



PHIL 6600 (01) - Social/Political Philosophy:

Grounded & Engaged Approaches to Political Theory and Philosophy

Instructor: Dr. Monique Deveaux mdeveaux@uoguelph.ca

Term: Fall 2023

Class venue: MCKN 132

Office: MCKN 356

Credit Weight: 0.50

Department of Philosophy

Delivery mode: in person (joining via teams/zoom if necessary)

Course Details

Calendar Description

A critical examination of selected works or central problems in the fields of social or political philosophy.

Course Description

This course has an unusual format: it will be taught in collaboration (and in tandem) with a graduate course at Vanderbilt University (in Nashville, Tennessee), with students following a common syllabus. The professor of the Vanderbilt class is Dr. Brooke Ackerly (Vanderbilt University – see her faculty website here: <https://as.vanderbilt.edu/political-science/bio/brooke-ackerly/>), who is a key thinker associated with ‘grounded normative theory’ (GNT). GNT is an approach to doing political theory/political philosophy that centres the lives, perspectives, and struggles of those who are the subject of theoretical reflection. Proponents of GNT draw centrally on empirical research, such as qualitative data (interviews) and ethnography, often generating their own research data.

Our plan is to have our two grad classes, which are scheduled at the same time and using this common syllabus, meet together virtually — with Dr. Ackerly’s class meeting in-person in Nashville, TN and our class meeting in-person on campus in Guelph (participating over zoom can be arranged if needed).

Our 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. Students will develop a final research project (with many options for format) on a topic or issue that is of interest to them.

Timetable

Our first class is on Sept. 13 (2:30-5:20) and our final class is on Nov. 29. We will meet 12 times. The Vanderbilt class will join us for all of these except on Nov 22 (due to US Thanksgiving break).

Location: MCKN 132.

Instructional Support

Instructor: Monique Deveaux

Email: mdeveaux@uoguelph.ca

Office Hours: by appointment

Resources

Most assigned readings are accessible through our library's online catalogue. These can be accessed through our course's e-reserves (Ares) page. Where a reading is not available from our catalog, I will supply a PDF at least a week in advance.

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/>

Course Learning Outcomes

By the end of the course, you should:

- i. have a sound overview of grounded and engaged approaches to political theory/philosophy (relates to assessment component 1: Class preparation and participation)
- ii. understand the strengths and challenges of the different grounded and engaged theory methods (relates to assessment components 1 & 2: class participation/discussion and weekly response papers)
- iii. be able to employ one or more of these methods in your own research and writing (relates to assessment component 3: Final Research Project)

Teaching and Learning Activities

1. Week 1, September 13 - Conceptual work: ideal vs. non-ideal theory; applied vs. grounded philosophy. Assigned readings:
 - a. Ingrid Robeyns, "Ideal Theory in Theory and Practice," *Social Theory and Practice* 34, 3: 341-362.
 - b. 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 (2019), pp. 13-24.
2. Week 2, September 20 - Critiques (and defenses) of 'ideal theory' - part I. Assigned readings:
 - a. Charles W. Mills, "'Ideal Theory' as Ideology," *Hypatia* 20, 3: 165-84.
 - b. 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)
3. Week 3, September 27 - Critiques (and defenses) of 'ideal theory' - part II: *political realism*. Assigned readings:
 - a. Enzo Rossi. 2023. "Fact-Centric Political Theory, Three Ways: Normative Behaviourism, Grounded Normative Theory, and Radical Realism." *Political Studies Review*: 1-8.
 - b. Michael Goodhart, "Realistic prescription", *The Routledge Handbook of Non-Ideal Theory*, edited by Hilkje Hänel and Johanna Müller pp 1-10.
 - c. Michael Goodhart, *Injustice: Political Theory for the Real World* (2018), Introduction & Ch. 1 (pp. 1-45)

Other readings not assigned, but for your enrichment:

- Raymond Geuss, *Philosophy and Real Politics* (2008) – selections: pp. 1-18, 70-76, 90-94, & 95-101.

- Enzo Rossi and Matt Sleat, "Realism in Normative Political Theory," *Philosophy Compass* 9/10 (2014): 689-701

4. Week 4, October 4 - Ways of guiding grounded & engaged philosophy.

Assigned readings:

- a. 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
- 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*, v. 20 (2021): 385-418.

Other readings not assigned, but for your enrichment

- Tully, James. "Political Philosophy as a Critical Activity." *Political Theory* 30, 4 (2002): 533-555.

5. Week 5, October 11 - Solidaristic normative theorizing. Assigned readings:

- a. Genevieve Fuji Johnson and Kerry Porth, "Sex Worker Rights are Human Rights: An Approach to Solidaristic Normative Theory," *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 2023, 25, 1: 101-126 <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616742.2022.2075424>
- b. Brooke Ackerly, *Just Responsibility: A Human Rights Theory of Global Justice* (2021), Prologue, Ch. 1 and Ch. 6.

6. Week 6, October 18 - Grounded Normativity and Participatory & Community-Engaged Research. Assigned readings:

- a. Glen Coulthard & Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, "Grounded Normative/Place-Based Solidarity," *American Quarterly* 68, 2 (2016): 249-255.
- b. Rebeccah Nelems, "Other Wise Democracies: What the Tree Canopies Know," Ch. 9 in *Democratic Multiplicity: Perceiving, Enacting, and Integrating Democratic Diversity*, ed. James Tully et al., (2022): pp. 152-171.
- c. Combahee River Collective, [The Combahee River Collective Statement](#) (1977)

7. Week 7, October 25 - Listening. Assigned readings:

- a. bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*. New York: Routledge (1994) – Introduction (optional) and Ch. 7

- b. Paul Apostolidis, *The Fight for Time: Migrant Day Laborers and the Politics of Precarity* (2019), Ch. 2 & Ch. 3
8. Week 8, November 1 - Grounded Normative Theory (GNT) and the Source of Our Normative Questions. Assigned readings:
- Fergus Green and Eric Brandstedt, "Engaged Climate Ethics," *The Journal of Political Philosophy* 29, 4 (2021): 539-563.
 - Audra Simpson. *Mohawk Interruptus: Political Life across the Borders of Settler States* (2014), chapter 1
9. Week 9, November 8 - GNT and Competing Readings of the Empirical Data: Idle No More. Assigned readings:
- Glen Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition* (2014) – Conclusion ("Lessons from Idle No More: the Future of Indigenous Activism") 151-80.
 - Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom through Radical Resistance* (2017), chapter 12 and conclusion.
10. Week 10, November 15 – Decolonial Thought: Sovereignty and Nation. Assigned readings:
- Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang. 2012. "Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor." *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 1, 1: 1-40.
 - Manuela Lavinias Picq, *Vernacular Sovereignities Indigenous Women Challenging World Politics*. Baltimore, Maryland: Project Muse (2018), chapter 5

Other readings not assigned, but which will enrich your knowledge of the field

- 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)
- Dale Turner, "Towards a Critical Indigenous Philosophy," ch. 5 in *This is Not a Peace Pipe* (2006)
- Taiaike 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).
- Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952)

11. Week 11, November 22 – Using grounded normative theory in your own research
(Vanderbilt group not meeting this week)

Watch the videos on **engagedtheory.net** and think about

1. What is engaged and grounded theory?
2. When might you use it in your own work?

12. Week 12, November 29 – Black and African American Grounded Normative Theory: A Long History. Assigned readings:

- a. Douglass, Frederick. *What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July?* Archives of American Public Address 1852 [cited. Available from <http://dougllassarchives.org/>].
- b. Audre Lorde, “The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House” (1979) – in *Lorde, Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (1984) and elsewhere
- c. Olúfémi O. Táíwò, “Reconsidering Reparations: The Movement for Black Lives and Self-Determination”, in B. Hogan et al., *The Movement for Black Lives: Philosophical Perspectives* (2021)

Assessments

Breakdown of grade

1. Preparation for class (i.e., reading, reflection) and in-class participation: 25%
2. 10 short (around 200 words) written reflections (due by 5 pm on Tuesdays)*: 25%
You may choose which 10 of our 12 classes that you write these reflections for, and a grade is assigned (at the end of the course) to your dossier of papers.
3. Final research project (to be determined in consultation with professors) due Dec. 13 – options include research paper, Wikipedia entry/editing, video project, or community partner-related research project design: 50%

*10 one-page (aim for 200 words - 300-word max) response pieces posted to Courselink. These commentaries should engage with one (or more) of the readings for that day; they can be informal, and can be critical, or more open-ended – posing questions, etc. 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, we will give you written feedback on your first one.

Course requirements

See under ‘assessments’ for particular grade components and assignments. To fully participate in our weekly seminars, you will need to read the assigned readings, attend class meetings regularly,

and participate in class discussion. 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 Policies

Late Policy

Your final research project is due on December 13. If you are not able to complete your project by then, it may be necessary to assign you an INC for your grade (due to the Registrar's deadline for submitting course grades).

Your 10 weekly reflection papers should be submitted (uploaded to Courselink discussion thread) by 5 pm on the day (Tuesday) before class. Papers submitted after that time might not be read by other students or the instructors in time for class. We understand that circumstances occasionally arise that may prevent you from submitting work on time. However, if three or more of your papers are submitted late (but still before class time), a deduction of 20% from your mark on this component of the course will be applied. Papers submitted after class has finished will not receive credit. If you wish to submit a paper for a particular class which you are unable to attend, as a way of connecting with the material that we are covering that day, please let me know in advance, and submit it by the Tues 5 pm deadline.

Use of AI

Use of AI tools such as Chat GPT as a *substitute* for your own reading of texts contravenes the pedagogical and learning goals of the course. Using these tools to write any part of your weekly response papers, or your final research paper, is also prohibited (and will be referred to the Dean for investigation of academic misconduct).

University Standard Statements

Email Communication

As per university regulations, all students are required to check their <uoguelph.ca> e- mail account regularly: e-mail is the official route of communication between the University and its students.

When You Cannot Meet a Course Requirement

When you find yourself unable to meet an in-course requirement because of illness or compassionate reasons, please advise the course instructor (or designated person, such as a teaching assistant) in writing, with your name, id#, and e-mail contact.

Graduate Calendar - Grounds for Academic Consideration

<https://www.uoguelph.ca/registrar/calendars/graduate/current/genreg/index.shtml>

Drop Date

Courses that are one semester long must be dropped by the end of the last day of classes; two-semester courses must be dropped by the last day of classes in the second semester. The

regulations and procedures for course registration are available in their respective Academic Calendars.

Graduate Calendar - Registration Changes

<https://www.uoguelph.ca/registrar/calendars/graduate/current/genreg/genreg-reg-regchg.shtml>

Copies of Out-Of-Class Assignments

Keep paper and/or other reliable back-up copies of all out-of-class assignments: you may be asked to resubmit work at any time.

Accessibility

The University promotes the full participation of students who experience disabilities in their academic programs. To that end, the provision of academic accommodation is a shared responsibility between the University and the student.

When accommodations are needed, the student is required to first register with Student Accessibility Services (SAS). Documentation to substantiate the existence of a disability is required, however, interim accommodations may be possible while that process is underway.

Accommodations are available for both permanent and temporary disabilities. It should be noted that common illnesses such as a cold or the flu do not constitute a disability.

Use of the SAS Exam Centre requires students to make a booking at least 14 days in advance, and no later than November 1 (fall), March 1 (winter) or July 1 (summer).

Similarly, new or changed accommodations for online quizzes, tests and exams must be approved at least a week ahead of time.

More information: www.uoguelph.ca/sas

Academic Misconduct

The University of Guelph is committed to upholding the highest standards of academic integrity and it is the responsibility of all members of the University community – faculty, staff, and students – to be aware of what constitutes academic misconduct and to do as much as possible to prevent academic offences from occurring. University of Guelph students have the responsibility of abiding by the University's policy on academic misconduct regardless of their location of study; faculty, staff and students have the responsibility of supporting an environment that discourages misconduct. Students need to remain aware that instructors have access to and the right to use electronic and other means of detection.

Please note: Whether or not a student intended to commit academic misconduct is not relevant for a finding of guilt. Hurried or careless submission of assignments does not excuse students from responsibility for verifying the academic integrity of their work before submitting it. Students who are in any doubt as to whether an action on their part could be construed as an academic offence should consult with a faculty member or faculty advisor.

Graduate Calendar - Academic Misconduct

<https://www.uoguelph.ca/registrar/calendars/graduate/current/genreg/index.shtml>

Recording of Materials

Presentations which are made in relation to course work—including lectures—cannot be recorded or copied without the permission of the participants, whether the instructor, a classmate or guest lecturer. Material recorded with permission is restricted to use for that course unless further permission is granted.

Resources

The Academic Calendars are the source of information about the University of Guelph's procedures, policies and regulations which apply to undergraduate, graduate and diploma programs.

Disclaimer

Please note that the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic may necessitate a revision of the format of course offerings, changes in classroom protocols, and academic schedules. Any such changes will be announced via Courselink and/or class email.

This includes on-campus scheduling during the semester, mid-terms and final examination schedules. All University-wide decisions will be posted on the COVID-19 website (<https://news.uoguelph.ca/2019-novel-coronavirus-information/>) and circulated by email.

Illness

Medical notes will not normally be required for singular instances of academic consideration, although students may be required to provide supporting documentation for multiple missed assessments or when involving a large part of a course (e.g., final exam or major assignment).

COVID-19 Safety Protocols

For information on current safety protocols, follow these links:

- <https://news.uoguelph.ca/return-to-campus/how-u-of-g-is-preparing-for-your-safe-return/>
- <https://news.uoguelph.ca/return-to-campus/spaces/#ClassroomSpaces>

Please note, that these guidelines may be updated as required in response to evolving University, Public Health or government directives.