

POLSC 203 – Spring 2014
John McMahon
M/W, 19:00-20:15, Room HW 1729

Office: HW 1730A
Hours: Mon., 5:30-6:30pm and by appt.
E-Mail: john.mcmahon@hunter.cuny.edu

POLITICAL THOUGHT SINCE 1900

Course Syllabus

“Then I just think, ok, what would it mean if we lived in a world in which no one held out for the possibility of substantial political equality, or for a full cessation of colonial practices - if no one held out for those things because they were impossible?”

[...] In fact in politics, sometimes the thing that will never happen actually starts to happen. And there have to be people who hold out for that, and who accept that they are idealists and that they are operating on principle as opposed to realpolitik. If there were no such ideals then our entire political sensibility would be corrupted by this process.

And maybe one of the jobs of theory or philosophy is to elevate principles that seem impossible, or that have the status of the impossible, to stand by them and will them, even when it looks highly unlikely that they'll ever be realised. But that's ok, it's a service.

What would happen if we lived in a world where there were no people who did that? It would be an impoverished world.” – Judith Butler, [interview with Open Democracy](#)

Course Description:

This writing-intensive course provides a critical introduction to political theory from the early twentieth century to the present. We will examine the major thinkers and ideas that have theorized and shaped political life over the past century, both for their historical value and for their contemporary significance and endurance. Further, our work this semester will be guided by the assumption that *contemporary* political thinking is enhanced and enriched by familiarity with the recent history of political thought. The thinkers we will examine this semester proffer invaluable concepts and categories with which to analyze the political world around us. Many provide reasons and rationales for attempts to change the world – some more successful than others, some seeking more radical transformation than others.

Throughout the course, we work through **four major themes** that will shape our efforts to theorize political life.

1. Power: Power is arguably the central concern of all political theory, but this is especially true in the 20th century. The theory and practice of politics in this time period have expanded our notions of what power is and how it operates. As such, we will pay careful attention to the way that different theorists and theoretical traditions conceptualize power and its workings, particularly how varied notions of power open up critical insight into social processes such as ideology, gender, race, sexuality, imperialism, and so on in addition to more traditional concerns about the state, law, and political institutions. Finally, we want to tend to the multiplicity of locations where power is deployed.

Key questions: How does power operate? How is power best conceptualized? Where and at what level does power operate? What is the relationship between power and resistance? Can power be harnessed ‘productively?’

2. Violence: The 20th century is the most violent century in human history; according to British historian Eric Hobsbawm, between “the world of 1914” and “the world of the 1990s, . . . more

human beings [were] killed or allowed to die by human decision than ever before in history.” Contemporary political theory necessarily has to address the proliferation of violence across different scales and social locations.

Key questions: How does one respond, politically and ethically, to violence? Is violence ever justified? How is violence differentially distributed across different social groups? To what extent is violence inextricable from politics? Is the nation-state an inherently violent force? What ‘causes’ political violence, and can violence even be said to have a ‘cause’?

3. Difference: Politics has always had to address and work on difference. However, political theory only starts to explicitly take difference into account in its theorizing in the 1900s. Numerous political and theoretical movements – anti-racism, feminism, anti-colonialism, queer liberation, etc. – challenged the implicit assumptions political theory had made, presumptions that centered affluent, white, heterosexual, masculine subjects. We are thus interested in how difference is understood by political theory and how difference transforms political theory.

Key questions: How do our conceptions of politics change when difference is understood as important? Should politics strive to reconcile difference and produce sameness, or affirm difference? How does it do those things (*can* it do those things)? What is the relationship between power and difference, and violence and difference? How do we change our understandings about ethics and politics when we begin to account for difference? How should we theorize difference?

4. Politics: Similar to the way that political theory in the 20th century has expanded our notion of power, it has done the same with what ‘counts’ as political. This expansion opens the possibility to politically contest a number of issues – sexuality or the individual psyche, for example – previously seen as un-political and thus outside the concern of political groups and forces.

Key questions: What ‘counts’ as political? How does the concept of ‘the political’ change throughout the 20th century? What new issues and problems arise with the expansion of the concept of politics? How does the expansion of politics affect the relationship between the state, society, and the individual?

This is a writing-intensive course. This class will primarily be a discussion format, with the occasional short lecture. Therefore regular attendance, careful preparation, and active participation are essential. You must prepare for every class by doing **all** the reading, reflecting upon the course texts, and bringing to class issues, questions, and passages for discussion. These readings are challenging and complex, and in order to have a successful semester together, you must seriously attempt to work through the readings. **Bring the relevant text to class, always!**

Learning Objectives:

- Understanding the contemporary theoretical-political tradition and debates
- Improving skills in reading and comprehending theoretical and historical texts
- Writing clear, well-argued expository analyses dealing with political questions and concepts
- Becoming interested in controversies over ideas, in different historical and cultural contexts, as worthy of serious and deep exploration in its own right but also acutely relevant to the political controversies of today
- Improving your ability to engage in dialogue and debate through discussions in class and various modes of writing for class
- Thinking more critically and analytically about one’s own political beliefs

Grading: Your grade in the course will be based on the following forms of work:

1. **Attendance and Participation (20%):** consisting of regular attendance (after two unexcused absences, your participation grade drops by one letter for each absence), conscientious reading of all assignments, and informed participation in class discussion; visiting my office hours also counts as participation.
2. **Class Blog (on WordPress.com) (25%):** You must submit one post responding to the readings for the day (minimum 250-300 words) and one to two discussion questions for one class session per week. Responding to/commenting on/discussing your colleagues' posts is encouraged (and may result in a bit of extra credit!), but is not required. You do not need write a response for the weeks when a take-home essay is due, but you may do so for extra credit. See course policies for more information regarding the content of your blog posts.
3. **Take-Home Essays (2 essays; 15% each, 30%total):** two five-page take-home essays in response to questions handed out in advance.
4. **Final Project (25%):** the primary form of the final project is an 8-10 page paper on a topic you will choose in consultation with me – this can take the form of a more thorough exploration of an issue from class, an independent question, etc. Alternatively, I am open to different forms of final projects – performance, short film, documentary, creative writing, artwork, etc. related to themes and questions from the class, if you receive my approval. If you choose an alternative project, you will be still be required to write a short paper connecting your work to course themes and objectives. I will work with all students on developing a topic/project, and we will use the semester to build up to the final assignment.

Course Policies

- Classroom philosophy and discussion: I proceed from the belief that all of us come to this class as learners and thinkers. None of us, myself included, have the singular correct answer for any of the complex, important problems we will be discussing. Instead, we all have valuable claims, arguments, thoughts, questions, and experiences to bring to our efforts together. We seek, thus, to work collaboratively through these questions and issues in a critical, dialogical manner. This means that our course will be focused on discussion and debate; this course is a speaking-intensive class. If this is to work, physical presence in the classroom is not an end in itself. Students should be in class to interact with their fellow students in a community of learning. Most importantly, this also means that our classroom will be an **open and respectful space for all**. Some of the issues covered in this course may be closely intertwined with deep-seated beliefs. I expect, enjoy and encourage a lively classroom discussion, but it must always be conducted in a respectful manner, free of invective, and conscious of what may be profound differences of opinion and experience.
- Class blog: You are required to submit a short post responding to the readings for the day (minimum 250-300 words) + 1-2 discussion questions for the class **once per week**. You may choose which class session you submit for each week. You may also choose which reading or readings to investigate. The response can involve a critique of the reading and/or its argument, putting the reading(s) in conversation with previous reading(s), applying texts to

contemporary situations, personal reflections, and much more. The discussion question(s) should include critical questions, broader thematic questions, questions relating the day's readings and previous readings, etc. – ask yourself, what would you like to talk about in class that day? **Both the response and the question(s)** are due by **7:00 a.m. of the morning of the class session** for which you are writing, on that day's readings. This will require you to get a free WordPress.com account and follow the instructions on BB for posting and commenting

- Office Hours: I strongly encourage everyone to meet with me during my office hours. If you're having difficulty with the class; if you don't understand the concepts and need help; if you want to clarify my expectations for an assignment; if you want to discuss the results of an assignment or an exam; if you want to express a concern of any kind; if you want to talk politics or just talk about life, meet with me.
- Email and Blackboard: I will be sending out updates and information via email and Blackboard. Furthermore, you are responsible for all information and material on the course Blackboard site. Thus it is very important for you to (a) check Blackboard regularly and (b) make sure that the email address that Blackboard has registered for you is an email address you check regularly. If it isn't, change your email address on Blackboard by clicking "Update Email" on the tools menu. **Check the email associated with your BB account at least once or twice per day.**
- We will be using TurnItIn.com for both the exam and the final project. You will receive instructions on accessing our course TurnItIn page. *Note that for both take-home essays and for the final project, you must turn in BOTH a paper copy in class and an electronic copy to TurnItIn.*
- You may provide documentation to excuse an absence. In all other cases, absences will be unexcused and negatively affect your grade (after two unexcused absences).
- Even if you are absent on the days that a written assignment is due, you are still responsible for turning in the assignment on-time.
- It is your right to expect that your work be thoughtfully and fairly graded. I am happy to answer questions regarding grading and discuss your work with you.
- Credit/No-Credit Grading: College rules specify that to be eligible for credit/no credit, students must complete all course requirements.

Office of AccessABILITY

In compliance with the ADA and with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, Hunter College is committed to ensuring educational access and accommodations for all its registered students. Hunter College's students with disabilities and medical conditions are encouraged to register with the Office of AccessABILITY for assistance and accommodation. For information and appointment contact the Office of AccessABILITY located in Room E1214 or call (212) 772-4857 or TTY (212) 650-3230

If needed, please be sure to make any necessary academic arrangements in advance of due dates so that I can best assist you.

Academic Integrity and Plagiarism

Hunter College regards acts of academic dishonesty (e.g., plagiarism, cheating on examinations, obtaining unfair advantage, and falsification of records and official documents) as serious offenses against the values of intellectual honesty. The College is committed to enforcing the CUNY Policy on Academic Integrity and will pursue cases of academic dishonesty according to the Hunter College Academic Integrity Procedures.

If online submissions, exams, or the paper is found to have been plagiarized, disciplinary action will result. A grade of F for the assignment and/or course will be given, and, if necessary, the case will be submitted for further action at the level of the Department Chair and/or the Dean of Students.

For the take-home essay exams, in-text citations (Author, Page number) can be used to reference class texts. For the final project, you are required to use Chicago-style citations; I will circulate information and guidelines with the paper assignment. For a guide to what constitutes plagiarism, please consult <http://www.lib.usm.edu/legacy/plag/plagiarismtutorial.php>; of course, discuss with me any questions you may have.

Course Materials

There is one book to purchase for this course, available at Shakespeare's Bookstore on Lexington Ave:

Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*, WW Norton Standard Edition (ISBN: 0393301583).

All other readings are available freely online or as PDFs on the Course E-Reserve page through the Hunter Library (see Blackboard for information). While not required, it is suggested that you bring printed copies of readings to class. **We will be directly engaging with the day's readings in class, so do be sure to have them with you in some form.**

Reading Schedule

When there is more than one reading for a given day, please read in the order listed on the syllabus.

January 27: Introductions, Brainstorming

January 29: Power

- Michel Foucault, "Method," *History of Sexuality Vol. I* (1976)
- Iris Marion Young, "Five Faces of Oppression" (2004)

I. Violence and Revolution

February 3: Psyche and Society I

- Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents* (1929), Part I-Part V

February 5: Psyche and Society II

- Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents* (1929), Part VI-end

February 10: Vladimir Lenin

- Lenin, “Class Society and the State,” *The State and Revolution* (1917)
- Lenin, “Imperialism as a Special Stage of Capitalism,” “The Place of Imperialism in History,” and “Preface to the French and German Editions,” *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism* (1917)

February 12: **NO CLASS (Lincoln’s Birthday)**

February 17: **NO CLASS (President’s Day)**

February 19: Fascism

- Benito Mussolini and Giovanni Gentile, “The Doctrine of Fascism” (1932)
- Adolf Hitler, “Nation and Race” (1925)
- Jose Antonio Prima de Rivera, “What the Falange Wants” (1934)
- Zeev Sternhell, “Fascist Ideology”

II. The Frankfurt School and Hannah Arendt

February 20: Walter Benjamin (**Thursday; classes follow Monday schedule**)

- Benjamin, “Critique of Violence” (1923)

February 24: Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno

- Horkheimer and Adorno, “Preface” and “The Concept of Enlightenment,” *Dialectics of Enlightenment* (1947)

February 26: Hannah Arendt I

- Arendt, “Preface to Part One,” “Antisemitism as an Outrage to Common Sense,” and “Total Domination,” *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951)
- Start on March 3 reading

March 3: Hannah Arendt II

- Arendt, “On Violence” (1970)

March 5: Herbert Marcuse

- Marcuse, “The New Forms of Control” and “The Closing of the Political Universe,” *One-Dimensional Man*, excerpts (1964)

March 10: TAKE-HOME ESSAY I DUE

- In-class film viewing

III. Liberalism, Libertarianism, Conservatism, Democracy

March 12: Liberalism

- John Rawls, “The Rationality and Motivations of Parties in the Original Position” (1999)

- John Rawls, “Justice as Fairness” (1985)
- Ian Carter, “Positive and Negative Liberty,” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*
 - Read Introduction and Parts 1, 2, and 7 at: <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/liberty-positive-negative/>
- Joshua Cherniss and Henry Hardy, “Isaiah Berlin,” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*
 - Read Part 5.3 at: <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/berlin/#5.3>

March 17: Libertarianism

- Robert Nozick, “Distributive Justice, Section I,” *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* (1974)
- Milton Friedman, “The Relationship between Economic Freedom and Political Freedom,” *Capitalism and Freedom* (1962)

March 19: Conservatism

- Michael Oakeshott, “On Being Conservative” (1956)
- Roger Scruton, “Why I Became a Conservative” (2003)

March 24: Democracy

- Jurgen Habermas, “Three Normative Models of Democracy” (1994)
- Chantal Mouffe, “For an Agonistic Model of Democracy,” *The Democratic Paradox* (2000)

IV. (Post)Colonialism, (Anti)Racism

March 26: Frantz Fanon

- Fanon, “Introduction” and “By Way of Conclusion,” *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952)
- Fanon, “Concerning Violence,” *Wretched of the Earth* (1961)

March 31: American Racism, Black Responses

- Martin Luther King, Jr., “Letter from a Birmingham Jail” (1963)
- Malcolm X, “The Ballot or the Bullet” (1964)
- Combahee River Collective Statement (1983)

April 2: Orientalisms

- Edward Said, “Introduction,” *Orientalism* (1978)
- Chandra Talpade Mohanty, “Under Western Eyes” (1988)

Interlude: Poststructuralism

April 7:

- Michel Foucault, “Truth and Power” (1977)
- Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, “Introduction: Rhizome,” *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1980/1987)
 - Read pp. 3-18

April 9: TAKE-HOME ESSAY II DUE

- **In-class: Writing Workshop**

April 14-April 22: NO CLASS (SPRING BREAK)

V. Feminism, Queer Theory, and the Body

April 23: Feminism I

- Simone de Beauvoir, "Introduction," *The Second Sex* (1949)
- Judith Lorber, "The Social Construction of Gender" (2003)
- Iris Marion Young, "Throwing Like a Girl: A Phenomenology of Feminine Body Comportment, Motility, and Spatiality" (1980)

April 28: Feminism II

- Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution" (1988)
- Anne Fausto-Sterling, "Dueling Dualisms," *Sexing the Body* (2000)

April 30: Feminism III

- Gloria Anzaldúa, "La Conciencia de la Mestiza: Towards a New Consciousness," *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1987)
- Audre Lorde, "Age, Race, Class, and Sex," *Sister/Outsider* (1984)
- bell hooks, "Feminism: A Movement to End Sexist Oppression," *Feminist Theory: from margin to center* (1984)

May 5: Queer Theory I

- Siobhan Somerville, "Queer," *Keywords for American Cultural Studies* (2007)
- Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner, "Sex in Public" (1998)
- Anonymous Queers, "Queers Read This!" (1990)

May 7: Queer Theory II

- J. Jack Halberstam, "Queer Temporalities and Postmodern Geographies," *In a Queer Time and Place* (2005)
 - Read pp. 1-6, 17-21
- Susan Stryker, "(De)subjugated Knowledges: An Introduction to Transgender Studies" (2006)
- Cathy Cohen, "Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens: The Radical Potential of Queer Politics?" (1997)

May 12: Pasts and Futures of the Body

- Sara Ahmed, "Introduction: Feel Your Way," *Cultural Politics of Emotion* (2004)
- Donna Haraway, "Cyborg Manifesto" (1991)
- Alison Kafer, "Introduction," *Feminist, Queer, Crip* (2013)

May 14: Endings

- Concluding discussion
- **IN-CLASS PEER REVIEW for final project**

Final Project due date TBA