

PHIL-2552: Revolution

Georgetown University 2023-2024

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Lecture: TR 9:30-11:00

Office Hours: T 11AM-1PM; R 11:00-12:00, Instructor's Office

"We must, with one last act of national authority, forever assure the empire of liberty in the country of our birth; we must take any hope of re-enslaving us away from the inhuman government that for so long kept us in the most humiliating torpor. In the end we must live independent or die.

– Jean-Jacques Dessalines, Haitian Declaration of Independence, January 1st 1804.

1. Course Summary: What this course is about

The political figures, ideologies, and forms of government established and promoted by the revolutions of the most recent centuries reverberate throughout global politics. Some of these revolutions are well known and often discussed in the English speaking world, others comparatively obscure and understudied. Political philosophers may ask: what are revolutions – what, if anything, unites the phenomena of sweeping economic change (the “Industrial Revolution”), intellectual paradigm shifts (“scientific revolutions”) with the political uprisings of past centuries in France, Haiti, or Iran? What do the course of revolutions have to teach us about political systems, even in non-revolutionary times? Must revolutions involve whole political and social orders, or is there a meaningful sense in which more limited sectors – science, religion, sports – can be “revolutionized”? Can historical trends and social changes themselves effect revolutions, or are revolutions driven by intentional actors like revolutionaries and revolutionary organizations? What causes revolution, and what prevents it? Perhaps most centrally: if oppression is the rule in human history, then why is revolution the exception?

Our course will discuss these questions through a look back at some of the revolutions that have shaped the present world, and the trends that the future world must confront.

2. Course Requirements

Class Participation: 10%

Reading Responses: 25%

Midterm Essay: 30%

Final Essay: 35%

2.1 Class/Section Participation

10% of your grade for this course is determined by class participation: attending some combination of class, section, and office hours, and contributing to these spaces while you are there in ways that contribute to rather than detract from the experience of those you share the rooms with. Some students will feel more comfortable contributing thoughts or asking questions in one forum over another, which is fine. A passing grade for the course will simply require students to be active participants in some form or other. Active participation may involve asking question, weighing in with an interpretation of what some author is claiming, or sharing one's

own point of view, insofar as it may helpfully inform the discussion at hand. It also involves being a thoughtful and engaged listener.

A good rule of thumb if you want a participation grade of a B or higher: Don't miss class, and don't disappear: in-class contributions, participation in section, attendance at office hours, or (worst case scenario) emails explaining why you couldn't do any of the aforementioned are ways to check in.

2.2 Reading Responses

Students are expected to submit a reading response of around 200-500 words when specifically required by course instructor. Reading responses will be requested up to but not more than five(5) times in the semester. These responses are short and largely exegetical: you will be asked to explain an argument or set of arguments that occurred in the reading, and to raise at most one critical point in response to the reading. They are due at the beginning of the class for which the reading is assigned. Lowest scores will be dropped.

2.3 Grading

Paper deadlines:

If you need an extension on any assignment, please ask *before* the due date. In general, I will be willing to give a 48-hour grace period (no questions asked). If you are still having trouble completing the assignment after that, you must set up an appointment to go over your ideas and set a schedule for finishing the paper. Unless an extension is granted in advance, assignments will be penalized 1/3 of a grade (A- to a B+, B+ to a B, etc.) for each day they are late.

Appealing a grade:

You can appeal any grade that you feel does not accurately represent the work you have done. All appeals for re-evaluation must be made in writing, no more than two weeks after your paper is returned, and no sooner than 48 hours after you receive your grade. Requests must provide a compelling argument for raising the grade, but an agreement to re-evaluate a paper is no guarantee of a better grade, and it can result in lower grades if there are more serious problems that were missed on the first reading.

The honor code:

The Georgetown University Honor pledge requires you to be honest in your academic endeavors and to hold yourself to the high ideals and rigorous standards of academic life. I expect you to be familiar with the letter and the spirit of this pledge; and, I will enforce the Honor Code by reporting any and all suspected cases of academic dishonesty.

2.3 Email Policy

There are many positives of our increasingly connected age: ease of communication allows us to have conversations across borders in real-time, reach each other at any hour of day, and do so with minimal effort. But these very advantages themselves intensify some drawbacks: it is

increasingly difficult to “disconnect” and increasingly easy to be less than thoughtful in when and how we contact each other. If your inbox and browser tabs look anything like mine (and I bet they do), you’re personally experiencing one of the weightiest downstream negative consequences: the incredible volume of demands on our attention in the form of emails, social media messages, targeted advertisements, and more.

These incessant demands on our attention are inimical in many ways to the kind of focus that an intellectual life and development universities ought to foster. Our expectations of ourselves and each other have to catch up to these new realities. So I propose these expectations for you and I both:

- I will do my best to send **two or fewer emails** to you all per week – please check Canvas regularly for class updates and course readings.
- I will routinely end the lecture portion of class **ten minutes early**, so students with quick questions and/or who cannot make office hours have an opportunity to ask them or raise questions in class and **in person**.
- I ask that **you default to office hours or in-person class time as your primary way to ask questions** about the text – my default policy will be that multiple students will be allowed in the room at once, though if you have a question or concern that requires discretion, we can accommodate that as well.
 - o **Please come to office hours** – they are a great chance to listen to what your fellow students think
- If you have a question or concern that requires email, I ask that you email me **during business hours** (9AM-5PM, M-F) unless there are extenuating circumstances, and with at least **48 hours** of notice before a decision/action you’re requesting must be completed (e.g. add/drop signature)
 - o This applies to requests for extensions as well

2.4 Class Conduct

In this class I hope we can come to respect two things: the truth, and each other. There’s a connection between these: we all know things, and so we all have things to learn from each other. But we can only acquire and build on each other’s knowledge collaboratively – saying what we think others want to hear is not genuine contribution to discussion, and neither is the lack of *voiced* dissent equivalent to genuine consensus. Respect for each other, for knowledge, and for learning requires that we articulate our own views, opinions, misgivings, and questions with courage and respect, and that we contribute

The we will be discussing in this class may generate contentious claims, spirited discussions, vehement disagreements, and trenchant criticisms. This is at least part of what doing philosophy is all about – most importantly, it’s part of what it is to live with other people as full people rather than as objects of management. I promise you all to do my best to raise philosophical issues and to start philosophical discussions in ways that are as sensitive as possible to the variety of viewpoints and opinions that we are sure to find among the members of this class. My part, as instructor, is not the same as yours – but you all have a necessary part nevertheless and I ask you all to do yours as well.

3. Tentative Schedule

All readings will be made accessible. On the weeks where a book is assigned rather than an article or articles, you will only be required to read an excerpt, though it is highly suggested and encouraged that you read the books in their entirety whenever your schedule allows. The one exception is for presenters: unless otherwise communicated, those presenting on a book will be required to read it in its entirety.

Part I:

- **Week 1 (Aug 24) Why Now?**

No Reading

- **Week 2 What's Revolution?**

1: Sidney Hook, *Revolution, Reform, and Social Justice*; Eugen Weber, "Revolution? Counterrevolution? What Revolution?"

2: Doug Lorimer, *Trotsky's Theory of Permanent Revolution* (parts I and II);

- **Week 3 (Sept 5, 7) What's Revolution?**

1: *NO CLASS (Labor Day, Tuesday operates on Monday schedule)*

read: James Boggs, "Who Will Make the Revolution?" [from *Pages from a Black Radical's Notebook*]

2: Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Revolution*

- **Week 4 1780s-1810s: Revolution in Haiti and France (Sept 12, 14)**

1: Lynn Hunt, "The Future of the French Revolution"; CLR James, *The Black Jacobins*

2: ; CLR James, *The Black Jacobins*

- **Week 5 1910-1917: Revolution in Mexico (Sept 19, 21)**

1: Kelly Lytle Hernández, *Bad Mexicans*; Ricardo Flores Magón, *Land and Liberty*

2: Kelly Lytle Hernández, *Bad Mexicans*; Ricardo Flores Magón, *Land and Liberty*

- **Week 6 1917: Revolution in the Russian Empire (Sept 26, 28)**

1: S.A Smith, *Russia in Revolution: An Empire in Crisis*

2: S.A Smith, *Russia in Revolution: An Empire in Crisis*

- **Week 7 1919-1922: Revolution in Italy? (Oct 3, Oct 5)**

1: Fred Frommer, "How Mussolini Seized Power in Italy—And Turned It Into a Fascist State"

2: Domenico Settembrini, "Mussolini and the Legacy of Revolutionary Socialism"; Antonio Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*

- **Week 8 Revolution in Guinea-Bissau and Portugal (Oct 10, 12)**

1: Sonia Vaz Borges, *Militant Education, Liberation Struggle*; Raquel Varela, *A People's History of the Portuguese Revolution*

2: Sidney Hook, *Revolution, Reform, and Social Justice*; Eugen Weber, "Revolution? Counterrevolution? What Revolution?"

MIDTERM DUE: Oct 15th 11:59 PM

Part II:

- **Week 9 (Oct 17, 19) The American Revolution? Or Counterrevolution?**

1: Jack P. Greene, "The American Revolution"; Sidney Hook, *Revolution, Reform, and Social Justice*;

2: Gerald Horne, *The Counter-Revolution of 1776*; Eugen Weber, "Revolution? Counterrevolution? What Revolution?"

- **Week 10 (Oct 24, 26) Counterrevolution Week 1**

1: Edmund Burke, "Letter to a Member of the National Assembly"

2: Georgi Plekhanov, "The Bourgeois Revolution: The Political Birth of Capitalism"

- **Week 11 (Oct 31, Nov 2) Counterrevolution Week 2**

1: Johanna Bockman, "The Struggle over Structural Adjustment: Socialist Revolution versus Capitalist Counterrevolution in Yugoslavia"

2: Sam Moyo, Praveen Jha, and Paris Yeros, "The classical agrarian question: Myth, reality and relevance today"

- **Week 12 (Nov 7, 9) The State and Revolution**

1: V.I. Lenin, "The State and Revolution"

2: Murray Bookchin, *The Next Revolution*

- **Week 13 (Nov 14, 16) Crisis Without Revolution?**

1: Peter McGhee, "We live in a world of upheaval. So why aren't today's protests leading to revolutions?"

2: Rana Dasgupta, "The demise of the nation-state"

- **Week 14 (Nov 21, 23) What now?**

1: Stephen M. Walt, "ISIS as Revolutionary State"

2: *NO CLASS, FALL RECESS*

FALL RECESS

- **Week 15 (Nov 28, 30) What now?**

1: Thea Riofrancos, "A Burning Planet"; Sidney Hook, *Revolution, Reform, and Social Justice*

2: Kai Nielsen, "On the Choice between Reform and Revolution"; Veronica Gago, *Feminist International: How to Change Everything*

- **Week 16 (Dec 5, 7)**

1: Nick Estes, *Our History is the Future*

2: *NO CLASS*

FINAL PAPER DUE

4. Resources

Accessibility and diversity:

One finds a great deal of diversity in teaching and learning styles in a modern university. These styles may not always mesh in ways that are conducive to the success and wellbeing of everyone in a course. But there are often ways of improving things. I am happy to discuss the structure of this course, and to work with the learning styles people have to the best of my abilities. So please feel free to talk to me in office hours. I sincerely think that every student is entitled to a meaningful and stimulating classroom experience! Disabled students and students

on record with the university as requiring particular accommodations, please let me know that this is the case, in confidence, during the first few weeks of the semester—and please take advantage of services provided by the university. Finally, please let me know if you learn during the semester that something would make the classroom accessible.

Sexual misconduct:

As a faculty member and an educator, it is my responsibility to help create a safe learning environment on our campus. Georgetown University and its faculty are committed to supporting survivors of sexual misconduct, including relationship violence and sexual assault. And university policy requires all faculty members to report any disclosures about sexual misconduct to the Title IX Coordinator, whose role is to coordinate the University's response to sexual misconduct. But Georgetown also has a number of fully confidential professional resources who can provide support and assistance to survivors of sexual assault and other forms of sexual misconduct. These resources include: [Jen Schweer](#) (202.687.0323) Associate Director of Health Education Services for Sexual Assault Response and Prevention; [Erica Shirley](#) (202.687.6985) Trauma Specialist (CAPS). More information about campus resources and reporting sexual misconduct can be found at <http://sexualassault.georgetown.edu>.