

The thematic focus of this course is memory and its relation to politics. We will broach two broad, related, questions: What is the role of memory in politics and political theory? What is the politics of memory? Primarily, this requires beginning with recognising memory as one of our fairly common human capacities, in order to appreciate its role in our political actions. How do political beings (such as us) deal with the past? What (and whose) memory is at work in the stories we tell ourselves and in those that are told us? How can we imagine a future that is different from the past and the present?

The course is not conceived as a topical survey of “memory” in the history of political thought, nor does it exhaust all the possible ways of approaching this question. Instead, we will learn about how history and memory are practised *in* political theory, and also try our hands at these practices. I have arranged things in a way that may facilitate our treatment of the problem of memory and, in doing so, get at some issues at work in the practice of political theorising. (It also violates chronology for the most part—weird, you may say, for a course on memory and history!). We will begin with something as fairly benign as *memory*—and over the course of the semester, develop connections to history, identity, ideology, violence, memorials, urban life, political change, struggle and hope (and whatever else we can think of). We will see, in short, how *memory* mediates the personal and the political, and what this can tell us about our abilities and capacities as political beings. We will be reading select thinkers of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries whose work explores this mediation, dealing both with the politics of memory and the memory of politics.

Focusing on learning political theory *by doing*, we will together chart out a route beginning with our current understandings of memory in relation to our own selves, and then move through the following issues: (1) how and when memory becomes political; (2) various orientations to the past; (3) collective memory; (4) memorials, memorialising, and urban memory; (5) ideology and amnesia (including the question of contemporary experience and the media). Through these topics, we will continually engage the question of who we are as subjects and what we are capable of being, doing, and hoping for.

There will be no exams. You will spend many a fall day reading, reflecting on your reading, writing a memoir (parts of which will correspond to the various sections of the syllabus), and reflecting on your writing. It is my hope that this excursion, full of nostalgic afternoons and film nights where possible, will furnish some tools to understand, and respond to, the realities that we inherit and create for ourselves.

TEXTS

The following books are available at the bookstore. The remaining required readings have been placed on electronic reserve.

Dienstag, Joshua Foa. *Dancing in Chains: Narrative and Memory in Political Theory*

Kundera, Milan. *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*. Harper, 1996 (any edition will do)

Marcuse, Herbert. *An Essay on Liberation*. Beacon Press, 1969 (any edition will do)

Minow, Martha. *Between Vengeance and Forgiveness*. Beacon Press, 1998

FILMS & AUDIO

Fahrenheit 451 (for Section Two)

Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind (for Section Three)

After Life (TBA)

Unchained Memories: Readings from the Slave Narratives (for Section Four)

Shadowtime (for Section Seven)

Herbert's Hippopotamus (for Section Seven)

EXPECTATIONS & REQUIREMENTS

Participation and Attendance

I strongly believe that how we approach a text or a film or an image for that matter reflects our ethics in our human relationships—and one does not have to think too hard how this relates to politics. I would strongly encourage you to treat these writings independently, perhaps like meeting a new person. There is a delight in making something of these thinkers on our own. Where necessary, I will place reading guides on the course page accessible through e-reserves.

You are required to attend class having done the assigned reading for the day.

This class will be conducted like a seminar, and intensive participation is not only required but expected. You are not expected, however, to have made peace with and/or understood everything before coming to class—your treasure is the questions, difficulties and issues that arise from what is read, because they eventually determine what course the class will take. I am very open to letting the class collectively set the route we take, and to take detours as we choose. Thus, you have a big role in determining what we make of this semester together. Autobiographies are important. I intend the classroom atmosphere for this course to be very personal. It is the objective of the course to have us engage political theory really personally and holistically, with all our senses, memories, and histories, if you may.

Courteous participation is assumed. Do not be snide, if you can help it. Feel free to challenge anyone, including the instructor, and be able to explain your reasons or hunches. Free expression of your thoughts necessitates a great deal of responsibility, and an openness to be challenged.

We are coming to this class to understand the texts, their writers, and each other better—and if possible, grow through that experience. If you are offended by what someone says, try your best to point that out in a reasonable way—a little effort goes a long way. Understanding someone does not mean endorsing them—so don't feel that understanding a point of view different from yours makes you weaker. It doesn't. I say this because many issues discussed in this class will be contentious.

Please make it a point to keep in touch with me outside of class. We should meet in person at least once every month, and as often as you desire.

In the schedule below, I have inserted the weeks for our film nights. We will work together to see what days work best.

Your grade will be adversely affected by tardiness and flakiness. Two unexcused absences will earn you a warning, ultimately leading to suspension if things don't improve. For all students, more than 2 unexcused absences will lower the course grade by one whole letter. With every additional absence,

you will lose one letter grade. (That is, if you are getting an A- without factoring in the attendance, your grade will drop to B- if you have 4 absences, C-/D if you have 5).

Absence on the day of your roundtable, or for any preparatory meeting for it, will result in an automatic F for the roundtable portion of your grade.

Written Work: The Memoir

There will be no exams. I have divided the syllabus into seven sections. Your task in this course is to write a memoir. Corresponding to each of the seven sections, you will write a 3-page segment of the memoir, corresponding to the section's themes. In each successive segment, you will be required to revisit and rework an issue raised in any prior segment, with the help of some newly acquired tool. You are not required to work on the same theme every section, but you must choose aspects of earlier discussions to take up anew, in conjunction with newer reading and also something exciting going on in your life or around you. You may keep your memoir entirely personal/autobiographical, or hone in on contemporary or historical issues of your interest, or decide on a combination of both. You cannot go wrong here!!

In terms of ideas and skills, this project is meant to test: (1) your understanding and treatment of issues being discussed; (2) your ability to make substantial connections between your readings and your experience; (3) your ability to be an independent thinker, to incorporate new knowledge, and to use new tools critically, creatively and imaginatively; (4) your intellectual curiosity, enthusiasm, and responsibility in relation to other writers and conversants; (5) your appreciation of the personal nature of politics, and the political nature of our personal lives.

I am attaching a sample cover-sheet to be handed in with every segment. It includes a checklist of requirements—for you to assess the ground you have covered before you submit your piece, and for me to respond accordingly. This way, you and I will evaluate you jointly at every stage. Also, I will try to suggest some aspects of one segment that may be usefully addressed in a later segment. I will consider your segments a work-in-progress until you submit the complete version—so you must take my comments and suggestions seriously and try to respond to them.

It is my responsibility to give you timely feedback on your memoir-segments and to respond to you as effectively as I can; it is yours to make sure I do that by giving me things to respond to! Your first assignment (due on Tuesday, 30 August) will be your starting point, and all your subsequent written work (due on dates mentioned on the reading schedule) should be placed together in a file folder or scrapbook. You will write a total of seven 3-page segments, and append an introduction and conclusion to your complete memoir. The complete memoir should be around 25 pages long, and you will hand it in on Friday, 16 December. You will be free to choose what form its final presentation takes. We will talk about this as the end draws nearer.

For each of your memoir-segments, I have included some broad themes in the reading schedule to orient you *only* as much or as little as you need. Ultimately, you are entirely free to choose the material that you will subject to your thematic discussions.

Roundtables

You will break into groups of three on the first day of the class, and each group will carry out a roundtable discussion in the classroom on one of the five days marked in the syllabus. At the roundtables, you will hash out important questions and issues related to a particular set of issues or text/s. I will work with you with themes for each of these roundtables. Members of the group will be the key presenters, and participation of all other students will be mandatory and graded. The presenters will summarise their written analysis in around 5 minutes, and then field questions. In many cases, the roundtables and memoir-segments may supplement each other to your liking and benefit.

For course policies on Academic Honesty and Religious Holidays, please refer to the SRC Catalogue, pp. 31-33. For issues of learning skills, and subsequent accommodations, please get in touch with me, and also contact Rebecca Fiske (rebecca@simons-rock.edu).

A sketch of your grade composition

Participation (incl. films), Roundtable	25%
Written work— <i>The Memoir</i>	75%
Segments I-VI	60%
Introduction, Conclusion, Final Version	15%

CLASS SCHEDULE

* All readings marked with an asterisk have been placed on electronic reserve or are in public domain on the worldwide web. The rest are from books available at the Hart Bookstore.

I reserve the right to modify the syllabus—you will be consulted for, and informed of, changes made.

A note on suggested themes for memoir segments: Please take the word “suggested” seriously, since by no means are you expected to or required to restrict yourself to any of the themes enumerated below. The topics you can write on are endless, and I encourage and reward original thought. You are *required* to address issues of your choice through the theoretical tools and benchmarks that the readings will provide you. I am here to help that process as much as I can.

Section One: Introduction

Tuesday, 23 August	Breaking Ice,
Thursday, 25 August	*Borges, Jorge Luis. “Funes, the Memorious”
Tuesday, 30 August	Memory, Subjectivity, Identity
	<i>Segment I Due</i>

Theme for Segment I: Personal Narrative/autobiography; remembering yourself, how you became who you are, how you are constructed, a genealogy of sorts (to be discussed in class)—numerous different ways to go about this...

Section Two: Political Theory and Storytelling

Thursday, 1 September	Day Off
Tuesday, 6 September	Kundera, Milan. <i>The Book of Laughter and Forgetting</i>
Thursday, 8 September	Kundera. <i>The Book of Laughter and Forgetting</i> (contd.) <i>Fahrenheit 451</i> (Film)
Tuesday, 13 September	Kundera. <i>The Book of Laughter and Forgetting</i> (contd.)
Thursday, 15 September	Roundtable I: on Borges, Kundera, Bradbury <i>Segment II Due</i>

Suggested Themes for Segment II: Write about any specific element of the film or the novel that strikes you as intriguing, and develop connections with some contemporary issue or any aspect of your personal narrative (Segment I). How does memory, such a personal thing, become political? What is the political nature of memory, as Kundera and Bradbury try to flesh out? How would you compare them? Do they clarify or mystify how you understand the role memory plays in politics? Does anything in your experience speak to it? Do societies and nations have memory like people do?

Section Three: (The) Past Lives

Tuesday, 20 September	*Nietzsche, Friedrich. <i>On the Use and Abuse of History</i> 1.0
Thursday, 22 September	*Nietzsche. <i>On the Use and Abuse of History</i> (contd.)
Tuesday, 27 September	*Nietzsche. <i>On the Genealogy of Morals</i> . Preface and Selections from 1 st Essay (TBA)
Thursday, 29 September	*Nietzsche. <i>On the Genealogy of Morals</i> . Selections from 2 nd Essay (TBA) <i>Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind</i> (Film)
Tuesday, 4 October	*Nietzsche. <i>On the Genealogy of Morals</i> . Selections from 3 rd Essay (TBA)
Thursday, 6 October	*Dienstag, Joshua Foa. "The Future of Pain" Roundtable II: On Nietzsche <i>Segment III Due</i>

Suggested Themes for Segment III: How does Nietzsche's discussion of origins, genealogy and of various types of history speak to your own genealogy, or to how you think you relate to the past? Is his typology useful? Perhaps you can allow Nietzsche's discussion of ideals to shed some light on an ideal you or a friend/foe hold dear, or use his claims about the sovereign individual to understand/assess/evaluate yourself as a sovereign individual. What does Nietzsche suggest about the personal and political uses of memory (including in law and government), and how does this speak to your earlier considerations (in Segment II) in dealing with Kundera and Bradbury? ...

Section Four: Collective Memory—Battles with History

Tuesday, 18 October	*Dienstag. “The Politics of Memory.” Minow. <i>Between Vengeance & Forgiveness</i> . Chapters 1 & 2
Thursday, 20 October	Minow. <i>Between Vengeance & Forgiveness</i> . Chapter 6 <i>FILM (TBA)</i>
Tuesday, 25 October	<i>FILM: Unchained Memories : Readings from the Slave Narratives</i>
Thursday, 27 October	Roundtable III : on Collective Memory <i>Segment IV Due</i>

Suggested Themes for Segment IV: You may address the question of war, violence, torture, etc., in relation to historical or current events; or think of how communities and nations memorialise victory or defeat.

Section Five: The Time of Space, and the Space of Time

Tuesday, 1 November	*Weiss, Srdjan Jovanovic. “Loss of Memory?—New Urban Condition of Belgrade” *Kingwell, Mark. Review of Walter Benjamin’s <i>The Arcades Project</i> .
Thursday, 3 November	Roundtable IV: On the Memory of Landscapes <i>Segment V Due</i>

Suggested Themes for Segment V: You may think of the memory of spaces—think of the way your own landscape has changed, either through your mobility over the years, or the changes that your hometown or neighbourhood has undergone. What is retained and what is lost, and what is created anew? Why is this significant, or why is it not? ...

Section Six: The Matter and Labour of History

Tuesday, 8 November	*Marx, Karl. “Estranged Labour”
Thursday, 10 November	*Marx. <i>German Ideology</i> (Selections) OR Marx. <i>The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte</i>
Tuesday, 15 November	*Marx. <i>The Manifesto of the Communist Party</i> . Selections (TBA)
Thursday, 17 November	Roundtable V: on Marx and Memory <i>Segment VI Due</i>

Suggested Themes for Segment VI: The relation between alienation and memory; what we do with our time in capitalism; Marx’s understanding of history and of ideology; what is a “historical materialist”? What is the “time” of revolution?

Section Seven: The Wounds and Recoveries of Memory

Tuesday, 29 November	*Benjamin, Walter. "Eduard Fuchs, Collector and Historian"
Thursday, 1 December	*Benjamin. "Theses on the Philosophy of History " <i>Film: Herbert's Hippopotamus</i>
Tuesday, 6 December	Marcuse, Herbert. <i>An Essay on Liberation</i> . Parts I & II (Selections TBA)
Thursday, 8 December	Marcuse. <i>An Essay on Liberation</i> . Parts III & IV (Selections TBA)
Friday, 16 December	Final Memoir Presentation; Completed Memoirs (Segments I-VII, Introduction, Conclusion) Due

Suggested Themes for Segment VII: The relation of memory to sensibility...What is your "sensibility"? What memory figures in the "new sensibility"? How does Marcuse "remember" Marx, Nietzsche and Benjamin? How is a different form of society possible if all our capacities are moulded in one form? ...[You are required to attach an introduction and concluding remarks (1-2 pages each) to the complete memoir before handing it in.]