

Civil Disobedience and Resistance in the Western Tradition

Lecturer: Peter Kruger

Language of Instruction: English

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Course Aims

The aim of this course is to explore and critically interrogate the political philosophical concepts of civil disobedience, resistance and violence, as well as their relation to democratic thought in the western tradition. At the end of the course the hope is that students develop skills in close and critical reading, cultivate skills for effective oral and written communication and have a broader understanding of political theory generally and dissent particularly.

Course Content

This course starts with an introduction to the phenomenon of civil disobedience in the classic sense, centred on the debates on the definition, justification and role of civil disobedience and resistance as conceived in relation to the Civil Rights Movement, ML King, Jr, and later by John Rawls. After discussing what is worth retaining from these debates, and what is not, we will turn to more current and alternative frameworks with which to theorise civil disobedience and resistance today. The course will address the questions of what is 'civil' in civil disobedience, the relation between fidelity to law and disobedience, disobedience as a democratic act, the role and justification – or lack thereof – of violence in civil disobedience and resistance and the role of civil disobedience and resistance.

Requirements

With the exception of the very first class, one student will be asked to prepare a 10–15 minute presentation (summary) of each reading in addition to raising two or three critical remarks. Every student must make a presentation at least once. A different student is to respond to these critical points, which they ought to receive from the presenting student prior to the seminar.

Each student is required to submit a seminar paper on a topic of their choosing, however the chosen topic must be approved by me. Students will be asked to send a short abstract (300 words) before commencing work on their paper. The final paper should be between 1,500–2,500 words in length.

I am reachable through e-mail should a student wish to make an appointment to discuss anything related to the course; I am typically available during office hours.

Students' marks will be calculated as such:

Attendance and participation: 15%

Presentation and response: 35%

Seminar paper: 50%

Readings (Compulsory)

- Aitchison, G. 2018. 'Coercion, Resistance, and the Radical Side to Civil Disobedience' in *Raisons Politiques* 69(1): 45–61.
- Bedau, HA. 1991. 'Introduction' in HA. Bedau (ed.): *Civil Disobedience in Focus*. London: Routledge, 1–12.
- Brownlee, K. 2004. 'Features of a Paradigm Case of Civil Disobedience' in *Res Publica* 10: 337–351.
- Celikates, R. 2015. 'Learning from the Streets: Civil Disobedience in Theory and Practise' in P. Weibel (ed.): *global aCtIVISm. Art and Conflict in the 21st Century*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. 65–72.
- CrimethInk. 2012. 'The Illegitimacy of Violence, the Violence of Illegitimacy'. Available at <https://crimethinc.com/2012/03/27/the-illegitimacy-of-violence-the-violence-of-legitimacy>
- Fanon, F. 1963. *The Wretched of the Earth*. New York: Grove Press. 79–93.
- Gelderloos, P. 2007. *How Nonviolence Protects the State*. Cambridge: South End Press. 45–63.
- King, ML, Jr. 1963. *Letter From a Birmingham Jail*. Available from: https://www.csuchico.edu/iege/_assets/documents/susi-letter-from-birmingham-jail.pdf
- Morreall, J. 1976. 'The Justifiability of Violent Civil Disobedience' in *The Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 6(1): 35–47.
- Rawls, J. 1999 [1971]. *A Theory of Justice*, revised ed. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. 319–343.
- Scheuerman, WE. 2015. 'Recent Theories of Civil Disobedience: An Anti-Legal Turn?' in *Journal of Political Philosophy* 23(4): 427–449.

(Optional)

- Balibar, É. 2015. *Violence and Civility*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Delmas, C. 2018. *A Duty to Resist: When Disobedience Should be Uncivil*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Levy, JT. 2014. 'There is No Such Things as Ideal Theory' in *Social Philosophy and Policy* 33(1–2): 312–333.
- Lyons, D. 1998. 'Moral Judgment, Historical Reality, and Civil Disobedience' in *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 27(1): 31–49.
- Scheuerman, WE. 2018. *Civil Disobedience*. New York: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Shelby, T. 2016. *Dark Ghettos: Injustice, Dissent, and Reform*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- The Invisible Committee, 2015. *To Our Friends*, trans. R Hurley. South Pasadena: Semiotext(e).
- Young, IM. 2001. 'Activist Challenges to Deliberative Democracy' in *Political Theory* 29(5): 670–690.