

POLS 2332 – M/Th 11:45-1:25pm
Professor Candice Delmas
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Pronouns: she/her
Office hours: Tu 2:30-3:30pm
Th/F 11:15-11:45am & by appointment

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Contemporary Political Thought

Overview

The goal of this course is to equip you with the tools to understand today's pressing political issues, through a survey of contemporary political thought. The course is divided into 4 broad, interrelated units that subsume sets of issues under the following political verbs: speaking, getting, being, and doing.

I. Speaking

Democracy is in crisis and we are said to live in a “post-truth” age. How are these two crises—of democracy and of truth—connected? What is the effect of organized lying on democracy's health and stability? What is propaganda? How can words cause violence? We begin the course with questions like these, as we investigate the role of truth in politics and the mechanisms through which propaganda and hateful speech can enable violence.

II. Getting

What is justice? What economic arrangements does it require? How (if at all) should we distribute the goods produced by social cooperation? What does it mean to say that workers are exploited? What is the proper role and function of government? How do factors beyond our control influence our life prospects and what should we do about it? We explore prominent philosophical approaches to political authority and accounts of economic justice, including Marxism, John Rawls's “justice as fairness,” Robert Nozick's libertarian theory of justice, and conservatism.

III. Being

Next, we will be thinking broadly about democratic citizenship and identity, through the lenses of radical democratic theory, intersectional feminism, and post-structural and post-colonial theory. The goal is to understand the meaning and politics of certain categories of social identity, how oppression works, how society produces gender and race and enforces

¹ Image: Banksy, *Rage, Flower Thrower* (Jerusalem, 2005)

social hierarchies; and, more basically, underneath or beyond identity politics, how we are constituted into subjects through social practices.

IV. Acting

The final unit of the class is devoted to political *praxis*, or what people can do outside institutional channels to change their society. We will think through the normative and pragmatic issues at the heart of liberation movements by reading Frantz Fanon's post-colonial radical existential humanist defense of violence in decolonization and Karuna Mantena's account of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s arguments for nonviolence in the Black freedom struggle. These texts, and all that precede, will equip us to think about the Black Lives Matter protests—as well as the most recent U.S. Capitol riots.

As I write this, President Donald Trump is facing a second impeachment for inciting the January 6, 2021, insurrection, during which a mob stormed and occupied the Capitol, overtook the House and Senate chambers, and ransacked the Speaker's office. At a rally he held hours before, Trump invited his supporters to disrupt Congress's certification of President-elect Joe Biden's victory in the 2020 presidential election, which Trump falsely claims he won. As the article of impeachment notes, Trump not only "repeatedly issued false statements" asserting widespread electoral fraud, but he "also willfully made statements that, in context, encouraged—and foreseeably resulted in—lawless action at the Capitol, such as: 'if you don't fight like hell you're not going to have a country anymore'."² The January 6 events raise issues connected to all 4 units of the course: (1) the importance of truth for democratic politics and the action-engendering power of words uttered by authority figures; (2) questions surrounding the unequal distribution of resources and power, and how inequalities are shaped by and serve to maintain social, including racial, hierarchies; (3) how to deal with pluralism, conflict, and disagreement in a democracy, how systems of power produce, and social norms enforce, race, gender, and dis/ability; (4) how social movements can act within and without institutions, and under what circumstances political violence can or cannot be justified.

Learning Goals

Upon successful completion of this course, students will sharpen their ability to engage in political-philosophical reflection and reasoning. Specifically, you will be able to:

- i. Draw connections between political theory and political practice;
- ii. Develop an understanding of the intersections of the state, civil society, and politics;
- iii. Identify, analyze and critically engage with philosophical concepts, theories, and arguments that are central to contemporary political debates;
- iv. Think critically and creatively about your own views on a variety of social and political issues; and
- v. Carefully express and defend these views in public and on paper.

Requirements

Although this is a 2000-level class, this course is heavy on participation and light on lectures. Assessment for the class will be a mixture of written and oral, individual and team, work. It includes 7 components, for a total of 100%:

1. Participation and attendance (5%)

² House Impeachment Resolution available at:

<https://www.cnn.com/2021/01/11/politics/house-articles-of-impeachment/index.html>

2. Muddy Points and CF feedback (5%)
3. Socratic Pods (10%)
4. Class Facilitation (30%)
5. Critical Reflection (10%)
6. Group Work (10%)
7. Editorial (30%)

Failure to complete one of these assignments will result in an ‘F’ for the course. You will be able to access your grades on Canvas Gradebook. Grade conversion:

A: 94-100	A-: 90-93.9	B+ 87-89.9	B: 84-86.9	B-: 80-83.9	C+: 77-79.9
C: 74-76.9	C-: 70-73.9	D+ 67-69.9	D: 64-68.9	F: 0-64	

Please refer to the “Course Handbook” for detailed instructions concerning each assignment. You will be quizzed on your knowledge of the syllabus and Handbook.

Word submissions: Submit your assignments in Word or PDF, not Pages, Notes, or Google Docs. As a Northeastern student, you can get Word for free: in myNEU, go to “Tech Marketplace for Students” and “Access Office365.”

Materials: The materials for this course are available on Canvas. The reading load is often heavy and very often difficult. To stay afloat, plan for a sufficient amount of time to *actively* read the texts (around 3 hours). Don’t hesitate to come to my, Tatiana’s, and Emma’s office hours if you have any difficulty.

How to read philosophy? If you have not had any philosophy classes yet, you are likely to find this class very challenging. Reading philosophical texts, including political thought, is not easy; it takes method, practice, and perseverance. The first thing I recommend you do is check out my guide “Philosophy for Beginners” (on Canvas) for detailed advice on how to read philosophy and be an *active learner*. I will always post a set of questions under the day’s module. These are meant to guide your active reading of the text. These are meant to guide your active reading of the text. You should read them before delving into the text to know what to pay attention to and what to take notes on. You should, and will always be invited to, ask questions in class. Admitting to not understanding or being confused about something is the first step of philosophical inquiry.

★ **Teaching Assistants:** We are lucky to have two TAs’ help this semester. Emma Andrews, a candidate for B.S. in Politics, Philosophy, and Economics (PPE), will help you prepare for your Class Facilitation and much else. Tatiana Rothchild, a PhD candidate in Political Science, will help you with, and grade, part of your written work. Please email Emma and/or Tatiana for regular substantive and logistical questions, as they will likely be more quickly available than I am and should be able to answer most of your questions. You are welcome to stop by at any time during Emma’s and Tatiana’s virtual office hours or schedule an appointment with them to talk about the material, your assignments, or anything else.

Tatiana Rothchild
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 Pronouns: she/her
 Office Hours: W/Th 2-3pm
 & by appointment

Emma Andrews
andrews.em@northeastern.edu
 Pronouns: she/her
 Office Hours: Tu 12:00-1:00pm;
 Th 9:15-10:15am & by appointment

Class format: I will teach remotely on Zoom. Some students who are on campus can go to our assigned classroom to follow the course with the [Hybrid NUflex](#) learning modality.

- Remember that on your scheduled days in the classroom, you will need to practice healthy physical distancing and wear a face mask.
- Every student attending class remotely is required to have their **camera on** during class.
- There will be opportunities for face-to-face meetings: not only through group projects, but also with me as soon as I deem the health situation sufficiently safe to return to campus. I envision going to the classroom for the last half hour of our class meeting for in-person small-group discussion and hope to begin doing so in March.

Emails: Please prefer direct emails to Canvas messages, which I may not get to in a timely fashion. **Always indicate the course number in the email subject** (ex: “POLS 2332 question about the CF assignment”). Write in a polite and professional manner:

- Start your email with a salutation (“Dear Professor Delmas” is better than “Hi!”).
- Sign your full name (Sincerely, First Name Last Name).

I will respond to your queries within **2** business days. If I haven’t done so, please send me another email. Remember that Emma and Tatiana may be able to help you as well.

Absences: See the Handbook for the course policy. But here’s something you should know: it’s a bad idea to ask your professors, after you missed class, whether you missed anything. Just read the syllabus and ask your classmates for their notes. To “Did I miss anything?” queries, my answer is [this poem](#) by Tom Wayman.

Appealing grades: Any student who feels that their assigned grade does not reflect their performance on an assignment can appeal the grade. All appeals must be submitted to the instructor in writing, in the form of a one-page document that clearly explains why you believe that the assigned grade does not reflect your performance. Petitioners must wait at least twenty-four hours after the grade is announced before submitting their appeals. All appeals must be submitted no later than one week after the grade is announced.

Classroom climate: One aim of studying political theory—and philosophy in general—is to unsettle our received convictions and upset our unexamined beliefs. Because of the controversial and provocative nature of some of the materials we will be studying this semester, I ask that all students exercise respect and generosity towards one another in the face of your inevitable disagreements. It is always welcome to criticize an idea, but never to attack the person who holds it. If at any point in the semester a student feels uncomfortable with the class climate or disrespected in any way, please do not hesitate to come speak with me directly.

Recording: You may not record and share our meetings. This prohibition is to create a learning environment where students and faculty can feel comfortable expressing their opinions in class without the possibility of their contribution to class being reproduced and replayed without their consent. I will always let you know if I decide to record meetings—specifically guest talks—for future use.

Gender inclusivity: Language is gender-inclusive when we use words that affirm and respect how people describe, express, and experience their gender. Please let me know your preferred

pronouns and names. I—we—will honor students' gender identities and gender expressions.

Title IX: Northeastern is committed to providing equal opportunity to its students and employees, and to eliminating discrimination when it occurs. In furtherance of this commitment, the University strictly prohibits discrimination or harassment on the basis of race, color, religion, religious creed, genetic information, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, national origin, ancestry, veteran, or disability status. The Northeastern University [Title IX policy](#) articulates how the University will respond to reported allegations of sexual harassment involving students, including sexual assault, and provides a consolidated statement of the rights and responsibilities under University policies and Title IX, as amended by the Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act of 2013.³ Please know that Title IX mandates me to report sexual assault if you share your experience with me.

Accessibility needs: Northeastern is fully committed to creating a community characterized by inclusion and diversity. As part of this commitment, it upholds the American with Disabilities Act as Amended of 2008 and the American with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of Rehabilitation Act, referred to collectively as the ADA. The ADA requires Northeastern to provide reasonable accommodations to students with disabilities unless doing so would create an undue hardship, compromise the health and safety of members of the university community, or fundamentally alter the nature of the university's employment mission. Students seeking information regarding ADA accommodations should review the University's ADA Information and Resources Procedure available [here](#).⁴

Academic integrity: The Department of Political Science takes very seriously the issue of academic honesty, and as set forth in Northeastern University's principles on Academic Honesty and Integrity Policy (the complete text can be found at [NEU's Office of Student Conduct and Conflict Resolution](#)).⁵ Any student who appears to violate these principles will fail the course and will be put on academic probation. Individual faculty, with the support of the Department, can impose harsher penalties and as they deem necessary. *Cheating* is one example of academic dishonesty, and which is defined as using or attempting to use unauthorized materials, information, or study aids in any academic exercise. When completing any academic assignment, a student shall rely on his or her own mastery of the subject. Cheating includes *plagiarism*, which is defined as using as one's own the words, ideas, data, code, or other original academic material of another without providing proper citation or attribution. Plagiarism can apply to any assignment, either final or drafted copies, and it can occur either accidentally or deliberately. Claiming that one has "forgotten" to document ideas or material taken from another source does not exempt one from plagiarizing.

FACT (Faculty Advisor Communication Tool): I will be using this tool to alert advisors of any students who are having difficulty meeting the expectations for the course as described in the syllabus. This is intended to help students who may benefit from additional support. A FACT report is not punitive in any way. It does not affect your grade and does not go on your transcript. It only alerts you and your advisor that you might need some additional support. If you think you might need extra help, please talk to me and/or your college advisor.

³ http://www.northeastern.edu/policies/pdfs/Title_IX_Policy.pdf

⁴ <http://www.northeastern.edu/oidi/compliance/americans-disabilities-act-ada/>

⁵ <http://www.northeastern.edu/osccr/academic-integrity-policy/>





Other concerns: Life at college can be very challenging, especially during these difficult times. Students can feel isolated, overwhelmed, lost, anxious, or depressed. Sometimes they experience relationship difficulties and low self-esteem. I care about your success in this course, and I care even more about your success in life. University Health and Counseling Services is staffed by experienced, professional psychologists and counselors, who are attuned to the needs of college students. Their services are free and confidential. Find out more [here](#).⁶ Please let me know if you encounter challenges that impede your progress in the course, so we can find ways to mitigate those.

Class Schedule


It may change, perhaps more than once: make sure you always refer to the latest draft and up-to-date Canvas modules. Keeping up to date with the class schedule and assignments due is your responsibility.

R 1/21	Hello!	Introduction(s)
M 1/25	Populism and Democracy	 Watch: Astra Taylor, <i>What is Democracy?</i> (2018) on Kanopy Read: Jane Mansbridge and Stephen Macedo, "Populism and Democratic Theory" (2019)
I. Speaking		
R 1/28	Truth & Politics	Hannah Arendt, "Truth and Politics" (1967) Vittorio Buffachi, What's the difference between lies and post-truth in politics? (2020) Sign up for your CF by Jan. 31
M 2/1	Truth-Telling	Lida Maxwell, <i>Insurgent Truth: Chelsea Manning and the Politics of Outsider Truth-Telling</i> , preface, chap. 1, chap. 3 (2019)
R 2/4	Linguistic Violence	Lynne Tirrell, "Genocidal Language Games" (2012) NB: ★ Prof. Tirrell will give a virtual talk at Northeastern on Wednesday, February 3 at 5pm. Details to follow. CF should attend and report!
M 2/8	Fake News and Misinformation	★ Guest talk by ETIENNE BROWN (Assistant Professor of Philosophy, San Jose State University) Read: Etienne Brown, TBD

⁶ <https://www.northeastern.edu/uahcs/counseling-services/>

R 2/11		Watch Joshua Oppenheimer, <i>The Act of Killing</i> (2012) and <i>The Look of Silence</i> (2014) No class meeting
R 2/18	Speaking for Others	Linda Martin Alcoff, "The Problem of Speaking for Others" (1991)
II. Getting		
M 2/22	Marxism	Critical Reflection due Karl Marx, <i>Theses on Feuerbach</i> (1845); <i>The German Ideology</i> , selections (1846); Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, <i>Communist Manifesto</i> (1848)  Guy Standing's TEDx Talk, What is the Precariat? (2017)
R 2/25	Justice as Fairness	John Rawls, <i>A Theory of Justice</i> , chap. 1-5, 11 (1971); <i>Justice as Fairness: A Restatement</i> , § 1-4 (2001)
M 3/1	Right-Wing Libertarianism	John Hospers, "What Libertarianism Is" (1974) Robert Nozick, <i>Anarchy, State and Utopia</i> , pp. 149-74, 262-5 (1974) Sign up for your Group Work
R 3/4	Conservatism(s)	Leo Strauss, "On Classical Political Philosophy" (1945) William F. Buckley Jr., " National Review: Our Mission Statement " aka. "Standing Athwart History" (1955) Samuel Francis, " The Paleo Persuasion " (2002) Roger Scruton, "Why I Became a Conservative" (2003) Irving Kristol, "The Neoconservative Persuasion" (2003)
M 3/8		Group Work Workshop: A Philosophical Primer on Today's Pressing Issues. Readings included in your People's Group Work page (groups without readings need to come up with their own bibliography).
III. Being		
R 3/11	Democracy's Future	 PPE talk by MICHELE MOODY-ADAMS (Joseph Straus Professor of Political Philosophy and Legal Theory, Columbia)

		University): “Does Democracy Have A Future?” * PPE talks are open to all: invite your friends!
M 3/15	Democracy and Conflict	Chantal Mouffé, “Deliberative Democracy or Agonistic Pluralism?” (1999)
R 3/18	Intersectional Feminism	bell hooks, <i>Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center</i> , chap. 1 “Black Women: Shaping Feminist Theory” (1984) Kimberlé Crenshaw, “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color” (1991)
M 3/22	Biopolitics	★ Guest talk by TODD MAY (Class of 1941 Memorial Professor of Philosophy, Clemson University) Michel Foucault, <i>Discipline and Punish</i> (pp. 170–206 of <i>Foucault Reader</i> and “Panopticism”)
R 3/25	Necropolitics	Achille Mbembe, “Necropolitics” (2003)
M 3/29		Group Work: Philosophical Primers Watch before class and engage on the discussion forum
IV. Acting		
R 4/1	Revolutionary Violence	Frantz Fanon, <i>The Wretched of the Earth</i> , chap. 1 “On Violence” (1963) Editorial step 1: Pitch due
M 4/5	Nonviolence	Karuna Mantena, “Showdown for Nonviolence” (2018) Malcom X, “The Ballot or the Bullet” (1964)
R 4/8	Black Lives Matter	Juliet Hooker, “Black Lives Matter and the Paradoxes of U.S. Black Politics” (2016)  Listen to Juliet Hooker on BLM protests: Perceptions and Strategy W: Editorial step 2: Pair up with Opponent
M 4/12	Postcolonial Global Justice	★ PPE Talk by KRUSHIL WATENE (Associate Professor of Philosophy, Massey University of New Zealand) Editorial step 3: Post-Opportunity Reflection due

R 4/15		Editorial step 4: Workshop Last day of class!
R 4/22	Editorial step 5:	Upload Final Editorial to Canvas