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Office Hours: Thursdays, 2–4 pm

## CONTEMPORARY THEORIES OF AGENCY

Political Science 462, Spring 2004  
Wednesdays, 9:30 am–12:20 pm

What is agency? How is it related to, among other things, freedom, power, structures, culture, subjection, passion, novelty, democracy, and justice? How do theories of agency deal with kinds of action that seem irreducible to “control”—trusting, improvising, experimenting, representing, listening? This seminar will be focused around close readings of key texts by four influential theorists of agency: Philip Pettit (*A Theory of Freedom*), Anthony Giddens (*The Constitution of Society*), Pierre Bourdieu (*Outline of a Theory of Practice*), and Judith Butler (*The Psychic Life of Power*). These will be supplemented by a small number of additional essays, including further work by these authors; critical responses by others; and essays that suggest new directions for work on agency. Admission is by instructor consent only, and will be limited in number. Consent will not be given in advance: if you are interested, come to the first session.

**TEXTS:** The following books will be available for purchase at the Seminary Coop and will also be placed on reserve in Regenstein. All other readings (\*) will be available on e-reserve.

Philip Pettit, *A Theory of Freedom*  
Anthony Giddens, *The Constitution of Society*  
Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*  
Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power*

**REQUIREMENTS:** Each student taking the course for credit must write a 15–20 page term paper, due Wednesday, June 9.

### WEEKLY MEETINGS AND READING ASSIGNMENTS:

1. March 31. Introductory meeting (no reading).
2. April 7. Pettit, I

Pettit, *A Theory of Freedom*, introduction and chaps. 1–5.

3. April 14. Pettit, II

Pettit, *A Theory of Freedom*, chaps. 6–7 and conclusion.

\*Pettit, “Before Negative and Positive Liberty,” chap. 1 in *Republicanism*

\*Pettit, “Republicanism: Once More with Hindsight,” epilogue in *Republicanism*

\*John McCormick, “Machiavelli Against Republicanism,” *Political Theory* 31, 5 (2003).

4. April 21. Giddens, I

Giddens, *The Constitution of Society*, introduction and chaps. 1–4.

5. April 28. Giddens, II

Giddens, *The Constitution of Society*, chaps. 5–6.

\*Giddens, “Fate, Risk, and Security” and “The Emergence of Life Politics,” chaps. 4 and 7 in *Modernity and Self-Identity*.

6. May 5. Bourdieu, I

Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, chaps. 1–3.

7. May 12. Bourdieu, II

Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, chap. 4.

\*Bourdieu, “Symbolic Violence and Political Struggles,” chap. 5 in *Pascalian Meditations*.

\*William Sewell, “A Theory of Structure,” *Am. J. Sociology* 98, 1 (July 1992).

\*Theodore Schatzki, “Practices and Actions: A Wittgensteinian Critique of Bourdieu and Giddens,” *Philosophy of the Social Sciences* 27, 3 (September 1997).

NOTE: there will be no class May 19; we will make this up by adding a session at the end.

8. May 26. Butler, I

\*Butler, “Implicit Censorship and Discursive Agency,” in *Excitable Speech*.

Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power*, introduction and chaps. 1–3.

9. June 2. Butler, II.

Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power*, chaps. 4–6.

\*Lois McNay, “Subject, Psyche, and Agency,” *Theory, Culture & Society* 16, 2 (1999): 175–93.

10. To be scheduled. Further directions.

\*Talal Asad, “Thinking about Agency and Pain,” in *Formations of the Secular*

\*Jane Bennett, “In Parliament with Things”

Additional readings TBA