your exchanges with one another as well as with the authors, by reconstructing and addressing the best version of someone's point. If you want clarification, ask for it politely.
- Try to engage one another. The best seminars are those in which you do your best to think together. This requires listening to one another and responding as best you can to each other's queries, suggestions and interpretations.
- Try to keep discussion on topic. In particular, please do not arbitrarily change the subject just because a new thought has occurred to you.
- Try not to assume too much specialist knowledge. If you wish to draw on texts or discourses outside of those everyone has studied in the Core seminars, take the time to explain the relevant points to everyone in the group.
- Seminars can be a wonderful opportunity for exploration, intellectual play and experimentation. We encourage you to try out new ideas and test views about which you might be unsure. Don't fret about saying the 'wrong' thing or sounding like you don't know what you are talking about. At the same time, do make sure you are giving other people a chance to speak. As chairs, of course, we will try to ensure that anyone who wants to speak can do so, but it is best if everyone works together to create an atmosphere conducive to productive group discussions.

Pronouns and first names

Should any of you wish to share information with us about your preferred pronouns, or the first name by which you prefer to go, or should you wish us to share those preferences with the group before class, please do not hesitate to be in touch.

Overviews, Introductions, and Helpful Texts

The following contain useful overviews and evaluations of the many issues covered in this term's course:

- Seyla Benhabib, ed., *Democracy and Difference*.
- Seyla Benhabib, Judith Butler, Drucilla Cornell, Nancy Fraser, *Feminist Contentions: A Philosophical Exchange*
- John Dryzek, *Deliberative Democracy and Beyond*.
- Nancy Fraser, *Unruly Practices: Power, Discourse and Gender*
- Raymond Geuss, *Outside Ethics* and *Philosophy and Real Politics*
- Bonnie Honig, *Political Theory and the Displacement of Politics*
- Lois McNay, *Against Recognition*
- J. D. Moon and Stephen White, eds., *What is Political Theory?*
- Anne Phillips, ed., *Feminism and Politics*
- James Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*
- Bernard Williams, *In the Beginning Was the Deed*
- Naomi Zack, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy and Race*
- Joy James and T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting, *The Black Feminist Reader*
- Melvin Rogers and Jack Turner, eds., *African American Political Thought: A Collected History*

Week 1: On the Political

What is politics? What does it mean to do politics? Does it make sense to speak of a 'political sphere' and some actions as 'political', and if so, how do we draw these distinctions? How modern is our politics, and to what extent is it informed by older traditions? Is the right orientation towards politics practical or normative, in what measures, and on what ground do we make that judgment? When it comes to politics, how do we even go about making that distinction? This week, we read two texts that, in their different ways, take on these questions. Our aim is to work out their distinctive answers and, perhaps, to compare and contrast their (deeply influential) responses.

Core Readings

- (A) - Hannah Arendt (1958), *The Human Condition*, books I and II
- (B) - Carl Schmitt (1932), *The Concept of the Political*

Supplementary Readings

- Chantal Mouffe (1993), *The Return of the Political*, especially chapters 8,9
- Bernard Williams (2005), *In the Beginning Was the Deed*, especially chapter 1: "Realism and Moralism in Political Theory"
- Chantal Mouffe, ed. (1999), *The Challenge of Carl Schmitt*, especially essays by Mouffe and Hirst
- Richard Wolin (1992), 'Carl Schmitt :The Conservative Revolutionary Habitus and the Aesthetics of Horror', *Political Theory* 20(3): 424-47
- Samuel Weber (1992), 'Taking Exception to Decision', *Diacritics*, 22(3/4): 5-18
- Dana Villa, ed. (2006), *Cambridge Companion to Hannah Arendt*, especially essays in parts III and VI.
- Andreas Kalyvas (2008), *Democracy and the Politics of the Extraordinary: Max Weber, Carl Schmitt and Hannah Arendt*, especially parts 2 and 3

Questions to think about:

1. Is politics best understood as the arena for the realisation of a distinctly human telos? If so, what are the implications of this? If not, why not, and how does that change our understanding of political life?
2. Is a conception of politics as centred on the issue of sovereignty desirable or defensible? Does that vary depending on how we conceive of sovereignty?

Week 2: Foucault and Power

Michel Foucault's work on power has been one of the major influences on radical critiques of liberal and Marxist conceptions of politics and society. His idea of a microphysics of power whose main target is the body has been central to a questioning of ideas of the autonomous self, distinctions between the public and the private, and ideas of rights and revolution. His work has been criticized, however, for its lack of normative foundations and its (apparently) nihilist implications for ideas of progressive change.

This week's reading introduces you to Foucault via two of the most famous sections of his work—Chapter 1 of *Discipline and Punish* and Volume 1 of the *History of Sexuality*. We then examine several later lectures and essays, in which he aims to clarify his theoretical ambitions and defend himself from charges of anti-humanism (among other criticisms). Throughout, we will aim to extract what is distinctive about a Foucauldian approach, and ask how his understanding of power might be of continuing use to political theorists.

Core Readings

- (A) - Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, chapter 1
- Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, volume 1
- (B) - Foucault, 'Two Lectures' (available in Colin Gordon (ed.), *Power/Knowledge*)
- Foucault, 'What is Enlightenment?' (available in Peter Dews (ed.), *The Foucault Reader*, Paul Rabinow (ed.), *Essential Works I: Ethics*, elsewhere)
- Foucault, 'The Subject and Power' (available in Dreyfus and Rabinow, eds., *Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*; Faubion, ed., *Essential Works III: Power*)

Supplementary Readings

- Foucault, Lecture four: 1 February 1978 in *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the College de France, 1977-78*.
- Immanuel Kant, 'What is Enlightenment?' (available in *Kant: Political Writings*)
- Lois McNay (1994), *Foucault: A Critical Introduction*
- Samuel Bagg (2021), 'Beyond the search for the subject: an anti-essentialist ontology for liberal democracy,' *European Journal of Political Theory* 20(2)
- Clarissa Hayward (2000), *De-Facing Power*
- Charles Taylor (1984), 'Foucault on Freedom and Truth,' *Political Theory* 12(2)

Questions to think about:

1. What is Foucault's account of power? Does it change over time, and between his different works? What are the implications of this account for normative theory?
2. What is Foucault's account of truth, and the relation of knowledge to power? What are its implications for political and scientific progress?

Week 3: The Non-sovereign Subject

How should normative thought proceed when it rejects conventional notions of the sovereign (and implicitly masculine) subject that underpin much of Western political reasoning? What entailments does the idea of vulnerability have for normative political thought? What does it mean to go beyond the language of rights and duties and acknowledge that we have indissoluble ethical ties to others/the other? Is care a fundamental political good and, if so, how should it be organised and distributed? Is it possible to make space for ideas of emotion, suffering and vulnerability in accounts of political reasoning or do they unduly confine and parochialise it?

Core Readings

- (A) - Judith Butler *Precarious Life* (2004), chapter 2: 'Violence, Mourning, Politics'
- Eva Feder Kittay (2011), 'The Ethics of Care, Dependence, and Disability',
Ratio Juris 24(1): 49-58
- (B) - Joan Tronto (1993), *Moral Boundaries: A Political Argument for An Ethic of Care*,
chapters 1,3, 4, and 6

Supplementary Readings

- Erinn Gilson (2014), *The Ethics of Vulnerability: A Feminist Analysis of Social Life and Practice*
- Estelle Ferrarese (2018), *The Politics of Vulnerability*, especially chapters 5, 6, 7
- Catriona Mackenzie, Wendy Rogers, and Susan Dodds, eds., (2013), *Vulnerability*, especially introduction and essays by Dodds and Mackenzie
- Terrell Carver and Samuel Chambers, eds. (2008), *Judith Butler's Precarious Politics: Critical Encounters*, especially essays in Parts IV and VI
- Jack Turner (2012), *Awakening to Race: Individualism and Social Consciousness in America*
- Sharon Krause (2015), *Freedom Beyond Sovereignty: Reconstructing Liberal Individualism*

Questions to think about:

1. What difference do ideas of vulnerability and/or care make to ideas of political reasoning?
2. How can we think about vulnerability and suffering without falling into undue negativity or a politics of victimhood?

Week 4: Intersubjective Reason

Habermas' work on inter-subjectivity and communication (and to a lesser extent the work of Arendt) offers one of the central challenges to the monological conceptions of the subject in liberal thought on the one hand, and the post-structural dispersion of the subject on the other. His intersubjective reformulation of reason has been especially influential for feminist theorists seeking to formulate alternative, non-foundational and inclusionary grounds for critique. Along with other thinkers, however, feminists worry that Habermasian ideas of deliberative democracy rest on an idealized conception of communication which ignores, inter alia, inequalities of power between participants in debate. We study these issues through a seminal exchange between leading feminist political theorists Seyla Benhabib, Judith Butler, and Nancy Fraser.

Core Readings

- (A) - Jurgen Habermas (1985), *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, chapters IX, X and XI
- (B) - Seyla Benhabib, Judith Butler, Nancy Fraser, et al. (1995), *Feminist Contentions*, all chapters by Benhabib, Butler, and Fraser (there are two by each)

Supplementary Readings

- Lynn Sanders (1997), 'Against Deliberation', *Political Theory* 25(3): 347-76.
- Seyla Benhabib (1992), *Situating the Self: Gender, Community and Postmodernism in Contemporary Ethics*, chapters 5 and 6 (chapter 6 also available in Meehan 1995)
- Nancy Fraser (1985), 'What's Critical About Critical Theory? The case of Habermas and gender', *New German Critique* 35: 97-131
- Joanna Meehan, ed. (1995), *Feminists Read Habermas*, chapters 1, 2, 7 and 8
- Seyla Benhabib, ed. (1996), *Democracy and Difference*, especially essays by Young, Benhabib, Honig and Mouffe
- Lois McNay (2008), *Against Recognition*, chapter 2
- John Dryzek (2000), *Deliberative Democracy and Beyond*
- Michael Kelly, ed. (1994), *Critique and Power: Recasting the Foucault-Habermas Debate*

Questions to think about:

1. To what extent does Habermas's turn to intersubjective reason 'save' the project of rational communication—and reason more generally—from the critiques examined in the first several weeks of the course?
2. Does a poststructuralist account of power and subjectivity undermine feminist goals? If so, how, and in what sense(s)? If not, why not? (i.e., why might we think it does, and why is this initial thought misguided?)

Week 5: Empire and Colonialism

Aggressive European efforts to colonize, settle, and exploit much of the rest of the world have shaped every aspect of modern political life, in every part of the globe. This week, we try to grapple with this reality through two key primary texts written by influential anti-colonial thinkers from the Black Atlantic world in the era of decolonization. We then examine a recent work of secondary scholarship analysing some of the main currents of anti-colonial thinking during this era. Of course, the tactics of colonial and imperial rule—and their impact on affected territories and populations—have varied widely across time and space, and it would be impossible to survey all forms of empire and colonialism; much less all practical and theoretical responses. The Supplementary Readings fill some of these gaps, for those who are interested, but are of course still incomplete.

Core Readings

- (A) - Aime Cesaire (1950), *Discourse on Colonialism*, trans. Joan Pinkham
- Kwame Nkrumah (1965), *Neocolonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism*, p. i-xx and 239-254
- (B) - Adom Getachew (2019) *Worldmaking After Empire: The Rise and Fall of Self Determination*

Supplementary Readings

- Gayatri Spivak (1988), “Can the Subaltern Speak?” in Nelson and Grossberg, eds., *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*
- Frantz Fanon (1965), “Algeria Unveiled” in *A Dying Colonialism*
- Amilcar Cabral (1974), “National Liberation and Culture,” *Transition* 45: 12-17
- C. T. Mohanty (1984), ‘Under Western Eyes’, *Boundary 2* 12.3; and (2002) “Under Western Eyes” Revisited: Feminist Solidarity Through Anticapitalist Struggles’, *Signs* 28
- Glen Sean Coulthard (2014), *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition*
- Walter D. Mignolo (2012), *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options*
- Edward Said (1978), *Orientalism*

Questions to think about:

1. How does colonial rule differ from other forms of domination? How do different modes of colonial rule differ from one another? How does a focus on colonial dynamics alter our analyses of power and subjectivity from previous weeks?
2. How does (or should) a recognition of the colonial origins of contemporary global injustices change our understanding of and response to them?

Week 6: Race, Liberalism, and Political Theory

Racial oppression—like European colonialism, and inextricably intertwined with it—is a constitutive condition of modernity. How should we make sense of this condition? And what are its implications, more specifically, for our practices of political theorizing? This week, we begin to address these questions by examining two of the most influential 20th-century theorists of race: Du Bois and Fanon. We then turn to a contemporary debate about the adequacy of mainstream, liberal forms of political theory in grappling with racial oppression. As critical race theorists have shown, (liberal) political theory has often colluded in the construction of institutions and norms that contribute to racial oppression. But can it also serve, in the right hands, as a resource for contesting that oppression?

Core Readings

- (A) - W. E. B. Du Bois (1903), *The Souls of Black Folk*, Forethought, chapters 1, 10
- W. E. B. Du Bois (1920), *Darkwater*, chapter 2: 'The Souls of White Folk'
- (B) - Frantz Fanon (1952), *Black Skin, White Masks*, Introduction, chapters 1, 5, 7, 8
- (C) - Tommie Shelby (2007) 'Justice, Deviance and the Dark Ghetto', *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 35(2): 126-60
- Shatema Threadcraft (2014), 'Intimate Injustice, Political Obligation and the Dark Ghetto' *Signs* 39: 735-60 (also available in her book *Intimate Justice*)

Supplementary Readings

- Frederick Douglass (1845), *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (available widely, but 2010 City Lights edition has good introduction by Angela Davis)
- Karen and Barbara Fields (2014), *Racecraft: The Soul of Inequality in American Life*
- Danielle Allen (2008), *Talking to Strangers: Anxieties of Citizenship since Brown vs. Board of Education*
- José Medina (2013), *The Epistemology of Resistance*, especially chapter 3
- Shatema Threadcraft (2017), 'North American Necropolitics and Gender: On #BlackLivesMatter and Black Femicide' *South Atlantic Quarterly* 116(3): 553-579
- Charles Mills (2013), "Retrieving Rawls for Racial Justice? A Critique of Tommie Shelby," *Critical Philosophy of Race* 1(1): 1-27
- Charles Mills (1997), *The Racial Contract*

Questions to think about:

1. Has liberal political theory functioned to occlude, rather than to illuminate, the causes of racism? If so, how? Can it be used to contest oppression, or must it be abandoned in a serious attempt to overcome white supremacy?
2. What has been the role of women in critical theorizing about race?

Week 7: Violence and Nonviolence

Politics is variously claimed to be about ‘power’ or ‘authority’—the capacity of state institutions to command compliance that is (to different degrees) voluntary. Violence is then seen as the ‘other’ of politics: i.e., what it formally excludes and marginalizes; as well as a tool of the excluded and marginalized against the state. Yet the exclusion is itself a process steeped in violence, and the sanctification of the state as free faces critiques from those who recognize the costs imposed on ‘marginal’ elements. This week, we examine two classic accounts of violence, and its relationship to other forms of power. We then turn to a discussion of its supposedly more ‘civil’ or ‘political’ opposite: nonviolence.

Core Readings

- (A) - Frantz Fanon (1961), *The Wretched of the Earth*, Section 1: ‘On Violence’
- Jean-Paul Sartre, ‘Preface’ to Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*
- (B) - Hannah Arendt (1969), *On Violence*
- (C) - Martin Luther King, Jr. (1963), ‘Letter from Birmingham Jail’
- Brandon Terry (2018), ‘Requiem for a Dream: The Problem Space of Black Power’, in Terry and Shelby, eds., *To Shape a New World: Essays on the Political Philosophy of Martin Luther King*.

Supplementary Readings

- Elizabeth Frazer and Kimberly Hutchings (2008), ‘On Politics and Violence: Arendt contra Fanon,’ *Contemporary Political Theory* 7: 90-108
- Mathias Thaler (2018), *Naming Violence*, Introduction.
- Mahatma Gandhi (1909), ‘Hind Swaraj,’ (available in Parel, ed., *Hind Swaraj’ and Other Writings*, and other places)
- Karuna Mantena (2012), “Another Realism: The Politics of Gandhian Nonviolence,” *American Political Science Review* 106(2): 455-470.
- Lance Hill (2004), ‘The Myth of Nonviolence’, in *Deacons for Defense: Armed Resistance and the Civil Rights Movement*
- Erin Pineda (2020), *Seeing Like an Activist: Civil Disobedience and the Civil Rights Movement*

Questions to think about:

1. Can political violence ever be justified? If so, under what conditions? If not, how do we grapple with cases of violence that appear justified in hindsight?
2. Should we draw a clear distinction between violence and other forms of power and authority? Or should we emphasize the continuities between them? What are the advantages and disadvantages of each approach?

Week 8: Organizing, Leadership, Resistance

Contesting the entrenched power structures we have studied in this course—including those of patriarchy, colonialism, white supremacy, and capitalism—requires building and deploying countervailing power. Yet the institutions capable of wielding this kind of power, such as political parties, labour unions, and social movement organizations, are always in danger of becoming captured or corrupted. How then can domination and oppression be resisted? What sorts of organization can facilitate genuine resistance, enabling oppressed populations to defend their interests? This week, we examine Antonio Gramsci’s classic Marxist perspective on this problem, as well as the “radical Black feminist pragmatism” articulated by Deva Woodly’s recent book.

Core Readings

- (A) - Antonio Gramsci (1971), *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, ed., Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith, Book II, chapters 1 and 2 (p. 123-276)
- (B) - Deva Woodly (2021), *Reckoning: Black Lives Matter and the Democratic Necessity of Social Movements*

Supplementary Readings

- James Scott (1990), *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*
- Jeffrey Stout (2010), *Blessed are the Organized*
- Mie Inouye (2021), “Starting with People Where They Are: Ella Baker’s Theory of Political Organizing,” *American Political Science Review* (online ahead of print)
- Vijay Phulwani (2016), “The Poor Man’s Machiavelli: Saul Alinsky and the Morality of Power,” *American Political Science Review* 110(4): 863-875
- Jodi Dean (2016), *Crowds and Party*
- Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau (1985), *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*
- John Medearis (2015), *Why Democracy is Oppositional*
- Marc Stears (2010), *Demanding Democracy: American Radicals in Search of a New Politics*
- Alexandros Kioupkiolis (2020), *The Common and Counterhegemonic Politics: Rethinking Social Change*

Questions to think about:

1. To what extent must resistance be organized in order to be effective? What are the dangers of organization, and how might they be avoided?
2. Do different axes of domination and power require different modes of resistance? If so, how do they differ? How might adopting an ‘intersectional’ perspective change the strategies and tactics of organizing and resistance?