

Neoliberalism and its Critics

This course is fashioned, roughly, in the tradition of what James Tully calls “political philosophy as a critical activity” (James Tully, “Political Philosophy as a Critical Activity,” *Political Theory*, 30 (August 2002), 533-555). Our overall aim: a critical grasp of practices of governance – language games, structures and webs of power relations, and forms of subjectification -- in our times.

Many scholars describe ours as “neoliberal” times. Loosely, they refer to a range of phenomena (processes, practices, rationalities and values) that have extended market logic, practices, technologies and values into every sphere of human life in a period that, for some, begins in the 1930s and for others, in the 1970s. The label is much contested, both its content and its utility, both by those who use it and those who disparage it. **One goal of this course is to engage critically in this contest.** How useful is which version of the concept? For what? What, if anything, does it risk obscuring? After a brief introduction to the debate, we delve – in turn -- into four influential approaches to understanding neoliberalism: as a political philosophy or set of ideas, as a class project, as a political rationality, and as statecraft. **Another goal of the course is to develop a comfortable but critical understanding of these approaches.** Our basic strategy will be first to follow sympathetically, to get a solid grasp of the approach and its unique insights and then, to turn a critical eye on the approach. Other approaches, concrete cases and, especially, race and gender will ground our critical analysis throughout the course.

In Part Two of the syllabus, “Neoliberalism as Political Ideas,” we turn to sources of neoliberal thought. Some scholars emphasize ideas in their account of neoliberalism. It is a phenomenon, they propose, rooted in the beliefs and knowledge forms of post-war professional economics as they reacted to then-dominant Keynesian welfarism and Bretton Woods internationalism. We spend a number of weeks with some of the most influential exponents of these ideas and their interlocutors. Specifically, we consider the thought of Friedrich Hayek, and Milton Friedman. To deepen our understanding of the content (and history!) of this thought, we read work of some of their key interlocutors, including J.M. Keynes and Karl Polanyi. Hovering over these texts allows us to consider these arguments on their own terms, treating them not merely as historical examples of a collection of bad ideas but as coherent philosophies that demand serious engagement. You may, in the end, decide that the theories are neither coherent nor convincing. But before you can reject the ideas, I expect you to understand them.

Part Three, “Neoliberalism as a Class Project,” provides one way to critique not just the content of so-called neoliberal thought but the very idea that neoliberalism is usefully understood in terms of ideas. In this section, we focus on David Harvey’s *A Brief Introduction to Neoliberalism*. This is the classic defense of the view that neoliberalism is the project of an international, capitalist class. **A third goal of the course: to develop a facility for applying**

a conceptual framework to concrete issues -- both to gain insight into the issue and to reflect critically upon the approach. Thus, after we've digested Harvey's argument, we consider the case of international trade and specifically, the TPP. What, if anything, does Harvey's theory reveal about the TPP that is not obvious at first glance? What does his theory reveal that others, e.g. the view that emphasizes the ideas or philosophy of neoliberalism, don't? We'll also consider whether the case, e.g. the TPP, confirms or disconfirms his theory.

In Part Four, we turn to the Foucault-inspired approach that sees neoliberalism as a "political rationality." Michel Foucault's *The Birth of Biopolitics* is foundational to the scholarship on neoliberalism. Due to time constraints, we will read only an excerpt of that work. Instead, this section pivots on Wendy Brown's *Undoing the Demos*. In this text, she reads, draws on and extends Foucault. Again, after getting our heads around Brown's analysis, we will use it to reflect upon the earlier approaches and the concrete issue area of higher education in the US. Finally, as before, we use both the other approaches and the case to think critically about the neo-Foucaultian framework for understanding our times.

In Part Five, we consider theorists who define neoliberalism in terms of a new kind of "statecraft." Epitomized by the work of the French sociologist, Loic Wacquant, this scholarship sees a shift from the liberal "welfare" state to a neoliberal "carceral" state. In addition to work by Wacquant, we read Marie Gottschalk's, *Caught*, a political scientist's account of how neoliberalism (and structural racism) helped produce mass incarceration in the US.

In Part Six, we turn to the topic of "Gender, 'Work,' 'Family,'" and (neoliberal) Capitalism. We will bring to bear on this topic the various approaches to understanding neoliberal governance we have encountered, as well as our questions and doubts.

A final goal of the course is to enhance your skill in the art and science of political theory research. To help you develop a critical grasp of (this particular array of) modes of investigation and argumentation that you might use in your own work, we pay attention to the approaches used by the thinkers we engage in the course. The formal assignments of the course are structured to help you develop knowledge and skills necessary to conduct independent research.

POLICIES and EXPECTATIONS

I treat this course as a research seminar. That means a few things. Most importantly, it means that I expect more time, energy and independence than usual. I expect you to participate as much as possible as an independent scholar, e.g. read as if this were your thesis, with an eye to what to we need to explore in order to deepen our grasp of neoliberalism and the scholarship about it. Also, because I expect us to be "thinking as we go," don't be surprised if the readings and assignments change mid-course. If we discover that we need to think more carefully about X, well, then we'll have to think more carefully about X. And if doing so requires cutting Y, well, so be it. More than usual, responsibility for making this course work rests largely with you. Based on my experience, the great thing about all of this is that you will be engaged in and rewarded by this course in unusual ways.

Late work: As a rule, I do not accept late assignments. Discipline can be useful. I hope to help you cultivate a certain amount of it.

More importantly, the written assignments for this course are carefully sequenced and our classroom discussions will often center on students' written work. For this reason, late work is *especially* problematic. Please note that at key points in the semester, I ask you to turn in work in progress. *Neither I nor your classmates expect perfection in works in progress.* It is imperative that you turn in your work on time so that your peer reviewers and I will have time to read and respond to your work.

Disability accommodation: Students with disabilities requiring accommodation should be in touch with me and the director of disability support services (Theresa Lowrie, disability-services@reed.edu) within the first two weeks of class in order to make arrangements for suitable accommodation.

Communication: I will use email (often via Moodle) to post important announcements about the course. Please be sure to check your Reed email at least once a day so that you will see these messages. You can reach me via email for all sorts of questions, but I also *strongly* encourage you to come talk with me during office hours to discuss your work in progress (if you can't make my posted office hours, just email me and suggest a few alternative times for an appointment). Doing political theory is hard. Really hard. If you find yourself frustrated or stuck, please don't despair, and *please* don't keep your struggles to yourself. A quick (or long) conversation can often be the best way out of a research quagmire, so please keep me informed of what you're up to. (You are also welcome to drop by if you have made a particularly exciting discovery or lit upon an especially interesting idea that you just have to share with someone.)

ASSIGNMENTS

I have designed the course assignments to promote serious scholarly engagement with texts, ideas and each other. In addition to facilitating productive in class-discussion, the assignments are designed to help you develop your research and writing skills.

1. *Reading and Class Participation*

Your first assignment is to **read** the materials with care. Many of our texts are dense, multi-layered texts. Often you may need to read them more than once. I have tried to limit the amount of reading accordingly but, I'm afraid, have been less successful on this front than I would like to have been. This means you'll have to make (wise) decisions about where to focus your attention. And keeps notes of what you think should be cut, kept and expanded!

a) *Class Discussion*

Come to class prepared to discuss the reading critically, imaginatively and insightfully.

Active participation is essential. If speaking in class is a challenge for you, please let me know. We can work together to address the matter.

Attendance, of course, is mandatory. If you miss more than three classes, you run the risk of failing the course.

b) *Class Discussion Prompter (CDP)*

Each of you will play a special role in directing class discussion twice during the semester. (We will sign up for these days in the second class meeting; you must complete one of these days before fall break.) **You will post 2-3 discussion questions to the course Moodle twenty-four hours before class.** In class, you will re-introduce and elaborate on your questions to help direct our inquiry. While I do not require you to meet with me to discuss the materials beforehand, I encourage you to do so.

You and I will co-facilitate the discussion in class. I very much hope that your interests and insights drive the discussion. In any case, as you prepare your questions, I ask you to think carefully about the following:

- What is the central argument advanced by each of the texts under consideration? If you're having trouble understanding the text(s), I encourage you to talk to your peers and/or me about the material.
- How does consideration of one or more of the readings previously completed for this course inform your understanding of the material presently under consideration? Do any of the essays previously read complement, supplement, contradict, and/or challenge the texts now being discussed?
- What criticisms might be directed against the readings at hand? (Obviously, you may use your answer to the second question as a way of working into the third.) Here I want you to consider the limitations, unspoken assumptions, contradictions, etc. you find in the readings.

c) *CDP Preparation: Annotated Bibliography (one to two pages)*

To prepare for your role as CDP, you will develop an annotated bibliography for the assigned materials. In a paragraph or less of notes, for each reading identify the following: i. the main question or puzzle; ii. the means (approach or method and material) the author uses to investigate or “answer” the question; iii. their answer; iv. key concepts; iv. your questions (clarificatory or critical); v. thoughts about the reading for future editions of the syllabus (e.g. keep, cut, lengthen, shorten, etc). Think of these as very rough drafts of pieces of a literature review.

This is due to me as a Word doc or PDF, via email, twenty-four hours before the class you are helping to lead.

2. *Comparison of Approaches (five pages)*

A central goal of the course is for you to develop a comfortable but critical grasp of the four major approaches we engage. To this end, you will write a critical analysis comparing two of

the approaches. Your job here is both to explain the key moves, assumptions, commitments of each theory and then, with the help of the comparison, offering your own view – a thesis – about their strengths, weaknesses, etc. The questions I offer above for your preparation as CDP are good guides to what you might consider in this piece. While you will be introduced to each approach in the first few weeks of the course, we delve into them more deeply over the course of the semester. The best version of this assignment will draw on later readings. **It is, however, due anytime between 9/9 and 10/13.**

3. *Application (five pages)*

Scholars who use the concept of “neoliberalism” hold that it will help us gain a deeper understanding of “the real world” or “practices of governance” (as Tully calls them). This assignment relies on and tests that hypothesis. Your task is to use one of the four approaches to analyze a particular case or issue area (pre-determined; designated by (*) on the syllabus). If you choose to use the approach that takes up the case directly, you must consider questions or different angles one of the other approaches would raise. (At least one of these approaches must not be among the two that you use for the Comparative Analysis.) You may also use the issue area and additional information to critique the chosen approach. The material for this essay will come from the syllabus. In addition, you should find 2-3 outside sources – anything from scholarly works to popular press – to incorporate into the analysis.

A solid draft of the assignment is due to me as a Word doc or PDF, via email, twenty-four hours before the day on which we will discuss the topic in class. **The final version is due** at noon the Saturday following the class discussion.

4. *Final Research Paper (twelve to fifteen pages)*

Your main assignment for this course is a semi-independent research paper. To help you develop the skills and knowledge necessary for this task, I have broken the assignment into four steps. Twice in the process, you will have the benefit of giving and receiving feedback to/from your peers: you will exchange drafts and provide feedback in class.

a) *Précis (October 30)*

In less than one page, identify your topic, the puzzle (about the world or theory) or question you want to investigate or address. Why is this an interesting question? What are general issues you are trying to get at in addressing it? How – with which political theoretical approach or “method” and investigating what material (literature, policy, discourse, etc) – do you plan to investigate this question? Why this approach? Why this material? What do you expect to find or conclude? Note that the elements of the précis bear resemblance to those of both the annotated bibliography and the literature review.

Email the précis to me as a Word doc or PDF by **5pm on Sunday, October 30th.**

b) *Annotated Bibliography (November 13)*

Your research should draw on material from and beyond what we cover in class. Very roughly, in total, your bibliography should include between five to ten sources. At least two should be ones we did not cover in class. In anticipation of writing an outline, it makes sense to organize the bibliography according to topics or questions. See examples from the Political Science Junior Qualifying Exam webpage. http://academic.reed.edu/poli_sci/resources/juniorqual.html. Your bibliography is due, via email, on **Sunday, November 13th by 5pm.**

c) *Draft (November 27)*

Ideally, this is a full but rough draft of your final paper. At very least, it should be eight pages, though not necessarily the first eight, of your paper. The aim is to produce a substantial piece of writing and get some feedback on it before you draft the entire paper. You may want to include revised elements from your précis.

Please email the draft – with editorial directions -- to me and your writing peers by **5p on Sunday, November 27th**. Read and prepare feedback for your partners, to be delivered in class when they present their work in class (November 30 or December 5).

d) *Class Presentation (November 30 or December 5)*

In class on either 11/30 or 12/5, you will present the major questions, argument and evidence of your work-in-progress in a well-organized and rehearsed presentation. Your peers and I will give you constructive feedback. In addition to providing you with the important opportunity to hone your public speaking skills, this assignment is aimed at helping you sharpen your analysis. I expect you to incorporate feedback offered and encourage you to discuss it with me after class. As always, I encourage you to discuss your presentation with me beforehand. Do you hate public speaking? Great. Think of this as an opportunity to work on this necessary skill and please, please use me as a resource to help you succeed.

e) *Final Draft*

Please email me your final, brilliant draft on Sunday, December 11th **at noon.**

TEXTS

The following texts are required and are available for purchase at the bookstore:

Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, (New York: Zone Books, 2015)
Friedrich Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1944, 2007).
David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).
Milton Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962, 2002)
Marie Gottschalk, *Caught* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2105)
Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time* (Beacon Press, 2001)
Kathi Weeks, *The Problem With Work* (Duke University Press, 2011)

Recommended visual media:

Commanding Heights (2002)

Inside Job (2010)

Iron Lady (2011)

The Internet's Own Boy: The Story of Aaron Swartz (2014)

SYLLABUS

Part One Introduction: Questions, Terms, Concepts, Approaches

M 8/29 What is "Neoliberalism"?

<http://sfoonline.barnard.edu/gender-justice-and-neoliberal-transformations/what-is-neoliberalism/>

Jamie Peck, *Constructions of Neoliberal Reason*, chapter six, "Decoding Obamanomics"

W 8/31 Approaches to Understanding Neoliberalism

Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, chapter one.

David Harvey, *A Brief Introduction to Neoliberalism*, Introduction and chapter one.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qOP2V_np2c0&feature=youtu.be

W 9/7 Approaches, continued

Loic Wacquant, "Three Steps to a Historical Anthropology of Actually Existing Neoliberalism." *Social Anthropology*, 19-4 (November), 66-79.

Philip Mirowski, "Postface: Defining Neoliberalism," in *The Road from Mont Pèlerin: The Making of the Neoliberal Thought Collective*, ed. Philip Mirowski and Dieter Plehwe (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009).

Part Two Neoliberal Ideas, or Neoliberalism as an Ideational Production

M 9/12 Friedrich Hayek, Founder of the "Thought Collective"

Jamie Peck, *Constructions of Neoliberal Reason*, chapter two

Friedrich Hayek, "Uses of Knowledge" and "Opening Address"

W 9/14 Hayek, continued

Friedrich Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1944, 2007): introduction, chapters 1-7.

M 9/19 John Maynard Keynes, Hayek's Favorite Enemy/Foil

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d0nERTFo-Sk>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GTQnarzmTOc>

John Maynard Keynes, *The End of Laissez-Faire* in *The Collected Writings of John Maynard Keynes*, Vol. IX, pp. 272-294 (London: Macmillan, 1934, 1973).

John Maynard Keynes, "Poverty in Plenty: Is the Economic System Self-Adjusting," in *The Collected Writings of John Maynard Keynes*, Vol. XIII: *The General Theory and After. Part I: Preparation*, pp. 485-492 (London: Macmillan, 1934, 1973).

W 9/21 Keynes, continued

Richard Posner, "How I Became a Keynesian," *The New Republic* (September 22, 2009)

John Maynard Keynes, "Letter to Professor F. A. Hayek" in *The Collected Writings of John Maynard Keynes*, Vol. XXVII, pp. 385-388 (London: Macmillan, 1934, 1973).

John Maynard Keynes, "Economic Possibilities for our Grandchildren," in *The Collected Writings of John Maynard Keynes*, Vol. IX, pp. 321-332 (London: Macmillan, 1934, 1973).

John Maynard Keynes, "A Short View of Russia" in *The Collected Writings of John Maynard Keynes*, Vol. IX, pp. 253-271 (London: Macmillan, 1934, 1973).

M 9/26 The Chicago School

Jamie Peck, *Constructions of Neoliberal Reason*, chapter three

Milton Friedman, "Introduction" in *Fiftieth Anniversary: The Road to Serfdom* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1994).

W 9/28 The Chicago School, continued

Milton Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962, 2002), introduction, chapter 1-2, 6-7, 11-12.

M 10/3 Case: The US Presidential Campaign

Part Three Neoliberalism as a Class Project, or the Neo-Marxist Approach

W 10/5 David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), chapters 2-4.

M 10/10 David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), chapter 5-7.

W 10/12 (*) Case: International Trade and the TPP

Fall Break 10/15- 10/23

Part Four Neoliberalism as a Political Rationality, or the Neo-Foucaultian Approach

M 10/24 Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos* (New York: Zone Books, 2015), chapters II and III

W 10/26 Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos* (Zone Books, 2015), chapters IV and V

S 10/30, 5p Precip due via email

M 10/31(*) Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos* (Zone Books, 2015) chapter VI

Case: Education in the US

Part Five Race, Neoliberalism and a New Form of Statecraft: Cause, Effect, or Contiguous?

W 11/2 <http://www.politicalresearch.org/2014/10/08/how-colorblindness-co-evolved-with-free-market-thinking/>
Winant, Howard, "Race and Racism in the 21st Century," *Critical Sociology*, 2015, Vol. 41(2) 313–324.
Reed, Adolf, "Marx, Race and Neoliberalism," *The New Forum*, January/February 2013 vol. 22 no. 1 49-57.

M 11/7 Loic Wacquant, "Crafting the Neoliberal State: Workfare, Prisonfare and Social Insecurity," *Sociological Forum*, Vol. 25, No. 2, June 2010
---, "Class, Race and Hyperincarceration," *Dædalus*, Summer 2010.

W 11/9 Marie Gottschalk, *Caught* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2105), chapters one, three through five.

S 11/13, 5p Annotated bibliography due via email

M 11/14 (*) Marie Gottschalk, *Caught* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2105), chapters six and seven (and if you have time, chapter nine).

Case: Prisons in the US

Part Six Gender, "Work," "Family" and (Neoliberal) Capitalism

W 11/16 Anne-Marie Slaughter, "Why Women Still Can't Have it All," *The Atlantic*, July 2012.
Sheryl Sandberg, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AdvXCKFNqTY>
Nancy Fraser, "Feminism, Capitalism and the Cunning of History," *New Left Review*, March/April 2009.

Th 11/17 Speaker: Michael Ferguson (University of Colorado, Boulder), "Neoliberal Feminism: What It Is, and Why We Should Be Worried" Eliot 207, 5:30-7p

M 11/21 Speaker: Sam Chambers (Johns Hopkins), "Homo Politicus Neoliberalis" Eliot 419, 1-2:30p

Review Brown, chapters I-III for Sam's visit

W 11/23 (*) Gender, “Work” and “Family”

Joan C. Tronto, *Caring Democracy: Markets, Equality, and Justice* (New York University Press, 2013), chapters 3 and 4
Kathi Weeks, *The Problem With Work* (Duke University Press, 2011), chapter four.

Case: Gender, “Work” and “Family”

S 11/27, 5p Draft of final paper due to me and peers, via email

M 11/28 Next? Alternative Futures

Kathi Weeks, *The Problem With Work* (Duke University Press, 2011), chapter five and epilogue.

Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, epilogue.

Inclusive Capitalism: <http://www.inc-cap.com/>

Peter Evans, “Is An Alternative Globalization Possible?” *Politics & Society* 36.2 (2008).

Dean Spade, “Impossibility Now,” (2013),

<http://sfoonline.barnard.edu/gender-justice-and-neoliberal-transformations/impossibility-now/>

W 11/30 presentations and review

M 12/5 presentations and review

S, 12/11, 5p Final paper due via email