

## Rewriting the History of Political Theory From the Margins

Humboldt University Berlin, June 8-9 2023

Lehrbereich Theorie der Politik

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### Call for Papers

The history of political philosophy is usually narrated as a sequence of canonical authors reflecting on a limited set of perennial problems, such as justice, freedom, domination, tyranny and the just regime. However, feminist and decolonial approaches have long contested this narrative. By tracing diverse lineages in the history of political theory, they rectify problematic omissions, but also elucidate contemporary issues. In recent years, scholars working on history of political thought have also increasingly showed interest in re-centering marginalized bodies of thought. This conference aims to set up a dialogue between these different approaches to shed light on the thematic, methodological and political dimensions of rewriting the history of political theory. How can we place center-stage authors, traditions and concepts that are typically relegated to the margins of the dominant historical narrative? Particular attention will be paid to marginalized concepts (slavery, foreignness, infidelity), non-Western and women political thinkers that have been excluded, and political events that have been dismissed as falling outside of the scope of political theory (for example the woman question or the Haitian revolution).

In this workshop, we wish to contribute to these recent debates by discussing case studies, methodological questions, and strategies that aim to diffuse the western, male-centered history of political philosophy. Covering the period from the late middle-ages to the present, this conference follows three – closely interwoven – threads:

1. By diversifying lineages in the history of political theory, we can introduce hitherto neglected **concepts and themes**. By focusing on forgotten radical experiments, traditions of political thought and activism, and neglected authors, some concepts in the history of political thought (such as the state, sovereignty, authority) might lose their centrality, while others (such as freedom, citizenship, property rights) might have various conflicting and alternative meanings. Such a "history of political concepts from below" (Bogues and Laudani) starts from the use of concepts within political struggles, rather than their theorization in canonical texts. On the other hand, if we do start from canonical texts, we will likely find that theoretical reflections on politics are often scattered through practical political works (for instance, Giles of Rome, Ptolemy of Lucca, Marsilius of Padua, Leonardo Bruni, Donato Giannotti, the treatise of the Monarchomachs, Henry Parker, Ibn Khaldun etc.) or treatises on metaphysics and ethics (f.i., Ibn Sina, Ibn Tufayl, Ibn-Rushd, John of Jandun, Elijah Del Medigo). How can we relate their reflections on politics to those in other fields, such as ontology and metaphysics, and what does that teach us of the various theorizations of social and political relations? Finally, the very periodization of political theory is the object of critique: how is exclusion and marginalization effectuated by the much-criticized notion

of modernity? How does decentering hegemonic texts and events (f.i., Machiavelli's *The Prince*, the French Revolution) and the re-centering of other texts or events (f.i., the treaties in North America and the Haitian Revolution) alter our periodization and the key concepts associated with each era?

2. Rewriting the history of political thought brings up a number of **methodological issues**. Political theory is typically based on texts, while the transmission of texts is itself biased in favor of those political and theoretical groups who have been dominant. As a consequence, unorthodox positions as well as the position of marginalized authors such as women and non-Western thinkers have been lost, handed over to us by means of texts written by others, or transmitted orally. Furthermore, if we do have texts, these might not be widely available as they might not be translated or digitally accessible, and they might also be of another nature than the texts that dominate the canon – they might, for instance, be letters and diaries rather than lectures and monographs. How can we remedy these lacunas – what reading strategies can we develop to recuperate their thought? Furthermore, what is the best way to write about authors and intellectual-political debates, especially when there's a dearth of textual sources? In the absence of texts written in their own voice, could we engage in fiction to conjure up the lost authors of the history of political thought – and to what extent would such a romanticized version be different from the historical constructions that are published as 'genuine' academic work?
3. To experiment with alternative histories of political thought raises **strategic questions** related to the institutions in which we pursue our research and teaching, as well as to contemporary politics. If we assume that the ontological and metaphysical assumptions underpinning these works are radically different from our own, how can we assess their relevancy for understanding contemporary politics? These questions also speak directly to challenges in teaching these texts. Rethinking the history of political thought has implications both for scholarship and education, and while our emphasis will be on the former we also welcome submissions that focus on the implications for teaching.

### **Format**

Speakers can choose between a) giving a 30-minute lecture, followed by a 30-minute Q&A, or b) pre-circulating their papers, and presenting for 10 minutes followed by a 30-minute Q&A. Please indicate in your submission your preferred format. The conference will be concluded with a roundtable with all the speakers (and open to the audience) to discuss the status of the canon in political theory. A conference dinner will take place on June 8<sup>th</sup>.

### **Timeline**

Submission deadline: October 17th, 2022

Communication of results: November 1st, 2022

Deadline for pre-circulated papers: May 15th, 2023

### **Submission & Contact**

Please submit your abstract here: <https://surveyheart.com/form/6307528a1940d466be509504>

For any questions regarding the call, please contact Liesbeth Schoonheim and Ieva Motuzaitė: [liesbeth.schoonheim@hu-berlin.de](mailto:liesbeth.schoonheim@hu-berlin.de) , [motuzaii@hu-berlin.de](mailto:motuzaii@hu-berlin.de)