

PHIL 6600 Social & Political Philosophy I:

Grounded & Engaged Approaches to Political Theory/ Philosophy

Term: Fall 2022

Instructor: Professor Monique Deveaux (MCKN 356) mdeveaux@uoguelph.ca

Format: Weekly in-person seminar meetings, or online (if required).

When/Where: Thursdays 11:30-2:20 – in MCKN 521

Course Synopsis:

This course examines the shift away from ‘ideal theory’ and towards more grounded and engaged normative approaches to political theory/philosophy. Proponents of these approaches argue that there’s much value in centering people’s lived experiences when we undertake normative theorizing. According to them, determining whether a social practice or state of affairs is unjust, and how to make it more just, is a matter best worked out contextually and in ways that include the voices of those suffering from oppression.

Engaged/grounded normative theory approaches reject both ‘ideal theorizing’ — i.e., the method of devising theories of justice from abstract principles or idealized hypothetical worlds — as well as ‘applied philosophy’ approaches that seek merely to apply ideal ethical principles, norms, or judgements to real-world cases. There’s a wide variety of research methods that we can consider to be grounded or engaged: historically contextual approaches to political problems, interpretive methods in the social sciences, qualitative interviews, ethnographic research, discourse analysis, etc.

We’ll begin the course by reading critiques of ideal theory and theorizing, then move on to philosophical defenses and examples of grounded and engaged approaches to ‘doing’ theory differently. The readings below include ‘realist’ approaches to political philosophy; theorizing that makes central use of empirical research, such as qualitative interviews and ethnographic studies; engaged, participatory, and solidaristic approaches to normative theorizing; Indigenous, grounded/place-based theorizing; and dialogic, democratic, and reciprocity-based approaches to theorizing.

Assignments & Means of Evaluation

Course Assessment

- Oral expression (in-class/video class discussion)*: 15%
- 10 short (200 words) written reflections pieces (due before class)**: 15%
- Oral presentation + written version of presentation (2000 words/5-6 pages, *or else* presentation slides)***: 25%
- Final research paper (7000-8000 words): 45% (due mid-December)

*This component is not just attendance; it is about how well you convey your ideas verbally and engage in discussion with others as a constructive interlocutor. Includes the roundtable at the beginning of class.

**10 one-page (300 words max) response pieces posted to our Courselink Discussion space. These should engage with one (or more) of the readings for that day, and can be informal; they may also be substantially replies to another student’s piece for that day. These will be marked together as a dossier at the end of the course, however, I will give you written feedback on your first one. If you would benefit

from comments on subsequent ones, please ask me. You can submit these for *any* of our classes, even the day of your oral presentation.

***this is an extended critical analysis (*not* summary) of the course readings for that day. Please give this to me no later than two days after your oral presentation.

Course Requirements

You are expected to read the assigned readings (usually about 70 - 100 pages per week) attend class meetings regularly, and participate in class discussion. *Prior* to most (10) classes, you should submit a short, written reflection (200-300 words), in which you reflect critically on some aspect of that day's reading.

There are two longer written assignments for the course: a 2000-word critical essay focused on the course readings you're focusing on in your oral class presentation; and a final paper of 7000-8000 words (essentially the length of a journal-article) due in mid-December. If you miss any readings due to absence, please make sure to catch up, as we will often refer back to material covered in prior classes.

Course objectives

This course will introduce you to a family of approaches to political philosophy/theory known as "grounded and engaged approaches to normative theorizing." More generally, the course aims to develop your analytical and critical reasoning skills; your ability to insights and arguments; and your ability to write cogently and concisely.

Learning outcomes

By the end of the course, you should have a sound overview of grounded and engaged approaches to political theory/philosophy, and understand the strengths and challenges of several of these different approaches and methods. You should also be able to employ one or more of these methods in your own research and writing.

Readings:

This course uses books, book chapters, and journal articles available through our online library catalogue. In a few cases I will supply a PDF of the reading in advance. *Approximately 100-150 pages per week of reading.* If you are sourcing readings for the day you're presenting, just make sure we have access to the reading in digital form.

Schedule of Readings and Topics *(subject to change)*

The readings for the first 7 classes are set, but the readings for the subsequent classes will depend on what students choose for their presentations and want to read/discuss. I have provided a list of suggested readings (starting after the set readings), grouped by theme, but you are also welcome to source and assign readings of your own choosing.

For additional sources, see also resources like <https://engagedtheory.net/resources/>, and for Indigenous political theory, <https://cpsa-acsp.ca/syllabus/> and <https://nycstandswithstandingrock.wordpress.com/standingrocksyllabus/>

Sept. 8 – Conceptual work: ideal vs. non-ideal theory; applied vs. grounded philosophy

- Ingrid Robeyns, "Ideal Theory in Theory and Practice," *Social Theory and Practice* 34, 3: 341-362.

- Jonathan Wolff, “Method in Philosophy and Public Policy: Applied Philosophy Versus Engaged Philosophy.” In *The Routledge Handbook of Ethics and Public Policy*, ed. Annabelle Lever and Andrei Poama. London: Routledge, 2019 (pp. 13-24).

Sept. 15 – no class (Deveaux at conference)

Sept. 22 Critiques (and defenses) of ‘ideal theory’ - part I

- Charles W. Mills, “‘Ideal Theory’ as Ideology,” *Hypatia* 20, 3: 165-84.
- Onora O’Neill, “Abstraction, Idealisation, and Ideology in Ethics,” in O’Neill, *From Principles to Practice: Normativity in Judgement in Ethics and Politics* (2018)” (pp. 55-70)
- Amartya Sen, “What Do We Want from a Theory of Justice?” *Journal of Philosophy* 103, 5 (2006): 215-238.

Sept. 29 - Critiques (and defenses) of ‘ideal theory’ - part II – political realism

- Raymond Geuss, *Philosophy and Real Politics* (2008) – selections: pp. 1-18, 70-76, 90-94, & 95-101.
- Michael Goodhart, *Injustice: Political Theory for the Real World* (2018), Introduction & Ch. 1 (pp. 1-45)
- (tentative) Hwa Young Kim and David Axelsen, “Ideal Theorizing as a Political Weapon” (2022 draft paper, to be distributed)

Oct. 6 – Calls for grounded & engaged philosophy

- Green, Fergus, and Eric Brandstedt, “Engaged Climate Ethics,” *The Journal of Political Philosophy* 29, 4 (2021): 539-563.
- Ackerly, Brooke, Luis Cabrera, Fonna Forman, Genevieve Fuji Johnson, Chris Tenove, and Antje Wiener, “Unearthing Grounded Normative Theory: Practices and Commitments of Empirical Research in Political Theory,” *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy* (2021): 1-27
- James Tully, “Deparochializing Political Theory and Beyond,” ch. 3 in *James Tully: To Think and Act Differently*, ed. Alex Livingston (Routledge, 2022): pp. 41-52
- Rebeccah Nelems, “Other Wise Democracies: What the Tree Canopies Know,” Ch. 9 in *James Tully: To Think and Act Differently*, ed. Alex Livingston (Routledge, 2022): pp. 152-171.

Oct. 13 – Community-engaged, participatory, & solidaristic approaches to theory

- Glen Coulthard & Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, “Grounded Normative/Place-Based Solidarity,” *American Quarterly* 68, 2 (2016): 249-255.
- Genevieve Fuji Johnson and Kerry Porth, “Sex Worker Rights are Human Rights: An Approach to Solidaristic Normative Theory,” *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 2022, *advance online*: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616742.2022.2075424>
- Myisha Cherry, “State Racism, State Violence, and Vulnerable Solidarity,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy and Race* (2017)
- Ethel Tungohan, “Reflections on the Use of Socially Engaged Research in the Social Sciences,” *Politics, Groups, & Identities* 8, 1 (2020): 172-180.

Oct. 20 – Ethnography & political theory: I [this class will be held over Teams/Zoom]

- B. Zacka, B. Ackerly, J. Elster, S. Gutnick Allen, H. Iqtidar, M. Longo and P. Sagar, “Political Theory with an Ethnographic Sensibility,” *Contemporary Political Theory* 20 (2021): 385-418.
- Paul Apostolidis, *The Fight for Time: Migrant Day Laborers and the Politics of Precarity* (2019) – Introduction, Ch. 1, & Ch. 2

Oct. 27 - Ethnography & political theory: II

- Paul Apostolidis, *The Fight for Time: Migrant Day Laborers and the Politics of Precarity* (2019), Ch’s 3, 4, 5, & 6

Student-led discussions (you choose the readings)

Nov. 3

Nov. 10

Nov. 17

Nov. 24

Dec. 1 - *please reserve, in case we need it*)

Suggested other readings by theme (or source your own readings)

Feminist grounded normative theory

- Brooke Ackerly, *Just Responsibility: a Human Rights Theory of Global Justice* (2018)
- Audre Lorde, “The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House” (1979) – in Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (1984) and elsewhere
- María Lugones and Elizabeth Spelman, “Have We Got a Theory for You! Feminist Theory, Cultural Imperialism, and the Demand for the ‘Woman’s Voice’,” *Women’s Studies International Forum* 6, 6 (1983)

Indigenous reflections on theorizing

- Yann Allard-Tremblay and Elaine Coburn, “The Flying Heads of Settler Colonialism; or the Ideological Erasures of Indigenous Peoples in Political Theorizing,” *Political Studies* (2021) advance online - <https://doi-org.subzero.lib.uoguelph.ca/10.1177/00323217211018127>
- Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (2021), Ch. 1 (pp. 21-47).
- Audra Simpson and Andrea Smith, Introduction, *Theorizing Native Studies* (2014)

- Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom through Radical Resistance* (2017) –esp. Ch’s 1, 3 & 4.
- Dale Turner, “Towards a Critical Indigenous Philosophy,” ch. 5 in *This is Not a Peace Pipe* (2006)
- Taiaiake Alfred, “Wasáse: Indigenous Resurgences,” ch. 4 in *Colonialism and its Legacies*, ed. J. Levy (2011)
- Gina Starblanket, “Being Indigenous Feminists: Resurgences against Contemporary Patriarchy,” in *Making Space for Indigenous Feminism, 2nd Ed.*, ed. J. Green (2017).

Grounded theory and racial justice (historical approaches)

- Martin Luther King, “Letter from a Birmingham Jail” (1963)
- Frederick Douglass, *Angela Davis Narrative of the life of Frederick Douglass, an American slave, written by himself* (2010). [incl. Davis’s lectures on liberation]
- Alex Livingston, “Power for the Powerless: Martin Luther King, Jr.’s Late Theory of Civil Disobedience,” *Journal of Politics* 82, 2 (2020): 700-713.
- Angela Davis, *Lectures on liberation* (1970) – lectures 1 and 2
- Juliet Hooker, *Theorizing Race in the Americas: Douglass, Sarmiento, Du Bois, and Vasconcelos* (2017)
- Meena Krishnamurthy, “Martin Luther King on Democratic Propoganda, Shame, and Moral Transformation,” *Political Theory* 50, 2 (2022): 305-336.

Grounded theory and racial justice: (contemporary, social movement-based approaches — the Movement for Black Lives #BLM/M4BL)

- B. Hogan et al., *The Movement for Black Lives: Philosophical Perspectives* (2021)
- (see esp. chapter by Olúfémi O. Táíwò, “Reconsidering Reparations: The Movement for Black Lives and Self-Determination”)
- Deva Woodyly, *Reckoning: Black Lives Matter and the Democratic Necessity of Social Movements* (2021), esp. ch’s 2, 3, & 4
- Michelle Moody-Adams, *Making Space for Justice: Social Movements, Collective Imagination, and Political Hope* (2022)

Grounded responses to colonialism and imperialism

- C.L.R. James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussain L’Ouverture & the San Domingo Revolution* (1989)
- Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952)
- Catherine Lu, *Justice and Reconciliation in World Politics* (2017)

Non-violence and political resistance

- M. K. Gandhi “The Theory and Practice of Passive Resistance,” “The Doctrine of the Sword,” “Satyagraha in South Africa,” “Ages-Old Problem,” “Speech at Brimingham Meeting,” and other essays, in *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* (1999). (various volumes - New Delhi: Government of India).

- Nelson Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom: the Autobiography of Nelson Mandela* (2013 - various editions)
- Judith Butler, *The Force of Nonviolence: an Ethico-Political Bind* (Verso, 2020)