Ug-idsem 1227 Theorizing Politics

Gallatin School

office: rm 508

Monday 4-6

Fall 2014/Professor George Shulman

Tuesday 2-5/Thursday by appt

Tuesday 6:20-9:00, Rm 527 Gallatin

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Course Description:

The plan of this course is to read two very different "canonical" political theorists - Machiavelli and Marx- and then a variety of thinkers - from Wittgenstein to Foucault, from James Baldwin to Judith Butler- to think about what "politics" is, and, about what it means to "theorize" such an object. So, our goal is two-fold: to think about politics, and, to think about theorizing this object.

On the one hand, we analyze what politics -as a concept and a practice- has meant in history, means to us now, and could mean:

What distinguishes "politics" from other kinds of human activities? What makes an action or practice "political?" Is it credible to define a conceptual "idea" of "the political" that tells us what politics essentially/always is, in contrast to, say, morality or art as having their own distinctive essence? Or on the contrary, is politics (and so our sense of what is "political") a changing human practice? By reading a variety of theorists, we also explore different "dimensions" of political life: ideas of "rule" and of "the state;" structures of domination (class, race, gender) that have been "politicized"; the forging of group identification (by class, nation, gender, race, sexuality etc); the role of antagonism between different groupings; the role of "culture" in the form of narratives, symbols, and language more broadly; the role of rhetoric and performance, since politics happens through speech-acts meant to persuade audiences; the aspect of appearance and theatricality in politics, since it is enacted or performed on a public stage; and lastly, the changing ideas and practices of "democracy."

On the other hand, by comparing different thinkers, we also explore what it means to "theorize" about politics. Is "political theory" a changing practice? If political theorists use different literary genres and metaphors to represent the world, what difference do these forms make to the "content" of their views? How theorists write, we will see, shapes what they can say.

This is an introductory course; it does not presume background in the canon of political thought, or in the study of politics. My substantive goal is to introduce key thinkers, concepts, and dimensions of both politics and
theorizing as historically changing practices. But my pedagogic goal is to show that "theory" is essential to understand our current circumstances, and my political goal is to recover a capacity for action and the faith -in agency and possibility- on which it depends. Our problem now is not a lack of information, but a lack of frameworks to make politically salient what we already know. The source of widespread inaction is not apathy, a lack of interest, but despair, a lack of faith that one can make a difference. My goal in this course, then, is to show the depth of richness of past forms of theorizing about politics, and to put that theorizing to work, for us, now, to engage our own circumstances.

**Learning Goals:**
* close reading of texts
* writing critical essays that use textual evidence to address themes
* speaking in collaborative and conversational ways about contested topics
* beginning to understand "politics" and the canon of political theory

**Course Requirements**
- attendance is mandatory: we meet only once a week; any unexcused absences will count against your grade
- preparation of assigned texts is presumed
- a 1-page (typed) response to readings each week (questions in syllabus)
- two 5-page essays about course texts (a third essay is optional)
- a final optional project relating course texts to a current event/issue

**Grading:**
- response papers 25%
- participation 25%
- essays 25% x 2 = 50% (improvement in writing also counts)

* plagiarism -using content you do not attribute to its actual source- is punished by an F in the course. If you have ANY questions about what counts as plagiarism (i.e. what resources, passages, or work you should cite) please ask for clarification!

* Policy on electronics: I expect all cell-phones to be turned off and put out of sight and reach. Laptop use is not allowed unless the student has learning difficulties that require it.

* We will take a break half-way through class for 10 minutes.

**Required Texts**
Niccolo Machiavelli, *The Prince and the Discourses* (Modern Library ed. only)
only, Norton
Ludwig Wittgenstein, On Certainty
James Baldwin, The Fire Next Time
xeroxed readings provided by instructor

Sep. 2: Introduction: defining "politics" and "political"

Sep 9 Machiavelli I: Spatial and Temporal dimensions of Politics
#2
read: * Niccolo Machiavelli, The Discourses
      Machiavelli’s preface/introduction
      Book One: preface, chaps 1-7/9-12/16-18/25-26/34-35
      40/47/53/55/58
      Book Two: preface/ chaps 2/10/19/24/29
      Book Three: chaps 1-3/7-9/30-31/35/41-42

write: * For M, what characterizes a "republic" or makes a "free people"?
   * explain M’s idea of "corruption" What criteria indicate it?
   * In what senses is the U.S. republic "corrupt"?
   * Assess M’s idea that a republic can be "re-newed" by "re-turning to first principles." What would this mean for the U.S.?

Sep 16: Machiavelli II:
#3 Political energy and Political Form: Constitutions & Politics

read: * James Madison, Federalist Paper #10
* John McMccormick, "Ferocious Populism"
* Sheldon Wolin, "Norm and Form: Constitutionalizing Democracy"
* Abraham Lincoln, "Lyceum Address"
* Henry Thoreau, "Civil Disobedience"

**optional:** * Hannah Arendt, "Civil Disobedience"

**write:** * How do constitutions protect &/or endanger democratic politics?
  * Do elections hold elites accountable? must "the people" use other means for representation? Is protest productive? Enough?
  * Is Madison’s politics corrupt by Machiavelli’s criteria?
  * On what grounds/by what means do we protest domination/exclusion
  * Compare Lincoln’s appeal to constitutional "origins" (1787) vs Thoreau/Wolin appealing to revolutionary origins (1776)

Sep 23: Machiavelli III: Contingency, context, and political action

#4

**read:** *Machiavelli, The Prince
  * Mary Dietz, "Trapping the Prince"

**write:** * Why is "Fortuna" the goddess of politics?
  * What kind of character do humans need if the world is ruled by Fortuna, not God? (What character is affirmed by each authority?)
  * When political actors understand "the reality of appearances," and take account of how they appear/are perceived, is that being corrupt or acting responsibly?
  * If "the prince" is a metaphor for politics, what does it mean?

Sep 30: Machiavelli IV: Violence, states of exception, & morality in politics

#5

**read:** *Max Weber, "Politics as a Vocation"
  * Hannah Arendt, "Reflections On Violence"

**write:** *Assess Arendt’s distinction between violence and power

  * Analyze violence: is it always wicked, but sometimes necessary - when? Is it always wicked AND impractical/counter-productive?

first paper due Monday October 6 by NOON

Oct 7: Marx’s theory of alienation I: beyond liberalism

#6

**read:** * Robt Darnton, "What Was Revolutionary about the Fr Revolution?" * Karl Marx, Tucker Reader, "Letter To Ruge" (use xerox)
  * Marx, Tucker Reader, "Contribution to the Critique" (use xerox)
  * Marx, Tucker Reader, "On the Jewish
Question" (25-52)

write: * Assess Darnton &/or Marx on what the French Revolution means and accomplishes
* Assess M’s idea that humans "alienate" power to gods & states
* What is Marx’s critique of "the democratic state" in the US?
* How would Marx critique Madison and how would Madison respond?

Oct 14 Marx’s Theory of alienation II –from state to society & labor
class cancelled for Fall Break
BUT – do the reading and hand in response paper on thurs:

read: * Marx, Tucker Reader, "Eco & Philo Manuscript" (70-93/101-105)
* Marx, Tucker Reader, "Alienation and social Class" (133-136)

write: * What is "alienation"? Where do you see it? Why does it happen? Is it a credible/appealing/useful concept?
* what does it mean to say the problem in capitalism is not so much "exploitation" as "alienation" of labor?
* Assess Marx’s idea of “Man” –what defines the "human" essence?

Oct 21 Marx’s historical materialism I
#7
read: * Marx, Tucker Reader,"Theses on Feuerbach" & "German Ideology" (143-75/189-200)
* Marx, Tucker Reader, "The Coming Upheaval," (218-19)
* Marx, Tucker Reader, Intro to Critique of Political Economy"
* Marx, Tucker Reader, Preface & Afterward to Capital (294-302)
* Raymond Williams, Marxism & Literature, "base & superstructure"

write: * Why does M reject his ideas of species being & alienation?
* Assess M’s claim that the organization of "production" is a "material condition" that "determines" culture & politics.
* Assess M’s idea that society is shaped and driven by central divisions (of labor) and thus by certain conflicts in politics
* Assess a teleological story, proceeding in stages toward its "end" (as both goal and culmination.)

Oct 28 Historical Materialism as a theory of politics
#8
  * Marx, Tucker Reader, "Political Writings" (501-524)
  * Sam Gindin, "Unmaking Global capitalism"
  * Wendy Brown, "Neo-Liberalism and the End of Liberal Democracy"
  * Kathy Weeks, "The Problem with Work"

write: * How does M praise -& require- capitalism? Why?
  * How does M imagine/foster group (class) identification?
  * Assess M’s view that antagonism is crucial in politics.
  * Does world-wide "globalization" of capitalism vindicate Marx?
  * In what ways do Brown, Gindin &/or Weeks update/abandon Marx?

Second paper due Monday November 3 by 10am
Nov 4 The cultural turn I: from ideology to language & narrative

#9
read: * Ludwig Wittgenstein, "On Certainty" (entire)
  * William Adams, "Narrative Imagination"
  * Alisdair McIntyre, "Epistemological Crisis & Dramatic Narrative"

write:
* What is "language" for Wittgenstein? What is "culture"? Do his views change your sense of the real or true? What would W say to Marx, and how would Marx respond to W?
* What is narrative? why does it matter in human life & politics?
* What is the relationship between narrative and power?
* Compare MacIntyre and Marx on the idea of crisis

Nov 11 the cultural turn II: to the subject, discourse and practices

#10
read: * Michel Foucault, "Two Lectures on Power" (read only p92-108)
  * Michel Foucault, "Truth and Power" (p.119-133)
  * Michel Foucault, "the Subject and power" (326-47)
  * Michel Foucault, "Society Must be Defended"
  * William Connolly, commentary on Foucault

write:
* How does F define power? How does he change the received view?
* How does F relate "knowledge" to "power"?
  * How is "discourse" different than "ideology"?
* Why depict "the subject," not "the
individual" or "the self
* what is "bio-power" & "bio-politics"? How do these ideas matter?
* What is the task of "theory" for Foucault?
* How does F redefine politics compared to Machiavelli &/or Marx?

Nov 18 Race and Rhetoric
#11
read: * James Baldwin, The Fire Next Time
  * Loic Waquant, "From Slavery to Mass Incarceration"
  * Crenshaw & Peller, "Reel Time/Real Justice"
  * Frederick Douglass, "What is July 4th to the Negro?"
  * James Baldwin, interview
write:
  * How does Baldwin define/understand/explain "race"? How and why is "whiteness" produced? How is "blackness" defined? By whom?
  * Assess Waquant’s account of racialized forms of inequality.
  * Assess Crenshaw’s claim that the meaning of facts is not self-evident but depends on the "background narratives" we use. What is the problem with the dominant (liberal) narrative?
  * Use Waquant/Crenshaw to assess what the civil rights movement did/did not accomplish. In what senses is there (no) progress?
  * By what rhetoric could critics of racial inequality persuade whites to change institutions and redistribute resources?
  * Compare the rhetorical approaches of Douglass & Baldwin to addressing disfranchised whites.

Nov 26
#12 (Gender) Politics and Freedom I

Read: * Adrienne Rich, "Compulsory Heterosexuality"
  * Gayle Rubin, "The Traffic in Women"
  * Judith Butler, "Imitation and Gender Insubordination"
write:
  * In what ways is "heterosexuality" a "political institution"?
  * Is Rubin right that feminists need psychoanalytic theory? Why?
  * How is gender a performative practice?
  * Characterize the difference between Rich and Butler

Dec 3 (Gender) Politics and Freedom II
#13
read: * Linda Zerilli, "We know not what we do"
  * Hannah Arendt, "What is Freedom?"
write: * How does Zerilli use Wittgenstein to criticize
Butler?
* Can Z’s view of sex difference also clarify race?
* Assess Z’s view of the role of theory in politics.
* Depict and assess Arendt’s view of freedom

Dec 10
#14
read:
* Susan Griffin, "The Way of Ideology"
* William Connolly, "An Ecology of Late Capitalism"

final papers/optional papers due Friday Dec 13 by noon

politics is
----noun naming an activity - what activities are called politics?
----Adjectival/adverbial:
    being "political" means?/making x "political"
    means doing what?

why is politics necessary?
    Plurality and heterogeneity mean people are not harmonious
    We need "politics" to create order and mediate conflict?
    Contingency/uncertainty mean we cannot simply repeat rituals; politics involves collective ways of adapting to (and making) change?
    justice not self-evident - how do we come to agreements?
    community is not automatic - how is a "we" ever created or sustained?
    Authority is never secure or total -

How/why is politics valuable?
    How we learn to live with uncertainty/contingency & moral ambiguity?
    How we learn difference, and taking others into account?
    By participating in politics we develop a capacity for justice?
    How we learn to "act in concert"?
    Politics is the alternative to violence?
    By participating in politics we RISK who we were and risk CHANGE?

sites of politics ----
citizen/state/nation
    Civil society, subject positions, Institusions
    (family, workplace, gender, economy)
politics occurs on a social landscape that establishes inequalities
politics occurs on a stage involving performances and
ways of "escaping" from politics
through ideas of Reason or by ideas of divine revelation
by absolutes, truths, gods, authority, priests, philosophers, experts
by worshiping procedures and law
by relying on violence or coercion rather than persuasion?
by dreams of consensus, agreement, unity, harmony

Dimensions of politics
"politics" is driven by INTERESTS/by "rational interest"
politics is maximizing "utility" - "self-interest" as means/ends
"politics" is driven by unconscious MOTIVES:
anxiety/fantasy/projection
"politics" is driven by intentions, principles, ideals

Politics involves collective identification (the creation of a "we")

Politics means "power" as (a) a form of rule (coercive power over) And (b) as "power to," the generative capacity created by solidarity

Politics involves narrative - how is temporality conceived/narrated?
who narrates? what story is dominant/excluded/included? How is the past defined and related to present? How are ideals/expectations defined?

Politics involves rhetoric/persuasion
Politics involves performance - necessarily? In good ways? In bad ways?

This class pursues a cluster of questions about politics:

I-Mapping the concept:

A. What is "politics?" A specific activity involving "government" and thus state power? Activities engaging collective life and destiny, involving claims to commonality or common interests, as well as large-scale group action? Any exercise of power or any situation involving power? A way of doing (or thinking about) ANY activity regardless of its location or context? What do we mean that someone is "being political?" What does it mean
to say that a practice or issue has been "politicized?"
What do we mean that there is a "politics" in or of the
family, culture, or science?

B. The word "political" - (1) what is going on when we
say that virtually everything is "political?" If
everything is, is the concept no longer useful? (2) Some
theorists try to identify the "properly political," that
is, not so much what people CALL politics (earmarks, pork-
barrel bargaining, smoke-filled rooms, electioneering) but
what is "really" political - the essence, the real truth,
the truly genuine act. (Like we might say with "love" -
that is not really love, we might say, but this is...) Theorists try to identify the distinctive about a
political as opposed to a moral, erotic, aesthetic,
military, literary activity. Something like seeking the
"essence," almost in the sense of a platonic form (what is
the "chairness" that enables us to say this is and that is
not a "chair"). As you read, keep asking, what
distinguishes "the political" from what we CALL
"politics."

C. The history of the practice and of the concept, e.g.
from the Greek polis, where "politics" was first
identified as a special kind of activity, to the French
Revolution, which re-introduced the idea of "the people"
ruling themselves, to more recent arguments about class
and the workplace, or family, gender, and sexuality, or
"identity politics." Where is "politics" located? Where is
this activity taking place? Who is involved in it?
(Formally enfranchised citizens voting in elections?
Anyone is any sort of institution or association?) So as
you read along, ask: how have practices and conceptions of
politics changed

II-Why are so many Americans avowedly hostile to
"politics?"

A. the moral dimension: are we hostile to "politics"
because of what once was called "sin" -because power and
willful partiality are involved? Because there are always
winners and losers? Because those who wield power are at
risk morally, since actions always turn out differently
than we intend, and often have troubling consequences? But
on the other hand: Might power be necessary, even valuable
-needed to do anything good or worthwhile? And if we seek
purity by remaining passive or disengaged, do we still
put ourselves at moral risk? How are principles and power
related, then? (When is compromise corrupt, and when
morally necessary, even noble? When is moral intransigence
- immoral?) What are our obligations to others in regard
to collective things?

B. the systemic dimension: Are people hostile to or
disengaged because of the structure of the political
system itself, which encourages individualism and
withdrawal? Whose interests are served by our apathy or
antipathy? Are we absent or hostile because politics is
corrupt, not so much in a "moral" sense as because,
systemically, private interests and corporate power rule, politicians are bought, representation is a sham, debate is non-existent, and ordinary people cannot make a difference? To see or say this "cynicism," or insight? What follows from it?

III. The fundamental dimensions of "politics"

Why is there politics in human life? Partly because each person is radically incomplete (without self-sufficiency) and it is only by creating communities that we can fulfill and develop ourselves, meet our needs, survive at all let alone flourish. But politics is also necessary because, on the other hand, common interest or justice is not self-evident. We may need each other, but we are PLURAL — we have different ideas of how to live and what is to be done, different views of what constitutes justice. But mutual need, plurality, and disagreement do not suffice to characterize political life.

A. Power - how do human beings generate and exercise power, the capacity to shape the world and themselves? How do we create power? How do we decide the goals or purposes or objects on behalf of which to exercise it? How do we justify power? How do we control (whose) power? The word "power" speaks to the facts of hierarchy and inequality in all human social relations, but it also speaks to human capacities to (re)make history and (re)shape their world. Without power there is no life, no benefit, no culture, but power makes life dangerous, too. (What does democracy mean in regard to power?)

B. Language, Persuasion, and Justice: politics arises because we live in LANGUAGE, and pursue our ends only THROUGH language. We often dismiss language as "unreal" compared to interests and passions we consider really real, but human beings create reality through stories, symbols, which exercise material power in our life. In politics, no end can be achieved without language that generates legitimacy, and no leader, social movement, regime, or nation is able to create power, to become powerful, to achieve its ends, unless it ALSO generates widespread support -through rhetorics that PERSUADE people to assent, by appealing to principles and by offering REAL benefits. But language can deceive and consent can be "manufactured." When is language or political speech "corrupt"? (When does political "poetry" -the language of high principle and noble ideals- obscure worldly interests or advance a hidden agenda? When are noble ideals essential to meeting worldly necessities?)

C. Identification: politics appears because human beings are always defining -struggling with each other over definitions of- belonging and membership and identity. With whom do I belong? Who is the WE with whom we include ourselves? Am I to "identify" by gender, ethnic/racial origin, class position, national attachment, party affiliation? What difference in my life follows from
one or another identification? These identifications are not natural, but "political," that is, created, public, power-laden, exclusionary, and open to change or redefinition. Are some identifications inherently pernicious? Should we work to abolish them? Or is the idea to pluralize them? How should we mediate conflicting identifications that bring people into conflict? Is there some way to opt out and say: I am "just" an individual?

D. Motivation: what "drives" people to act? How do people define their "interests" (and the "self" that has such interests)? Is our understanding of our interest every as rational as we believe it is? How are understandings of interest engendered by culture and media? On the other hand, do we also need to consider unconscious motivations, wishes, fantasies, disclaimed aggression, etc, "drives" working as it were behind our backs, shaping how we define our interest? Are we ever to credit what people say about their motivations? But what then is the relationship between interests and professions of principle? Are we to "unmask" principle to expose the "real" interest motivating action? Is there a relationship? If politics "reflects" interest, anxiety, fantasy, and principles, can it also mean CHANGING how we define/understand these?

E. Public life and Action: Politics arises because human beings must decide what is to be done, and politics appears not only in our deliberation - in language- but in its outcome -the deed, the act- though speaking to others is itself a deed, a kind of action. What difference does it make that people speak and act in public -in meetings, rallies, associations, etc- always in the presence of others? What counts as a public event or deed? What is "action" and what counts as acting? (Why are theatrical metaphors so useful for thinking about politics -and about our antipathy to politicians who are "false" because they are "merely acting?")

IV-Democracy:

What is democracy? (Demos -the many- cracy -rule vs. aristoi (the few) cracy - rule or an-archy as non-rule) Is democracy a form of government? A form of political life independent of and in many ways hostile to the state -i.e. as direct participation in social movements, counter-cultures or a parallel polis? Is the only "real" democracy a "direct," that is, personal involvement in governance and the exercise of power? Does representative government warrant the name democracy? Or, does democracy name a culture, a way of life not confined to government or elections? Or is democracy about the private rights of individuals to live (-consume, work, worship, raise children) as they wish? Then is democracy not about common or political life at all, but the guarantor of private individualism?

V-Citizenship and Nation-states:
How are we to assess the meaning of nationalism and the power of the nation-state? Has national identification and patriotism ever NOT been pernicious? Should people now identify as trans-national citizens of the world, oriented locally and globally but not nationally? Or is a politics oriented by nations necessary in a globalized world?

I have given you, O Adam, no fixed abode, and no visage of your own, nor any special gift, in order that whatever place or aspect or talents you yourself will have desired, you may have and possess them wholly in accord with your desire and your own decision. Other species are confined to a prescribed nature, under laws of my making. No limits have been imposed you however; you determine your nature by your own free will, in the hands of which I have placed you. I have placed you at the world's very center, that you may better behold from this point whatever is in the world. And I have made you neither celestial nor terrestrial, neither mortal nor immortal, so that, like a free and able sculptor and painter of yourself, you may mold yourself wholly in the form of your choice.

---Pico della Mirandolla

"I have become useless to myself, to my relatives and to my friends because such as been the decision of my sad fate. And I can say nothing better than that there has been left me no other good than health for myself and my family. I continue to wait in order to be in time to take good fortune when she comes, and if she does not come, to have patience."

"On the coming of evening, I return to my house and enter my study; and at the door I take off the days clothing covered dust and mud, and put on garments regal and courtly, and reclad appropriately, I enter the ancient courts of ancient men, where, received by them with affection, I feed on that food which only is mine and which I was born for, where I am not ashamed to speak with them and to ask them the reason for their actions; and they in their kindness answer me; and for four hours of time I do not feel boredom, I forget every trouble, I do not dread poverty, I am not frightened by death. entirely I give myself over to them."

"I believe...as Boccaccio said, that it is better to act and repent than not to act and repent." ----Machiavelli

"I love my city more than my soul." ---Machiavelli
"Although martial severity, self-discipline and danger have been the conspicuous characteristics of my life, its primary prerequisite and basis has been freedom, a necessity completely irreconcilable with any kind of commitment to a grossly factual situation. Accordingly, if I lived like a soldier it would have been a silly misapprehension to believe that I should therefore have lived as a soldier; yes, if it is permissible to describe and define intellectually an emotional treasure as noble as freedom, then it may be said that live like a soldier but not as a soldier, figuratively but not literally, to be allowed in short to live symbolically, spells true freedom."

-Thomas Mann

Context for thinking about Machiavelli

1. Remember the time he wrote as a time of such violence and chaos - and what might be justified in THAT context, when such violence makes ANY means seem justified if it creates stability and security.

2. Imagine that he seeks, most of all, to create ANY stable structure, BUT also, ideally, a republic. Actions that seem necessary to FOUND a republic are NOT necessary in a healthy republic, except in moments of crisis. (War, as with Lincoln and southern secession, say, but there remains the issue of deception.) He addresses limit conditions and "states of exception" - times of founding and crisis, more than he addresses "normal" or "healthy" politics.

4. He really believes that single great leaders are necessary for great changes in the world, but as a republican, he also is deeply ambivalent about such leaders. That is why the longest chapter in the prince is the chapter on conspiracy. The founder of the new republic will have to be killed by republican plotters unless he creates republican institutions and steps aside.

5. There is moral ambiguity in Machiavelli, therefore: princes may need to do evil things for good ends, and the people, also, may need to use violence to gain their liberty. This is the meaning of his contrast between "fighting like BEASTS" (like a "lion" and a "fox") and "fighting like MEN" - The goal is establishing a framework in which people can "fight like men," i.e. "by law" - within a constitutional framework, even as that framework itself can be changed (as it was in Rome.) Force and Fraud MAY be necessary to establish that framework, but are NOT prevalent once it is established, if the polity is healthy. Think of Mandela and the ANC in South Africa, whose political struggle to (re)found a non-racial state
involved lion and fox but enabled another kind of politics afterwards. Still, there remains an inescapable element of the "beastly" even in a healthy polity — as when the people RIOT to gain redress of grievances, or conspire to deceive their enemies. WHEN is force or fraud necessary — and who decides? Or should we reject the very idea of states of exception to normal 'moral' rules?

6. Imagine that Machiavelli is trying to teach us ABOUT politics — especially about aspects of politics we find ugly or abhorrent — AND imagine that his lessons are warped by his machismo, which was rife in Florentine culture. His idea of politics is inextricably linked and tainted by his conception of masculinity or manliness, compared to "effeminacy" as corruption.

What is Machiavelli trying to teach about politics?

Study Questions: Machiavelli, The Discourses
- He claims to create a "new route." What is it???
- He claims to recover the example of the roman republic — why?
- He celebrates the founders of religions and states. Why?
- Romulus killed Remus: if the act accuses, the result excuses — what redeems fratricide? What redeems founding violence?
- He says republics require a religious framework of faith. Why?
- How is a founding law or constitution, and a founding faith, the BASIS of liberty? Does freedom require a framework of law and belief? Why? Or —do founders ("founding fathers") create an edifice that imprisons their children, the second and third generations? How can they exercise their freedom?
- What is corruption? Machiavelli uses the word all the time, but what does he mean? When is a republic "corrupt?" What has happened to the citizens? Does it denote a moral condition? Psychological? Political?
- The way to address "corruption," he argues, is a "return to first principles" by which citizens also "return to themselves." What does "return" mean?
- Use his story of founding, corruption & renewal to theorize American politics

Study Questions, Machiavelli, The Prince:
- There seems to be a profound contradiction between the Prince and the Discourses — the Discourses celebrates Roman virtue, the Prince counsels fraud and force. But are they so different? What is the relationship? Are BOTH teaching important lessons about politics?
- What is Machiavelli’s purpose in The Prince? (Is it to instruct princes — or to warn the people?) What does he
mean by describing himself as a landscape painter who sees both heights and valleys? (Where are we?)
- does it confirm or change your view of what politics is or must be?
- what does he teach about generating and keeping power?
- Why must a Prince "learn to be bad?" What does he mean?
What does he teach about force (the lion) and fraud (the fox)? Are deception and violence necessary in politics?
When? Why? How does fighting "like a man" (by law) relate to fighting like a beast, by force and fraud? Is there a purpose that "redeems" the evil he does? Could fighting like beasts be necessary to establish or protect the laws that enable people to fight like men? Or, are both ways of fighting always necessary?
- He says "I love my city more than my soul." He loves his city MORE - not rather than - his soul. Does this claim illuminate his text?

- What does it mean that the prince is oriented by Fortuna and not (only?) God? Why is Fortuna the goddess of politics?

- Imagine the prince as a leader - a Moses, Pericles, or Lincoln, Bobby Kennedy, Clinton, Mandela, Bush, Obama: does your view of the text change? Was Martin Luther King a prince?
- Imagine that "princes" must situate themselves in the relationship of "the nobles" and "the people" (of the few who want to dominate and the many who wish not to be ruled)

- Rousseau says that Machiavelli wrote the prince for (to warn) the people

I. The landscape of power.
You are situated in a landscape of power - princes, people, and nobles. Assume inequality of power between elites and people, also assume that different princes try to organize the people in different ways - Nixon v McGovern in 72 Jesse Jackson v Mondale in 84, or Kerry v Bush in 2004. Imagine the state as the SITE and object of such conflicts - who controls it, uses it, FOR whom. Do the nobles use the state to exploit the people, or do the people use the state to defend themselves against the nobles. Imagine that "the nobles" and "the people" are themselves divided, not a unit automatically, but a political creation, created and sustained by ideas and leaders. No one is OUTSIDE the landscape of power.

What is the landscape of power in the U.S. now?
Where & WHO are YOU? WHO are you WITH?

II. The theatre of appearances:
How you appear to others is a material fact, a material force; how you appear - what you say and do, also your MANNER - is a powerful reality. To be a responsible
(or a good) actor, you must reckon on the consequences of how you appear; you are responsible not only for your intentions, but for the effects on others of what you say and do. (I am aware of this as a parent and teacher - I try to act with the impact of my appearance in mind: how I appear is often different than how I feel, and in teaching especially, I will say what I do NOT believe for the sake of helping a discussion. I PERFORM because I enact a role; there is a difference between my public face and my private reality.) What makes a "good" or a "bad" performance? This is not a MORAL distinction, but a distinction referring to what Machiavelli calls VIRTU, which means not virtue, but virtuosity. If I reckon on the consequences of my appearance, then I SHAPE them to have the effect I seek - is this to "manipulate" appearances or/and to take responsibility for the effects of my actions? To shape one’s appearances - is this corruption &/or responsibility?

We are inclined to condemn this awareness of the reality of appearances, we are inclined to say - this is IMMORAL, because there is a GAP between who you "really" are and how you act or appear or what you say. But this gap needs to be looked at, and our moral judgments of "actors" needs to be judged, too. Do you imagine that - in the realm of intimate relations - we are supposed to be completely transparent with our friends, lovers, family? But are you wholly transparent or honest with a friend or lover? Are there things you hold back or hide? Little deceptions? Why? - to avoid unnecessary hurt to them? To protect yourself? Because they will not understand what you wish to tell them, not yet at least, maybe later? Have you ever engaged in the act of seduction? Does the other KNOW he or she is being seduced? Why do it? Even in intimate relations, then, there is a "gap" between your inside and your appearance, a degree of artifice or performing? Is the issue how to be a "good" parent, teacher, leader, citizen, lover? Does good mean moral goodness, the same at every instant? Does it mean always being "true" to oneself, whatever that means? Or does it mean virtuosity at a task or role?

In POLITICS, when people are often adversaries and there is NOT a lot of trust, deception may be even more present and necessary. Deception not in a "corrupt" sense, but in the everyday ordinary sense of seducing another, of not saying everything, of withholding some things for the sake of other things which are more important. BUT there are kinds of withholding and degrees of deception, no? Think of (a) CIVILITY, which depends on not expressing how you feel, but showing politeness instead, especially with adversaries; (b) politicians "hiding" their sex life; (c) politicians seeking support from constituencies by downplaying certain of their positions. Or, if you are an atheist in a religious country, should you proclaim it or soft-pedal it? Is it worth being marginalized? (d) Nixon hiding the fact that he was subverting the democratic process (- although these deceptions were so compounded
that they could not last).
When are political relationships enabled by ordinary
degrees of civility and when are they corrupted by
systematic lying? When is deception a CRIME threatening
the republic, and when a NECESSARY part of politics? When
are WE being MORALISTIC about "lying," and SCAPEGOATING
"politicians" for degrees of deception we know in our own
lives? What should we make of our wish for complete
transparency and authenticity at all times? Is this a wish
for PURITY that is nowhere possible -and often
destructive- in life? I am trying to suggest the
difference between using POLITICAL and MORAL criteria to
judge political action. Can we attack political
corruption without being moralistic about LIFE!?

Still, what happens when citizens become the passive
(duped) audience of a prince -then politics has become
"theatricalized" in a bad way? Are we now a cynical
audience, who enjoy (and analyze) the artfulness of a
performance or technique even at our own expense? But more
broadly, if we see politicians as actors, what is the
script? Who writes it? Can the script be changed? How?

Machiavelli thus teaches about the REALITY of
APPEARANCES, how much appearances matter, but he also
EXPOSES the spectacle by which leaders deceive people.
What, then, follows from recognizing the INESCAPABLE
power of appearances? Is there a difference between
"corruption," and "good theater" or a "good performance"?
(A good political performance must (a) show its seams, its
artifice? (b) empower and inspire people, who may begin as
an audience but are inspired to become actors themselves,
authors of their own destiny?

III. Moralism and Fortuna

Americans are moralistic, we make absolute
distinctions between good and evil. We do not like moral
ambiguity, we think in terms of black and white in more
senses than one. Machiavelli appears IMMORAL or AMORAL to
us because he sees that good can come from evil deeds, and
that evil can come from good intentions. He does not
believe that good intentions are all that count in life,
and he believes we are responsible for consequences that
follow from our speech and action. The terrifying thing is
that, since Fortuna governs the world, we cannot guarantee
that good will come from our good intentions. We may SAY
God is on our side, and then we assume that we are the
side of goodness, and never face the truth, which is that
any time we act we are at moral risk, because evil may
come from what we do, despite our best intentions. To take
responsibility for our own complicity in evil, whether by
intention or not, is to gain moral maturity. We tend to
think that you are either innocent (good) or corrupt, but
for Machiavelli, moral maturity requires GETTING OVER
innocence, seeing innocence (our need for innocence) as
itself immoral.
Choose ONE question/identify it on your paper/double-space/

1. "Of all men who have been eulogized, those deserve it most who have been the authors and founders of religion; next come such as have established republics or kingdoms." Why/how is the idea of "the founder" so crucial to Machiavelli? Is it a myth? A wish (if there were such people, then ...)? A metaphor for what humans must do? Does he use the myth or become its captive?

2. "There is nothing more difficult to carry out, nor more doubtful of success, nor more dangerous to handle than to initiate a new order of things." Discuss Machiavelli’s idea of innovation: why is it so difficult? Yet why then talk so much of renewal and "return to first principles"?

3. Discuss the concept of Fortuna: Why is Fortuna the goddess of politics? How is a universe ruled by a providential god, or by Fortuna, different? To live in relation to Fortuna is to develop what kind of character? How does it matter that Fortuna is a woman?

4. "Machiavelli portrays a shifting, kaleidoscopic world in which nothing is fixed or certain, no one can be trusted, and things are not what they seem. Appearance is more effectual than reality, and deceit is the best weapon." Discuss change, appearance, and deceit (and their counterparts, stability, reality, and trust) in the world he portrays. What distinguishes "political" knowledge from other forms of knowledge like science or philosophy?

5. For Machiavelli, politics occurs in a theater of appearances, performance and persuasion. Leaders mold appearances (their words, manner, and deeds) to gain allegiance and inspire action BECAUSE political power depends on belief and loyalty. But what criteria distinguish good and bad performances, good and bad leaders? What do his theatrical metaphors teach about politics?

6. "Because power is inescapable in life, the question is how to generate it and for what ends to exercise it. For Machiavelli, paradoxically, power is lasting only if it is legitimate." Discuss Machiavelli’s view of power.

7. For Machiavelli, freedom is not the "free will" facing a moral choice of good or evil, but (a) creative action in relation to Fortuna and (b) collective action via the framework of a republic. Assess his view of freedom.

8. A.nonymous: "For Machiavelli, freedom means breaking tradition to innovate new routes."
B.nonymous: "No! A ‘free people’ needs a framework
Relate founding and freedom (or creativity) in Machiavelli

9. Develop Machiavelli’s view of "corruption" and "renewal." What is corruption? How is it addressed politically? (Is American politics "corrupt" in Machiavelli’s sense? What might his "renewal" look like in the U.S.?)

10. Analyze Machiavelli’s contrast between fighting like beasts (lion and fox, force and fraud) and fighting like men (by laws.) What is the difference? But also, is there a relationship? Or does fighting like beasts as such defeat any democratic end (i.e. fighting like men) because means are ends in the making?

11. "Machiavelli’s writings are merely a manual for a political opportunist. He has no conception of the social purpose of politics, and no system of values: he cannot answer the question of the end for which political power is used. He is a cynical technician of force & fraud." -A.onymous

"Machiavelli presents a vision of political virtue to contrast with the incompetence and unnecessary cruelty of the political actors of his day. His vision is meant to inspire and guide citizens (or "armed prophets") to bring stability & justice to a corrupt and violent time." -B.onymous

Assess the purpose of Machiavelli’s political theory

12. "For Machiavelli, political responsibility requires learning how not to be good. He thus says "I love my city more than my soul." His is a moral though not a Christian view of life and politics." -A.onymous

"To claim that ends justify means is misguided because means are always ends in the making: force and fraud NEVER create value." -B.onymous

Assess how Machiavelli relates morality & politics
(Does he endorse politics without morality? Show how political responsibility involves a different kind of morality altogether? Does political responsibility require dealing with violence, or is he mistaken about means and ends?)

13. Machiavelli’s figuration of political corruption as effeminacy, his macho persona and willingness to embrace violence, his idealization of male/paternal leadership,
his difficulty in imagining mutuality, and his picture of Fortuna, show the impact of gender codes, and his own sense of proper (and endangered) masculinity. Use gender to assess his theory.

14. What IS the role of ideals in Machiavelli’s view of politics? (One great critic argued that Machiavelli focused "on men, not principles" because ideals are always used to justify horrific conduct.)

15. Analyze Weber’s view of tragedy and politics, including the two ethics (of ultimate ends and of responsibility) and his image of "the demon of politics." In sum, what distinguishes "politics as a vocation"? In turn, does Weber offer insight into Machiavelli?

16. Assess Arendt’s claim that political theorists confuse violence and power: why distinguish them? Is her distinction credible? Does it change how you view politics? (You may use her to read Machiavelli: does he teach the distinction? Does his confusion about it explain the problems in his theory? Does he show how the distinction fails?)

17. Among canonical political theorists, only Machiavelli understands how a "space of appearances" constitutes the world of politics. Do we misunderstand the theatrical (and creative but also corrupt) dimension of political life if we deny the gap between reality and appearances? Are we ALL "politicians?" Discuss the idea of appearances and theatricality.

18. Does democracy depend on constitutionalism, or is democracy jeopardized by it? Assess the arguments about democracy and constitutionalism.

Solely Because of the Increasing Disorder

Solely because of the increasing disorder
In our cities of class struggle
Some of us have decided
To speak no more of cities by the sea, snow on roofs,
women
The smell of ripe apples in the cellars, the senses of the flesh, all
That makes man round and human
But to speak in the future only about the disorder
And so become one-sided, reduced, enmeshed in the business of politics and the dry, indecorous vocabulary of dialectical economics
So that this awful cramped coexistence
Of snowfalls (they’re not merely cold, we know)
Exploitation, the lured flesh, class justice, should not engender
Approval of a world so many-sided; delight in
The contradictions of so bloodstained a life
You understand.

- Bertolt Brecht

Questions from a Worker Who Reads

Who built Thebes of the seven gates?
In the books you will find the names of kings.
Did the kings haul up the lumps of rock?
And Babylon, many times demolished
Who raised it up so many times? In what houses
Of gold-glittering Lima did the builders live?
Where, the evening that the Wall of China was finished
Did the masons go? Great Rome
Is full of triumphal arches. Who erected them? Over whom
Did the Caesars triumph? Had Byzantium, much praised in
song,
Only palaces for its inhabitants? Even in fabled Atlantis
The night the ocean engulfed it
The drowning still bawled for their slaves.

The young Alexander conquered India.
Was he alone?
Caesar beat the Gauls.
Did he not even have a cook with him?
Phillips of Spain wept when his armada
Went down. Was he the only one to weep?
Frederick the Second won the Seven Years War. Who
Else won it?

Every page a victory.
Who cooked the feast for the victors?
Every ten years a great man.
Who paid the bill?

So many reports.
So many questions.

-Brecht

SECOND PAPER: write 5-page double-spaced paper due Friday
November 8 by 5pm

1. Use a text to analyze what political theorists DO.
   (Consider what they say about theory and how they "do" it.)

2. Analyze the "rhetoric" of a Marx text. Relate what it
   claims to how it speaks. Assess how he tries to persuade
   an audience to think/act differently. How does he claim
   authority or seek authority in our eyes? How does he use
   language to gain our assent? Is there an alternative to
   the form of rhetoric and persuasion he uses?

3. "Social criticism and change depend on creating
   counter-histories that make room for new actors and
voices." Analyze the role of narrative in Marx: assess the politics entailed by the story a text tells and HOW that story is told.

4. Use a Marx text to assess the claim that we are profoundly shaped by society (conditioned by forces we do not control) and yet also (a) makers of society, and (b) always capable of acting differently.

5. Use a Marx text to analyze the problem of domination: In what ways must a credible political theory address "domination" if it is to foster democratic life and human freedom? But what are the dangers in focusing on domination?

6. In a culture shaped by liberal political thought, freedom means being a "sovereign," self-sufficient and self-determining individual, but Marx depicts the paradox by which human action and freedom in fact depends on recognizing both forces we don’ control and others with whom we are tied. Use one Marx text to analyze this paradoxical idea of freedom.

7. Contrast freedom conceived as: (a) the choice of right or wrong in terms of (god's) moral law; (b) creative action in relation to Fortuna; (c)collective action within the rules of a game or republic; or (d) "making history" by consciously taking charge of (changing) social structure.

8. Machiavelli depicts a political world ruled by Fortuna, not god, while Marx depicts a political world ruled by laws of history: what difference follows from focusing on contingency or social structure? (Does KM gain a systematic perspective that NM lacks? Does KM avoid dilemmas that NM makes crucial to political virtuosity?)

9. Explore Marx’s idea that liberal capitalist society entails a "double life" split between "bourgeois" and "citizen." What is the problem? Why not conceive the "state" as "a means" to "private" ends in civil society? Why not lodge freedom in private life and civil society? What is Marx’s problem with what he calls "political emancipation," and how does he imagine moving beyond it?

10. Explore how Marx’s theory of alienation as a theory of politics.

11. Marx claims that "every class struggle is a political struggle." What is the meaning of "class" and "political"? Assess this view of politics.

12. What counts as "making history" in Marx’s view, and your own? (Is their "making history" for Machiavelli?)
13. Assess the language of necessity and inevitability in Marx. (Does it preclude freedom, or inspire action? What kind of claim is he making, and what impact does it have?)

14. Assess Marx’s claim that justice means creating circumstances in which "the development of each is a condition of the development of all."

15. According to Marx’s story in the CM, the proletariat no longer needs teachers or critics because experience compels/enables them to become critics and rebels themselves. Do you agree that ordinary people are -can be- critical of their assumptions and practices? Why/not? How would he respond to you?

16. In the Manifesto, Marx argues that people will and should identify as members of a class, rather than identify by region, ethnicity, religion, or nation. Class identification will "feel" most credible, and arguably, only political identification as members of a class enables people to change their circumstances in fundamental not incremental ways. Assess these claims.

17. Marx criticizes those he calls "utopian socialists" and uses "utopian" pejoratively, yet he is repeatedly called "utopian" by his critics. What is going on here? (What does he want to avoid? Is there a value to being "utopian" that he should affirm? Do criteria of what is "realistic" need to be assessed more critically? Should human nature be a fixed referent?)

18. Marx claims that capitalism "melts all that is solid" and "profanes all tat is holy." Is he correct that capitalism produces disenchantment of what he calls "illusions?" Does capitalism entail new illusions he did not anticipate? Assess Marx’s story of secularization and disenchantment.

19. "Marx hates politics: his goal is an "end to history" when humanity overcomes the very divisions that make politics necessary." -A.nonymous

"Marx reduces politics to the pursuit of material interests: he simply endorses the rule of the strong." -B.nonymous

"Marx brings politics down to earth; he encourages people to make 'political' rather than narrow 'economic' claims about the good of the whole, and he celebrates human initiative and collaborative action. How can you say he hates or devalues politics?" -C.nonymous

Assess Marx’s view of politics
20. Assess Laclau and Mouffe’s theory of "radical democracy." Which of Marx’s key assumptions do they abandon, and what new premises do they make?

DISCOURSE VS IDEOLOGY (see truth & power, p119)
"the notion of ideology appears to me difficult to make use of for 3 reasons.
"First, it always stands in virtual opposition to something else that is supposed to count as truth. I believe the problem does NOT consist of drawing a line between that which, in a discourse, falls under the category of scientificity or truth, and, that which comes under some other category; rather, it consists in seeing historically how effects of truth are produced within discourses that in themselves are neither true or false." [a discourse is neither true nor false, but establishes the terms defining true and false?]

"The second drawback is that the concept of ideology refers necessarily to something of the order of a subject." [I am not sure what he means here]

"Thirdly, ideology stands in a secondary position relative to something that functions as its infrastructure, its material determinant." [i.e. the concept of ideology presumes a marxist view of 'material base' causing/determining false/illusory ideas, whereas F argues that ideas are inseparable from practices, never after or before, always enacted and embodied in practices, so that truth is not separate from or the answer to power but instead there are 'regimes of truth' a relation of 'knowledge/power.]

For these reasons I think the concept cannot be used without circumspection. [NOTICE: HE DOES NOT SIMPLY ABANDON IT]

"Truth isn’t outside power or lacking in power: contrary to a myth whose history and functions would repay further study, truth isn’t the reward of free spirits, the child of protracted solitude, nor the privilege of those who have succeeded in liberating themselves. Truth is a thing of this world: it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint. And it induces regular effects of power. Each society has its regime of truth, its ‘general politics’ of truth - that is, the types of discourse it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances that enable one to distinguish true and false statements; the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are changed with saying what counts as true." [IN EFFECT HE IS HERE
DESCRIBING WHAT A ‘DISCOURSE’ IS - A REGIME OF TRUTH

(AS YOU THINK A SCIENCE IS) AND YOU ARE INDUCTED

INTO THAT REGIME AND LEARN HOW TO SPEAK AND ACT IN

THOSE TERMS. BUT RELIGION BEFORE SCIENCE WAS ALSO A

REGIME OF TRUTH, AND PEOPLE WERE INDUCTED INTO

IT...]

"In societies like ours, the ‘political economy’ of

truth is characterized by five important traits.

‘Truth’ is centered on the form of scientific
discourse and the institutions that produce it...."

[but we see the USE of this discourse (and so of

"truth" as a concept) in every domain of society.]

"There is a battle ‘for truth’ or at least ‘around

truth’ -it being understood that by truth I mean

not ‘the ensemble of truths to be discovered and

accepted’ but rather ‘the ensemble of rules

according to which the true and false are separated

and specific effects of power are attached to the

true,’ it being understood also that its not a

matter of a battle ‘on behalf’ of truth but of a

battle about the status of truth and the economic

and political role it plays...‘truth’ is to be

understood as a system of ordered procedures for

the production, regulation, distribution,
circulation and operation of statements. ‘Truth’ is

linked with systems of power that produce and

sustain it, and to effects of power which it

induces....a ‘regime’ of truth." [Think of sciences

linked to institutions and technologies, of churches

linked to parishes and liturgies/ceremonies as well

as theologies, of social/human sciences linked to

asylums, prisons, schools.]

"The problem is not

changing people’s consciousness -what is in their

heads- but the political, economic, institution

regimes producing truths. Its not a matter of

emancipating truth from every system of power

(which would be a chimera, for truth is already

power) but of detaching the power of truth from the

forms of hegemony (social, economic, and cultural)

within which it operates now. The political

question...is not error, illusion, alienated

consciousness, or ideology; it is truth itself.

Hence the importance of Nietzsche." ("Truth &

Power," 131-3)

the idea of a SUBJECT -

a self is not a subject, human beings are MADE

"subjects." What does that mean? It is by forms of

self-consciousness -by certain languages, Marx

would say ideology, Foucault says discourses- that

people come to recognize themselves as authors of

their acts. "Subject" is the broad category by

which he categorizes how WE imagine ourselves and

our agency. When languages of "will" and of "soul"

do this work, we imagine the agency of human beings

as independent of circumstance and history. This is
a "transcendental" subject because unconditioned, and it appears to precede and determine every act. But we also become speaking subjects, that is, people who see themselves as authors of their words and who actually do make intelligible sentences. What are the conditions of possibility for this to happen? How do we become e.g. citizens or productive workers who make choices and exercise responsibility? For F any form of agency bespeaks our existence as "subjects" (who are indeed agents, but agents who tend to disavow the conditions - of "subjection" - enabling that agency.) See "Subject & Power" p326-7:

"My objective has been to create a history of the different modes by which in our culture human beings are made subjects, the modes of objectification that transform human beings into subjects." [How do human beings become what he calls "speaking subjects" - by what forms of subjection, training, discipline, rule-bound action. How do they become what he calls "productive subjects"? "How have men learned to recognize themselves as subjects of 'sexuality'? Of course these questions involve power -because to be placed in relations of production and signification is to be placed in power relations that are very complex." [relations of signification - language - are not neutral, are power-laden, the rules that establish who can speak, whose words are illegible, etc - just as becoming a "productive" person - i.e. a "subject" - involve both discipline and inequalities.]
The practices that create a SUBJECT also create SUBJECTIVITY - i.e. my relation to myself - by what concepts and norms do I see myself and understand myself and perhaps modify myself?

Religion once created a form of subject and subjectivity. F recounts this in terms of the confessional practice. In speaking of the reformation rebellion against the Catholic Church he says: "The need to take a direct part in spiritual life, the work of salvation, in the truth that lies in the Book, all that was a struggle for a new subjectivity."

But his focus is a form of subjectification that entails a type of "individualization." What forms of subject-formation and subjectivity are involved in the emergence of "individualism" under liberal capitalism? He does not say "individualism" because he does not see an "ideology" (as an idea in our heads about being in charge of our destiny.) He sees new forms of "subjection" (via "disciplines" and "discourses") creating a new kind of "subject"
as a self-directing actor. This is the central paradox of modernity - how we are at once subjected and subjects, but as subjects invested in self-determination we tend to disavow the conditions that bring us into being (and shape really how we imagine and practice self-determination.) His goal: "we have to promote new forms of subjectivity through the refusal of the type of subjectivity imposed on us for several centuries." (336) "The target nowadays is not to discover what we are but to refuse what we are." But what type of subjectivity is that? It is a type that is organized, and organizes itself, in terms of NORMS and TRUTH. Why is that a problem? What is the alternative?

**POWER**

In "juridical" terms of the state, sovereignty, and law, "power" is power "OVER" - in the form of a state repressing citizens - the name is tyranny as coercive, prohibitive, negative, repressive.

In marxist terms - power is power over as class domination - enforced labor, exploitation of surplus from exploited labor. Class rule is enforced, imposed, dictated.

But do these senses of power exhaust what "power" is? What about the "power" entailed in most of the institutions in civil society? Doctors, teachers, parents, experts, do not exercise coercive tyranny. They do not "rule over" in quite that way. They argue, they model, they reward, they encourage, they love, they try to gain consent by their love, they "help" and educate and reform. Parental power is inseparable from love, and inseparable from a struggle with kids to get them to do what you want them to do. Force is the LAST resort, and a sign you have failed. Getting kids to stand in line when they are in first grade. Getting them to want to do well and get that star next to their name. Much of life is closer to THIS form of power, Foucault argues, not legal prohibition or state coercion.

"What we need is a political philosophy that isn’t erected around the problem of sovereignty or, therefore, around the problems of law and prohibition. We need to cut off the king’s head…I don’t want to say the state isn’t important. I want to say that relations of power extend beyond the limits of the state...in networks that invest the body, sexuality, the family, kinship, knowledge, technology, and so forth." ("Truth & Power" 122)

"power is a mode of action upon the action of others." Power is action "to structure the field of action of others." "Power is exercised over free
subjects." (342) the concept of power for Foucault thus INCLUDES the concept of freedom - "slavery is not a power relationship when a man is in chains, only when he has some possible mobility.... In relations of "power" we see "mutual incitement and struggle"

Accordingly, Foucault resists the language and idea of REPRESSION (from "Truth and Power" p.119-20): "this notion is more insidious (than ideology)" "in any event, I myself have had much more trouble freeing myself of it insofar as it does indeed appear to correspond so well with a whole range of phenomena that belong among the effects of power." [I.E. POWER CAN "REPRESS," "DOMINATE"] "But it seems to me now that the notion of repression is quite inadequate for capturing what is precisely the productive aspect of power. In defining the effects of power as repression one adopts a purely juridical...identification of power with a law that says NO -power is taken above all as carrying the force of prohibition...If power were never anything but repressive, if it never did anything but say no, do your really think one would be brought to obey it? What makes power hold good, what makes it accepted, is the fact that it doesn’t only weigh on us as a force that says no; it also traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms of knowledge, produces discourse. It [power] needs to be considered as a productive network that runs through the whole social body....."

Third paper: due Friday Dec 13 by noon

1. Marx distinguishes science and truth from ideology and illusion, but Foucault’s theory of discourse denies this distinction: discourses are themselves 'regimes of truth' to contrast with other discourses not with reality as such. Assess why he rejects the ideology-truth distinction, and the consequences of this move for how we imagine/practice politics. What follows for political practice if we say, not that truth is the antidote to power, and the means to human realization, and not that action should lead from the distortion of ideology to more credible truths about reality, but instead that every truth is a form of power? What is the meaning for politics of seeing how human life is constituted within discourses that cannot readily be compared by a criteria of true/false, because each produces its own forms of evidence and verification? What follows from emphasizing their productivity rather than their absolute truth? Is he caught in a performative contradiction? Has he provoked
you to think differently about truth?) **In sum: explore the relation of truth and politics:** If politics is not about replacing illusions with truth, what is it about? Is he close to Machiavelli?

2. For Foucault, power is not ‘juridical,’ neither possessed by a coercive state nor a property of persons bearing rights against it, as liberalism argues. It is not one group ruling another, nor does it emanate from a domain (‘the economy’) to determine other domains, as Marxism argues. F depicts power as ‘disciplinary,’ tied to language, circulating through each and all of us, ‘productive’ of new kinds of subjectivities and practices, and always engendering resistance. **Assess this view of power and consider how it changes your view of politics.** (Use examples to ask: Has he simply rejected the other views? Revealed what they occlude from view? Plotted a historical change in social life? Does this idea ‘politicize’ regions of life once deemed merely personal or private? Does he still need (and implicitly draw on) earlier views of power? In what, then, does "politics" consist?)

3. For Foucault, modern discourses constitute self-regulating subjects by way of subjection to ascribed identities: we conceive ‘authentic’ identity by taking on ‘the truth’ of our sexed, gendered, or raced ‘nature.’) He thus says we must not "discover who we are, but refuse who we are.” **Assess his view of identity, subjection and resistance.** (How is a ‘subject’ related to our idea of a ‘self’? If we say that ‘essentialism’ fixes the truth of femininity or masculinity, of what ‘black’ means, of same-sex attraction, so that one’s truth in these terms becomes the basis of identity, then politics means expressing, and getting others to recognize, the truth of one’s identity. What is the alternative he imagines? Compare discourses stipulating identity as homosexual/heterosexual, then gay/straight, and now queer rather than normal. What do such shifts in category suggest about the politics of gender or race?

4. Foucault depicts the language of (sexual) liberation (from repression or oppression) as a ruse of power. Denying there is any escape from relations of power, but casting power as productive rather than repressive, he seeks not a liberating move from alienation to self-actualization, but ongoing resistance to ‘discourses’ that define who can speak/what can be said, and to ‘practices’ of ‘discipline’ or ‘normalization.’ **Why is "liberation" a trap?** What politics follows from this claim? What action does it enable/ disable?

5. Foucault imagines politics not as governance of the whole, not as citizens (or workers) together exercising power over their collective life as a whole, not as the pursuit of liberation from oppression by collective
action, but as people organizing locally and non-nationally to resist disciplinary regimes of power/knowledge in all aspects of their lives. **Assess his theory of politics** - what is gained and lost by shifting politics away from the state and from claims about a common good, by turning toward local and specific practices of resistance and re-signification?

6. Use Foucault to assess Wolin’s claim that "democracy" cannot be a form of government, but only an episodic form of insurgency against inevitable institutionalization. Has Wolin (and Foucault) given up too much?

7. Analyze the political and theoretical significance of the shift from Rich’s analysis of gender to Butler’s. What is the difference and how does it matter? In turn, assess Zerilli’s critique of Butler. How can "feminism" entail different visions of "politics?"

8. Marx distinguishes ideology from truth, and organizes politics by moving people from one to the other. Butler denies any "truth" to gender; she imagines politics not as making (class or gender) identity correspond to an underlying essence or truth, but as 'dis-identification' from ascribed identity. For Butler that means politics is re-signifying signs/categories, not freeing women from a political institution, as Rich argued. **What is the political meaning of these differences?**

9. **Analyze what political theorists DO.** (Use examples to consider what they say about theory and how they "do" it.)

10. "Social change depend on creating counter-histories that make room for new actors and voices." **Analyze the role of narrative:** assess the politics entailed both by what story a theorist tells and by how s/he tells it.

11. A central political issue is who people identify with, and on what basis. **Use a text to assess political identification as a "we" -and antagonism with a "they."** Is such identification inescapable, necessary, valuable? a symptom of disavowal? A form of exclusion that is at once unwarranted and dangerous?

12. Contrast freedom conceived as: (a) the choice of good or evil in terms of god's moral law; (b) creative 'action in concert'; c) collective action within the rules of a game or republic; (d) "making history" by consciously taking charge of (changing) social structure; (e) "testing" the norms or re-signifying the categories that constitute subjects.

13. **Analyze the "rhetoric" of a text.** Relate what it claims to how it speaks. Assess how a text works to
persuade an audience to think/act differently. How does a theorist claim (and seek) authority? How does s/he use language to gain assent from audiences invested in the views or identity s/he would change?

14. For many (white) Americans, American society is conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are equal; for Baldwin, American society is conceived in slavery and dedicated to the proposition that black people are created unequal. Explore the stakes in this disagreement: What differences follow from narrating history by each perspective? Can/must both perspectives be recognized?

15. For Baldwin the real problem in (American) politics is not only domination (of white over black) but white disavowal of collective responsibility for (and benefit from) this systemic inequality. If the problem is not ignorance, but their denial of what (at some level) they know, the solution is not giving information, but acknowledging what they already know but won’t own or act on. Assess Baldwin’s idea of willful ‘innocence’ and explore how (or if) people can be persuaded - compelled? - to acknowledge what and who they disavow. Does Baldwin perform that feat? How? How not?

16. Race teaches Baldwin that politics must be understood through the process of projection whereby people invest in others their own dismissed humanity. ‘We are not like those people, with those attributes, who must be excluded or reformed.’ How does he explain this process? How does it work in politics? How does he address it? While Marx invokes interests, Baldwin analyzes motives (like fear and anxiety as well as wishes and fantasies) by using an implicitly psychoanalytic discourse. How does this change your view of politics?

17. Baldwin insists that whites are denying the truth -or true meaning- of their history, and as a result, they display how the past is not dead or past, but alive, ruling the present. The political task, then, is to ‘force’ them to ‘accept’ its formative power, for only by this acknowledgment can they open a space for acting otherwise than the past seems to dictate. Assess how Baldwin conceives (the truth of) history in relation to human freedom.

18. For Baldwin ‘love’ is a form of power, and a (confrontational) engagement with one’s other, neighbor, fellow-citizen. Why is struggle with an oppressor a form
of love? Is this idea a denial of political life, or a way to imagine and revivify it? Assess Baldwin’s idea of love, and its link to politics.

19. Baldwin bears witness to a truth (about domination and disavowal) that we must face to free ourselves, while Foucault denies that there are any such truths. Or, do both make visible the experiences, people, and possibilities that hegemonic frameworks make invisible? Compare Baldwin and Foucault.

20. Because we inherit not ‘the’ past but stories representing it, Baldwin suggests that democracy must multiply perspectives or voices that narrate the past. Yet he also says, we must face what we have ‘forgotten’ in the past, or we remain imprisoned by it. What is his politics of narration & history?