

Phil 335A Power and Oppression

Professor Sylvia Berryman
Taught on UBC campus and Guatemala

Summer Term 1 2023
May 15th-June 30th

This course examines philosophical theories of power and oppression and the significance of these phenomena in human interactions. The image of power and its potential oppressive effects on the human psyche and on social structure and civil society are themes that have haunted political thought: changing social structures produce different imageries and narratives of oppressive power. As philosophers attempt to articulate these concerns about the nature of power and oppression, they clarify our deepest values as individuals and our aspirations as a human community.

Experientially-informed philosophical research requires students to consider the applicability of abstract theories to a particular context. Daily experience of a less developed country environment, and opportunities to listen to the experiences and conceptual frameworks of people familiar with the intersections of oppression and poverty, form an essential background to your philosophical research for this course.

Readings: Available on Canvas. *=Guatemala focused readings; **=Indigenous authors
Note: Weeks 1-3 will be taught on the UBC campus, weeks 5-7 on location in Guatemala. A selection of academic publications on Guatemalan history, politics, and culture will be made available to students. Students can use these materials (and/or other documents) in developing topics for short assignments and final research papers.

Classes 1-5: Historical Perspectives (meets jointly with CENS 315)

Introduction: * Bartolomé de las Casas, 'Preface,' *In Defense of the Indians*

* Jon Beasley-Murray, 'Prologue: October 10, 1492', in *Post-Hegemony*

Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* Part 1, ch. 10-11, 13

Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality* part II, pp. 60-70.

Marx and Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* 1&2

Hannah Arendt, 'Ideology and Terror,' *The Origins of Totalitarianism*

J.S. Mill, 'On Individuality', ch. 3, *On Liberty*

Herbert Marcuse, 'New Forms of Control,' ch. 1, *One-Dimensional Man*

Michel Foucault, 'Panopticism,' ch. 3, *Discipline and Punish*

Michel Foucault, 'The Repressive Hypothesis,' ch. 2, *Hist. of Sexuality* vol. 1

** Irma Otzoy, 'Tecún Uman and the Conquest Dance [Pre-Conquest]'

Classes 6-8: Theorizing Power

Charles Taylor, 'Foucault on Freedom and Truth'

Stephen Lukes, 1-7 in *Power: A Radical View*, 2nd Ed.

Isaiah Berlin, 'Two Concepts of Liberty'

Phillip Pettit, 'Freedom as Anti-Power'

John Rawls, 'The Law of Peoples'

Allen Buchanan, 'Rawls' Law of Peoples: Rules for a Vanished Westphalian World'

Classes 9-11: Power at Work

* Tracy Ehlers, selection, *Silent Looms*

* David Stoll, selection, *El Norte or Bust!*

Mid-Term Test, Monday Jun 5th, 9:30am -- **Travel to Guatemala June 8**

Miranda Fricker, 'Epistemic justice as a condition of political freedom?'

** Victor Montejo, 'Truth, Human Rights, and Representation: Rigoberto Menchu'

Iris Marion Young, 'Responsibility, Social Connection, and Global Labor Justice'

* Gordon/Webber, Ch 3 *Blood of Extraction: Canadian Imperialism in Latin America*

Class 12: **Research Presentations** (meets jointly with CENS 315)

Students choose additional reading on the Guatemalan context and present their findings to the group, either individually or in pairs. Presentations should link themes addressed in either course to the particular situation, showing e.g. how local conditions illustrate general ideas or show weaknesses or gaps in general theories. A selection of reading materials will be made available to students.

Class 13: Theory meets Practice

** Various authors, 'Declaration of Iximché [Road to Revolution]'

** Myrna Mack, 'Assistance and Control [Genocide and Resistance]'

** Dominga Vásquez, 'Solidarity is a Characteristic of the Mayan People'

The Research Experience: Students of social theory face considerable challenges in integrating abstract theories of power and oppression into their everyday understanding and processing of daily experience. Encountering the stark realities of oppression in an unfamiliar environment where power dynamics are especially present and visible provides a unique opportunity for linking theory and practice. The narratives we encounter in our experiential learning—local perspectives on the colonial encounter, the accounts of massacre survivors or survival sex workers, economic migrants who have faced the dangers of border crossings—challenge us to consider the adequacy of our theories and to understand the particular as illustrations of a larger problem. Daily conversations within and outside of the classroom are a central piece of the academic experience; students are expected to participate fully in out-of-class opportunities and to integrate these into their theoretical writing and reflection.

Evaluation: Students will be asked to write two short assignments in preparation for their research paper, and a literature comprehension exam. These assignments will assist students in linking abstract philosophical theories to local experiences. A research project presented to the joint classes will form the basis for the final research paper: the research paper asks students to interpret an aspect of the Guatemalan experience of oppression in terms of the philosophical theories studied, reflecting in turn on the adequacy of the theories to account for the complexities of the local experience.

Assignments: 15%

Exam: 30%

Presentation: 15%

Research paper: 40%