Course description and aims

Political philosophers – from the ancient Greeks to contemporary deliberative democrats – have typically denigrated the role of the passions in political life. Contrasting the passions to reason, many (but not all!) political philosophers have understood the passions – anger, fear, desire, disgust, etc. - as so many obstacles to freedom, justice, autonomy, and right judgment. Be this as it may, the passions remain a central and unavoidable component of our political life, perhaps especially in a democracy. This course will provide a broad exploration of political philosophy’s traditionally negative portrayal of the passions, alongside an attempt to articulate a more positive place for the passions in democratic politics. The goal throughout will be to couple theoretical and scholarly discussion with examples drawn from contemporary politics. With this goal in mind, the first half of the course will explore important philosophical and historical approaches to the politics of the passions. The course’s second half will pursue an in-depth interdisciplinary study of three prominent and aversive political passions: fear, disgust, and resentment.

Course mechanics

This is an advanced political theory seminar. Every student should come to class prepared to engage in lively conversation based on the week’s reading. In addition to bringing the pertinent texts to class, students will be asked to write weekly short (1 page!) reader responses. The reader responses should avoid summary, and instead critically
engage a particular question or theme relevant to the reading. Responses will be turned in at the beginning of each Thursday class and counted as a part of the final participation grade (30% of the total). Each student will also be asked to help lead discussion during one class period. On the day the student leads discussion, he or she will be asked to deliver a 10-15 minute presentation on the readings. These presentations should be at once synoptic and evaluative. A sign-up sheet will be provided the second week of class.

In addition to short writing assignments and seminar participation, students will be asked to write a research paper (around 15-20 pages) due during finals week (see below). Students must submit a proposal of their research topic the eighth week of class. Papers will focus on a topic covered in the seminar while also drawing on additional reading. The final paper (including the graded proposal) will be worth 70% of the total grade. There will be no final exam.

Books to purchase

Available at Cornell University Bookstore:

Susan A. Bandes, *The Passions of Law*
Amy Gutmann and Dennis Thompson, *Why Deliberative Democracy?*
Cheryl Hall, *Trouble with Passion: Political Theory beyond the Reign of Reason*
Ange-Marie Hancock, *Politics of Disgust: The Political Identity of the Welfare Queen*
Albert O. Hirschman, *The Passions and the Interests*
Martha Nussbaum, ed., *For Love of Country? Debating the Limits of Patriotism*
Corey Robin, *Fear: The History of a Political Idea*
Michael Walzer, *Politics and Passion: Towards a More Egalitarian Liberalism*

Readings marked “*” on e-reserve.

PART ONE: PASSION & POLITICS

Week 1: Introduction

January 26

Herman Melville, “The Quarter-Deck” from *Moby Dick* (handout)

Week 2: The Political Trouble with the Passions

February 2

Martha Nussbaum, “Rational Emotions” from *Poetic Justice: The Literary Imagination and Public Life*, 53-78*

Week 3: Governing the Passions: Two Strategies

February 9

A.A. Long and D. Sedley, “The Passions”*
Martha Nussbaum, “Stoic Tonics,” “The Extirpation of the Passions”*
Madison, Hamilton, Jay, *The Federalist* (#10, #49, #51)*

Week 4: Democracy without Passion?

February 16

Amy Gutmann and Dennis Thompson, *Why Deliberative Democracy?*

Week 5: The Place of the Passions in Democratic Theory

February 23

Jane Mansbridge, “Everyday Talk in the Deliberative System”*
Wendell Phillips, “Philosophy of the Abolition Movement”*

Week 6: Love of Country: Democracy and Patriotism

March 2

Wendy Brown, “Political Idealization and its Discontents”*
Martha Nussbaum, ed. *For Love of Country? Debating the Limits of Patriotism*
John Schaar, “The Case for Patriotism” *

Week 7: Passion and Democratic Activism

March 9

Iris Marion Young, “Activist Challenges to Deliberative Democracy,” *Political Theory* 29 (5), 670-90.
Audre Lourde, “The Erotic as Power”*

Film Screening: “ACT UP! Stop the Church!”

Week 8: From Passions to Interests: Towards the Politics of Calculation

March 16
Albert O. Hirschman, *The Passions and the Interests*

Research paper proposals are due.

**Week 9: No Class**

March 23 / Spring Break

**PART TWO: FEAR, DISGUST & RESENTMENT**

**Week 10: Fear, Liberalism, and the Social Contract**

March 30

Judith Shklar, “The Liberalism of Fear”*  
Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (excerpts)*

Film Screening: “The Power of Nightmares I”

**Week 11: The Political Uses of Fear**

April 6

Mike Davis, “Fortress Los Angeles”*  
Newspaper Articles

Film Screening: “The Power of Nightmares II”

**Week 12: Disgust and American Politics**

April 13

Mary Douglas, “The Abominations of Leviticus”*  
Ange-Marie Hancock, *Politics of Disgust: The Political Identity of the Welfare Queen*

**Week 13: Disgust and the Law**

April 20

Martha C. Nussbaum, “Secret Sewers of Vice” Disgust, Bodies, and the Law” in Bandes  
Dan M. Kahan, “The Progressive Appropriation of Disgust” in Bandes  
Newspaper Articles
Week 14: Nietzsche and the Politics of Resentment

April 27

Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*

Week 15: Resentment and American Politics

May 4

Wendy Brown, “Wounded Attachments”*
William Connolly, “Fundamentalism in America”*
Newspaper Articles

Film Screening: “Affliction”

Final Research Paper Due May 12:00 15th at 307 White Hall