CONTEMPORARY POLITICAL THOUGHT
POLS 2332 | Spring 2024

W/F 11:45am-1:25pm | Dodge Hall 270

Zabou, "Bang Bang," London UK 2015

Professor: Candice Delmas (she/her)
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Office hours: M 3-4 (online) & F 2-3 (in-person, RP 406)

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Undergraduate TA: Ben Boger (he/him)
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Office hours: T 2-5 & R 2-4 (RP 426 RP)

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. You will explore interrelated questions of justice (how should the goods produced by social cooperation be distributed?), democracy (what is it and what is it for?), identity (how are race, sex, and gender constructed?), and praxis (how can we become free? how to bring about social change?).

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, with a focus on justice and oppression;
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;
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. There is a lot of **collaborative work** in this class: the Socratic Pods and two Group Works (A Constitution for Mars and the Philosophical Primers) make up 35% of the final grade. My students report enjoying these group projects. But group projects inevitably involve logistic challenges (finding a time to meet that works for everyone in the group etc.), so if your schedule is especially full, or if you dislike group work, you should think twice about taking this class. You'll rely on others and others will rely on you: everyone needs to show up and pull their weight.

Your final grade includes 6 components, for a total of 100%:
1. Participation   (10%)
2. Socratic Pods   (15%)
3. A Constitution for Mars   (5%)
4. Critical Reflections   (20%)
5. Philosophical Primers   (15%)
6. Editorial   (35%)
You will be able to access your grades on Canvas Gradebook.

The "**Handbook**" includes detailed instructions on each assignment. Carefully read this document _today_ in order to understand my expectations and your responsibilities and keep referring to it as you prepare for these assignments.

Grade conversion
A ≥ 94   A- = 90–93   B+ = 87–89   B = 83–86   B- = 80–82   C+ = 77–79
C = 73–76   C- = 70–72   D+ = 67–69   D = 63–66   F ≤ 60

★ Teaching Assistants
We are lucky to have two Teaching Assistants this semester: Julia ("Jules") Silveira and Benjamin Boger. Jules is a PhD candidate in Political Science at Northeastern and has already assisted me in teaching this course. Among other responsibilities, they will grade your Critical Reflections. Ben, a candidate for a combined major in Political Science and Philosophy B.A., took this course before. Among other responsibilities, he will grade your Socratic Memos. You are welcome and encouraged to stop by Jules's and Ben's office hours or schedule an appointment with them.

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.

Technology Requirements
I will be teaching this course using Canvas. I recommend bookmarking canvas.northeastern.edu/login for easy access. Prior to taking this course, review the [basic computer specifications](#) for Canvas. You can access Canvas on the go using the Canvas Student app, but not all features work on the mobile app. Essential course should be submitted using your computer and a web browser. Canvas does not support submissions in Pages or Notes. Save and submit your assignments in Word or PDF. As a Northeastern student, you can get Word and Adobe (PDF) for free: in myNEU, go to "Tech Marketplace for Students." Do not submit a Google Doc link either. Submissions in Pages, Notes, or Google Docs will count as null. For technology questions or assistance, contact the IT Service Desk 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, learn about ways to contact ITS Service Desk [here](#).

No electronic devices in class
Research shows that [students perform substantially worse when they use computers to take notes in class](#). The use or display of any mobile computing or communications devices (including computers, recording devices, phones, and even tablets you might only use for reading texts) is strictly banned during class, except when explicitly permitted. Tuck your cell away; do not leave it on your desk or lap.

Per the "Donut Rule," if your phone rings and disrupts class, you are hereby contractually bound to bring donuts to the next class.

Materials
The materials for this course are all available on Canvas. You must **print** the texts and bring them to class (this is indispensable since electronic devices are not allowed). 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 (2-3 hours). Don't hesitate to come to my and the TAs' 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 theory, 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 usually post a set of questions under the day's module. 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.

Communication and email etiquette

Please email us (the TAs and me) directly rather than through Canvas, and always indicate the course number in the email subject (ex: "POLS 2332 question about Critical Reflection #1"). If you have a question, make sure the answer is not in the syllabus or Handbook before emailing me. Write in a polite and professional manner:
  – Start your email with a salutation ("Dear Professor Delmas, Jules, and Ben," is better than "Hi!" at least until we get to know each other). In general, you should call a professor or employer by their title, (Professor, Dr. etc.) unless they ask you to refer to them in another way. Don't call your female professors "Miss" or "Ma'am."
  – Write full sentences and spell properly.
  – If you were absent, do not write me to ask: "Did I miss anything?" If you do, I'll send you this poem by Tom Wayman.
  – If you are writing about a group assignment, always CC your partners, unless you have a good reason not to, and tell me what your group number or topic is (e.g., "POLS 2332 Police Abolition Primer – question about sources" or "POLS 2332 Socratic Pod #3 issue").
  – I am happy to answer brief questions by email, but for substantive questions, please see me in person before or after class, or stop by during my office hours.
  – Sign your full name (because some emails don't display the sender's full name).
  – I observe evening- and weekend-free emails. I will do my best to respond to your queries within 1 business day. If you have not heard from me after 2 business days, please send me another email or come see me in class.
  – Let me say it again: always indicate the course number and issue in the email subject and CC your teammates by default if it concerns a Group Work. Thank you.

Recording
You may not record and share our meetings (whether in person or virtual). 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.

Classroom climate
Our classroom functions as a community of learners, and as such, it's vitally important that it be inclusive and respectful. For this to be the case, we all have a role to play. Learning happens most effectively in classes where mutual respect and a spirit of generosity is expected and maintained. Mutual respect in the classroom means treating all students and the professor with respect. This involves daily attendance with preparation so one can participate in discussions effectively; turning in all assignments and doing so on-time; bringing a seriousness of purpose to your examination of the materials and issues; being an attentive listener when others are speaking (including not doing other things on your computer or phone while others are speaking); being open to new ideas, evidence, arguments, and points of views; and being receptive to constructive feedback. Mutual respect does not mean that you must refrain from expressing disagreement—indeed, disagreement often fuels the best discussion. Rather, it means that the terms of disagreement are centered around the material discussed rather than the individuals discussing them.

Relevant here is a quote from James Baldwin: "We can disagree and still love each other, as long as your disagreement is not rooted in my oppression and denial of my humanity and right to exist." We all bear responsibility for making our classroom inclusive, welcoming, and committed to not perpetuating harmful systems of oppression.

My belief is that racism and other systems of oppression are part of the air that we all breathe, and we are all responsive to our environment. Micro-aggressions are inevitable when we are all breathing poisoned air, and so I ask us all to be accountable, and use these instances as learning opportunities. Essentially, when someone expresses feeling harmed by another person, we will believe them, and address the impact, not the intent, with the assumption that the person who caused harm did so *un*intentionally and can and will learn from the situation. Please feel free to approach me in person, by email or anonymously (via a TA), if there is anything along these lines that we should address.

The course will feature readings and discussions that include descriptions of explicit violence, brutality, offensive language, and indirect references to these things. Feel free to step out of the classroom if you feel uncomfortable with the material or the class discussion. This is particularly important for those who may have direct

experience of forms of violence: please care for yourself first. Don't hesitate to discuss any of these with me.

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 and the class know your preferred pronouns and names. I—we—will honor students' gender identities and gender expressions.

In philosophy and political theory, gender-neutral writing is the accepted practice recommended by the American Philosophical Association (APA). Appropriate language use includes, for example: "humanity," "humankind," "people," or "they." You can also alternate between the feminine and masculine pronouns. You should avoid the term "man" as the universal for "human beings," as it no longer communicates the generic sense of "everyone" or "anyone."

If you are unfamiliar with the idea of gender inclusive language, it may be helpful to read this handout. When quoting writers who utilize non-inclusive language, leave their words in the original ("Man by nature desires to know"). Gender-specific language is, of course, appropriate when referring to a gender class such as "men" or "women."

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. 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](#).

Academic integrity
Please familiarize yourself with [Northeastern's policy on academic integrity](#) and how it will be dealt with: "Academic dishonesty violates the most fundamental values of an intellectual community and undermines the achievements of the entire University." Any incident of academic dishonesty will be referred to the Office of Student Conduct and Conflict Resolution (OSCCR).
The University defines **plagiarism** as using as one's own the words, ideas, data, code, or other original academic material of another without providing proper citation or attribution. 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. The following require citation:
- Word-for-word quotations from a source, including another student's work.
- Paraphrasing (using the ideas of others in your own words).
- Empirical data.
- Unusual or controversial facts not widely recognized.

My policy: if *any part* of your paper contains plagiarism or cheating of any kind and at any level, you will receive a failing grade for that assignment *regardless of the amount plagiarized, intention or circumstances.* This may also result in you failing the course. I will make use of the plagiarism detection services available through Canvas, and your papers will be archived in the Canvas database.
Plagiarism is often the result of poor time management: students do not give themselves enough time to complete the assignment and end up plagiarizing deliberately or accidentally. If you are unclear as to whether or not a source requires citation, please consult the Writing Center or email me. When in doubt, give a citation. You will never be penalized for having too many citations, but you may be guilty of plagiarizing if you don't.

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.

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 at Find@Northeastern and here. As a Northeastern student, you can set up a free Headspace account, a meditation app that can help you learn how to breathe and manage your stress, anxiety, and insomnia (though it does not replace counseling). Please let me know if you encounter challenges that impede your progress in the course, so we can find ways to mitigate those. Note that if anything in your private life is going to interfere with your performance in the class, it is important that you approach me in a timely manner, that is, before, not after, the relevant deadlines. You do not need to share private information with me for us to have this conversation.

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.

W 1/10	Hello!	Introduction(s) Why the state?
F 1/12	Political Authority	Michael Huemer, *The Problem of Political Authority*, chap. 1 (1.1.-1.6, pp. 3-17) (2013) Jason Brennan, When Nonviolence Isn't Enough (2019) Take the Syllabus and Handbook Quiz
W 1/17	Marxism	Karl Marx, *Theses on Feuerbach* (1845) & *The German Ideology*, selections (1846)

		Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Communist Manifesto* (1848) 📺 Guy Standing's TEDx Talk, [What is the Precariat?](#) (2017)
F 1/19	🗣️	*Game: A Constitution for Mars* * No reading. Bring your laptop. Students who arrive late will not be permitted to participate. *
W 1/24	Justice as Fairness	John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, chap. 1-5, 11 (1971); *Justice as Fairness: A Restatement*, § 1-4 (2001) Sign up for your Philosophical Primer
F 1/26	Gender Justice	Susan Moller Okin, *Justice, Gender and the Family*, chap. 5: "Justice as Fairness: For Whom?" (1991)
W 1/31	Libertarianism	Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State and Utopia*, pp. 149-74, 262-5 (1974)
F 2/2	Oppression	Iris Marion Young, "Five Faces of Oppression" (1990)
W 2/7	🗣️	Philosophical Primer Workshop. Readings included in your People's Group Work page
F 2/9		📺 Watch: Astra Taylor, *[What is Democracy?](#)* (2018) * No class meeting * Critical Reflection #1 due
W 2/14	School Abolition	Ivan Illich, *[Deschooling Society](#)*, chap. 2: "Phenomenology of School," chap. 3: "Ritualization of Progress," and chap. 6 "Learning Webs" (1970)

F 2/16	Labor	Elizabeth Anderson, [How Bosses Are Literally Like Dictators](#) (2017) and "Equality and Freedom in the Workplace: Recovering Republican Insights" (2015)
W 2/21	Conservatisms	Leo Strauss, "What is Political Philosophy?" (1957) and "On Classical Political Philosophy" (1945), selections. Additional readings on Canvas re: classical conservatism; new right; paleoconservatism; neocons; and alt-right.
F 2/23		📺 Watch: Jennie Livingston, *Paris is Burning* (1990)
W 2/28	Gender	bell hooks, "Is Paris Burning?" (1992) Judith Butler, "Gender Is Burning" (pp. 381-393) (1993)
F 3/1	Mixed Identities	Gloria Anzaldùa, "La Prieta" (1981)[1] and *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, chap. 5 "How to Tame a Wild Tongue" (1987)
SPRING BREAK		
W 3/13	Nonviolence	Karuna Mantena, "Showdown for Nonviolence" (2018) M. K. Gandhi, *Selected Writings*, "The Practice of Satyagraha or Civil Disobedience" (1922)
F 3/15	Against Nonviolence	⭐ **Guest Talk by VICKY OSTERWEIL** (activist and writer)

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[1] Content Warning: the essay includes the mentioning of racial and sexual slurs.

W 3/20		* No class meeting * 📺 Watch Gillo Pontecorvo, The Battle of Algiers (1966) (120 min.) 🎙 Listen to: History of Philosophy Without Any Gaps Podcast, Politics with Bloodshed: The Black Panthers (2022) (25 min.)
F 3/22	Revolutionary Violence	Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, chap. 1 "On Violence" (1963) Critical Reflection #2 due
W 3/27	📺🎙👥	* No class meeting * Philosophical Primers Watch/listen before class and engage on the virtual discussion forum during class time.
F 3/29	Black Lives Matter	Shatema Threadcraft, "North American Necropolitics and Gender: On #BlackLivesMatter and Black Femicide" (2017)
W 4/3	Linguistic Activism	Michele Moody-Adams, *Making Space for Justice: Social Movements, Collective Imagination, and Political Hope*, chap. 5 "Language Matters" (2022) Editorial step 1: Pitch
F 4/5	Political Prisoners	Huey P. Newton, *Revolutionary Suicide*, "A Manifesto" (1973) Assata Shakur, *Assata: An Autobiography*, chap. 3 (1987)

		Tommie Shelby, "Army of the Wronged: Autobiography, Political Prisoners, and Black Radicalism" (2021)
W 4/10	Animal Rights	⭐ **Guest Talk by NICOLAS DELON (Assistant Professor of Philosophy, College of Charleston)** Readings TBD <mark>Editorial step 2: Argument Outline and Research Notes</mark>
F 4/12	TBD	Students' choice
W 4/17		<mark>Editorial step 3: Workshop</mark>
M 4/22		<mark>Editorial step 4: Upload Final Editorial to Canvas</mark>