

Dr. Randy LeBlanc
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jleblanc@uttyler.edu

113 CAS
Office Hours: (In-person) 4-5pm M and 1pm-2pm T
(Zoom Only): W 10:30am-12 noon and by appointment.

Graduate Study in Political Theory

Political theory is an approach to political phenomena that asks after the assumptions and causes behind appearances that make up our political life. With an eye toward re-visioning and, where necessary, reforming our collective political lives, *political theory clarifies concepts, identifies and studies the relationships among ideas, and how those ideas and relationships shape the way we think about and do politics*. The Western tradition in political theory concerns itself with questions of human nature, of the proper balance between individual autonomy and community, of the nature of justice, and of the relationship between freedom and responsibility. In this course, using the work of prominent but very different scholars, we will engage the very idea that there is such a tradition, explore its content and how it works, and interrogate the power and consequences of having such a “tradition.” Engaging these perspectives—and they are not the only possible perspectives--will allow us to critically reevaluate the preconceptions upon which our political institutions are built, and, in doing so, fashion for ourselves a working conception of the value and necessity of careful reflection upon ‘politics.’

Because political theory is about ideas and their political manifestations, *the student’s focus, should be on the ideas, their implications, and the many ways they have been and could be used (for good and ill). Like the thinkers we read, our experiences and beliefs are important, but also like these thinkers, those experiences and beliefs are not all there is. A critical analysis in political theory is, quite literally, a method of describing and evaluating an argument by separating that argument into its various parts or elements*. Students will be challenged to do this in both their oral and written work in this course. Therefore, the following are both learning objectives for the course as a whole and they are to be applied to the works and authors we encounter in both your written and oral work in the course.

Brief Course Outline:

The course and our discussion will proceed in four “modules”:

Module 1: Political Theory as Tradition and Practice

Module 2: Butler and Brown—The Theorist and Her World

Module 3: LeBlanc and Morefield—The Theorist, the Theorist, and the Issue

Module 4: Western Theory from Without: Mbembe’s Necropolitics

Course Learning Outcomes

By the end of this course,

- (1) Identify the key elements of the political theorist’s approach through direct engagement with primary texts in political theory.
- (2) Recognize and apply the methods of political theory to key questions of modern political life through reading and reflection, written and oral communication, and both formal and informal modes of interpersonal interaction.
- (3) Identify and be able to practice select norms of the political science profession, including peer evaluation, presentation of work, and the development of a collaborative and scholarly intellectual community.

CANVAS: All written and graded assignments will appear on Canvas. Assignments can be found under the “Syllabus,” “Assignments,” and “Modules” tabs on the Course page. All written and graded work will be submitted via Canvas. Students will also find supplementary handouts and readings on Canvas. All modules, essays, and attendance/participation grades are weighted as part of your final grade.

Texts: *The following texts are required and available at the UT-Tyler Bookstore:*

- Judith Butler, *Precarious Life* (London: Verso Books, 2020)
- Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism’s Stealth Revolution* (Brooklyn: Zone Books, 2015)
- Jeanne Morefield, *Unsettling the World: Edward Said and Political Theory* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2022)
- Achille Mbembe, *Necropolitics*, translated by Steven Corcoran (Duke University Press, 2019)

The following text is required and available as an eBook through the UT-Tyler library:

- John Randolph LeBlanc, *Edward Said on the Prospects of Peace in Palestine and Israel* (New York: Palgrave-MacMillan, 2013)

--All other REQUIRED texts are available on Canvas.

Course Requirements

All grading is done on a 10-point scale: A = 90-100; b = 80-89; C = 70-79... Remember that in graduate courses, a grade of “C” or below is considered a failing grade. The formal requirements of the course and their relative impact on your grade are as follows:

(1) Class Attendance and Participation 10%

Political theory necessarily involves discussion, and, in that vein, discussion involves taking cues from gestures, tone of voice, etc. To serve this end, *we will be meeting weekly in person. To meet attendance and participation requirement, you are expected to attend these class meetings and to participate in our class discussions.* Students will also be assigned readings each week and called upon to set up our class discussions. Bring your understanding of the readings, your questions, your answers, and your insights to our class meetings and be ready to articulate and discuss them.

(2) Modules: Readings and Assignment Worksheets 4 Modules (10%; 15%; 15%; 10%) = 50%

The course is divided into 4 units or modules. You can find the modules under the “Modules” tab on the course’s Canvas page. Each module consists of the occasional video and your assigned readings. Each module is also divided into worksheet assignments. Each assignment contains both specific readings and an *Assignment Worksheet* that must be completed in the week that it is assigned. *These assignments cannot be made up.*

The Assignment Worksheets require you to write *Analytical Summaries* of assigned readings. You will be asked to post a *one 200-word paragraph* (neither more nor less than 200 words) analytical summary *for each* of the assigned readings on Canvas. Your analytical summary paragraphs should (1) identify the main argument(s) of the work, (2) the major points the author is trying to make, and (3) how he or she used those points and examples to make the argument. *Your paragraphs should NOT be a list of answers to the above questions, a set of statements from your notes, or a list of any sort. Rather, it should be a well-conceived and readable description of the work that would communicate its meaning and significance to someone who, while being a professional colleague, has not read the work. NOTE: You are graded by Module and each worksheet makes up a significant percentage of each module grade. Missed worksheets cannot be made up.*

(3) Mid-Semester Essay (15%) and Final Essay (25%) 40%

Students will be asked to write analytical essays on some aspect of the class material using specific works we have read. *These WILL NOT be research papers.* Students are expected to limit themselves to the material we have read and discussed and their own substantial analytical abilities. The Mid-Semester essay will be five pages in length and be due on Canvas Monday, March 4 at 12 noon. *Students will present their papers in class those evenings and the class will discuss them.* The Final Essay will be 6-7

pages in length and will be due on Monday, April 29 at 12 noon. *All essays must be submitted on Canvas as Word documents, 12-point Times New Roman font, double-spaced, etc.* An essay stylesheet is available on Canvas. Students are expected to follow it. In addition, below are some further guidelines for writing your essays:

WARNING: IGNORE THE FOLLOWING PAPER GUIDELINES AT YOUR PERIL:

(1) DO NOT try to avoid addressing the issues by talking about the author's writing style, difficulty, etc. In this class, as in each of your graduate courses in political science, *you are considered a professional willing to work to understand difficult material.* You can always ask the professor for help, too, but do it BEFORE the day you turn in/present your paper.

(2) Write in reasoned, professional terms. Use your best English: there is no excuse for misspellings; make sure all of your sentences have subjects, verbs, and objects; make sure they match in number; do not use contractions; write in paragraphs (change to a new *but related* thought = new paragraph) above all, do not write the way you speak! Write like a professional.

(3) Focus on one or two ideas or issues that are common to all the readings. Do not simply rehearse the argument of the author—in the allotted space, you do not have the time! Your task is to discuss the readings in terms of the one or two most important ideas or issues that you have identified. As a start, consider the issues raised in our discussions in class and where this author/idea fits. *Add your own insights where appropriate. Raise questions and critical issues—do not rant.*

(4) These are NOT research papers. Limit yourself to the text before you. The assignment is designed to get you to read closely, carefully, and analytically. Resist the urge to run to the internet. Force yourself to deal with the text, come to some understanding of the issues raised, and craft your own argument.

SYLLABUS

All assignments may be found on Canvas and may be accessed through either the “Modules” link, the “Assignments” link, or the “Syllabus” link. Work for each module will be turned in on Canvas and is due by the end of the week before the Monday we discuss it in class (Sunday @ 11:59pm). Assignments will be closed after 11:59pm. Students are strongly encouraged to read ahead and to turn in their Worksheet Assignments before the Sunday deadline.

MODULE 1: Political Theory as Tradition and Practice

1.1. Introduction: Political Theory—What, Why, and How?

Jan 21 Su Worksheet Due @ 11:59pm

Jan 22 M Texts: Leslie Paul Thiele, *Thinking Politics*, Chapter 1 (Canvas)
 --bell hooks, “Theory as Liberatory Practice” (Canvas)
 --Sheldon Wolin, *Politics and Vision*, Chapter 1: “Political Philosophy and Philosophy” (Canvas)
 --Hannah Arendt, Interview with Gunter Gaus (youtube)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dVSRJC4KAiE>

MODULE 2: Butler and Brown—The Theorist and Her World

2.1. Judith Butler: Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence

Jan 28 Su Worksheet Due @ 11:59pm

Jan 29 M **Text:** Butler, *Precarious Life*, Preface and Chapters 1 and 2
--Chapter 1: “Explanation and Exoneration or What We Can Hear” (pp. 1-19)
--Chapter 2: “Violence, Mourning and Politics” (pp. 20-49)

2.2. Butler: Precarious Life

Feb 04 Su Worksheet Due @ 11:59pm

Feb 05 M **Texts:** Butler, *Precarious Life*, Chapters 3 and 4
--Chapter 3: “Indefinite Detention” (pp. 50-100)
--Chapter 4: “The Charge of Anti-Semitism: Jews, Israel, and the Risks of Public Critique” (pp. 101-127)

2.3. Wendy Brown: Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism’s Stealth Revolution

Feb 11 Su Worksheet Due @ 11:59pm

Feb 12 M **Texts:** Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, Preface, Chapters 1 and 2 (pp. 9-78)
--Chapter 1: “Undoing Democracy: Neoliberalism’s Remaking of State and Subject” (pp. 17-46)
--Chapter 2: “Foucault’s *Birth of Biopolitics* Lectures: Charting Neoliberal Political Rationality” (pp. 47-78)

2.4. Brown: Undoing the Demos

Feb 18 Su Worksheet Due @ 11:59pm

Feb 19 M **Texts:** Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, Chapters 3 and 4 (pp.79-150)
--Chapter 3: “Revising Foucault: *Homo Politicus* and *Homo Oeconomicus*” (pp. 79-114)
--Chapter 4: “Political Rationality and Governance” (pp. 115-150)

2.5. Brown: Undoing the Demos

Feb 25 Su Worksheet Due @ 11:59 pm

Feb 26 M **Texts:** Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, Chapters 5, 6, and Epilogue (pp.151-222)
--Chapter 5: “Law and Legal Reason” (pp. 151-174)
--Chapter 6: “Educating Human Capital” (pp. 175-200)
--Epilogue: “Losing Bare Democracy and the Inversion of Freedom into Sacrifice” (pp.201-222)

Mar 04 **Mid-semester Essay Due at 12 noon. Student Essay Presentations (12-15 minutes per student) begin 6pm.**

MODULE 3: LeBlanc and Morefield: The Theorist, the Theorist, and the Issue

3.1. *John LeBlanc: Edward Said on the Prospects of Peace in Palestine and Israel (2013)*

Mar 17 Su **Worksheet Due @ 11:59pm**

Mar 18 M **Text:** LeBlanc, *Said on the Prospects of Peace*, Intro, Chapters 1 and 2 (pp. 1-66)
 --Chapter 1: “Democratic Aspirations, Democratic Ambiguities” (pp. 9-40)
 --Chapter 2: “Unsettling Attachments and Unsettled Places” (pp.41-66)

3.2. *LeBlanc: Edward Said on the Prospects of Peace in Palestine and Israel*

Mar 24 Su **Worksheet Due @ 11:59pm**

Mar 25 M **Text:** LeBlanc, *Said on the Prospects of Peace*, Chapters 3, 4, and 5 (pp. 67-146)
 --Chapter 3: “Separation and the ‘Exile as Potentate’” (pp.67-94)
 --Chapter 4: “The ‘Exile as Traveler’: Exodus and Reconciliation” (pp. 95-122)
 --Chapter 5: “Articulating Presence, Narrating Detachment” (pp.123-146)

3.3. *Jeanne Morefield: Unsettling the World: Edward Said and Political Theory*

Mar 31 Su **Worksheet Due @ 11:59pm**

Apr 01 M **Text:** Morefield, *Unsettling the World*, Introduction and Chapters 1-3 (pp. xxiii-86)
 --Chapter 1: “Writing at a Distance: Exile, Critique, and Loss” (pp.1-24)
 --Chapter 2: “A Cluster of Flowing Currents: Theory Unresolved and Groundless” (pp. 25-54)
 --Chapter 3: “Into the Language of Music: The Colonizer and the Colonized Together” (pp.55-86)

3.4. *Morefield: Unsettling the World: Edward Said and Political Theory*

Apr 07 Su **Worksheet Due @ 11:59pm**

Apr 08 M **Text:** Morefield, *Unsettling the World*, Introduction and Chapters 4-6 (pp. 87-207)
 --Chapter 4: “Reading You in Your Presence: Political Interpretation and Worldly Humanism” (pp.93-133)
 --Chapter 5: “The Honeypots of Our Minds: Public Intellectuals in an Imperial World” (pp. 133-164)
 --Chapter 6: “The Treason of the Intellectuals: Reading Said against Liberal Narcissism” (pp.164-205)

MODULE 4: Western Theory from Without: Mbembe's Necropolitics

3.1. *Achille Mbembe: Mbembe's Necropolitical (Dis)Order*

Apr 14 Su Worksheet Due @ 11:59pm

Apr 15 M **Texts:** Achille Mbembe, *Necropolitics*, Intro and Chapters 1-3
--Achille Mbembe, *Necropolitics*, Introduction: "The Ordeal of the World" (pp. 1-8) and Chapter 1: "Exit from Democracy" (pp. 9-41)
--Chapter 2: "The Society of Enmity" (pp. 42-65)
--Chapter 3: "Necropolitics" (pp. 66-92)

3.2. *Mbembe: Fanon's Pharmacy*

Apr 21 Su Worksheet Due @ 11:59pm

Apr 22 M **Text:** Achille Mbembe, *Necropolitics*, Chapters 4-6 and Conclusion
--Chapter 4: "Viscerality" (pp. 93-116)
--Chapter 5: "Fanon's Pharmacy" (pp. 117-155)
--Chapter 6: "The Stifling Noonday" (pp. 156-183)
--Conclusion: "The Ethics of the Passerby" (pp. 184-190)

Apr 29 M **FINAL ESSAY DUE @ 12 noon on Canvas******

IMPORTANT: This syllabus reflects the minimum requirements of our professional relationship over the course of this semester. By staying in this class, you signify that you understand the contents of this syllabus and you agree to the terms and conditions stated herein.