

APPROACHES TO POWER

CONF 695 (005)

Spring 2013

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

Taught for the very first time this Spring, Approaches to Power is designed as an opportunity to explore the nature of *power* from a variety of intellectual and political perspectives. I have been many years in coming to teach this course, and it arises directly from my dissatisfaction with the way power has been under-theorized in conflict resolution and peacebuilding: in peace and conflict studies generally. At first glance this may sound counter-intuitive: after all, many conflict theorists and social scientists would define social or political conflict *ab initio* as competition over sources of power, and contests by parties over the ability to deploy power as each desires. Indeed, classical “realist” IR, with roots in Thucydides, Hobbes, or Machiavelli, takes this view, abetted by a straightforward and “common sense” definition of power. But when one tries to move beyond the commonsensical, definitions of power abound, disagreement among theorists is sharp, and the concept emerges as one of those “essentially contested” ideas (much like “culture”) that characterize so much social inquiry.

Whatever the fuzzy status of “power” in conflict studies generally, the real issue (for me) is how the concept is understood when one comes to *practice*: not to conflict analysis but to conflict resolution/transformation or (the newer and more ambitious term of art) peacebuilding. This is because many conceptions of practice have tacitly assumed symmetry or balance between the parties; or have advocated thin ideas of “empowerment” as remedies when they do not assume this; or – like John Burton’s invocation of Basic Human Needs as trumping power – have sought to “disappear” the thing entirely. For third parties intervening in other peoples’ misfortunes, the problem with all these dodges is that inattention to power (asymmetry) raises serious ethical concerns. Attention to these concerns will be an important part of how we approach the readings; in some of the readings these concerns are front and center. Were this a course “on power” in a political science, philosophy, or political sociology curriculum we might not need to engage these concerns. We might end the course where the preceding paragraph ends, with the essential contestation of ideas, or in a poststructural miasma where nothing fixed or “true” can be asserted with confidence. But we don’t have that intellectual (or political) luxury. When we move into the world as practitioners, whether in the “micro” setting of inter-party mediation or ADR, or the “macro” (structural) setting

of postconflict peacebuilding, what we understand, or misunderstand about power has real-world consequences for the parties – particularly for the weaker parties. This is the reason we'll start with a chapter I'm sure most of you have read in several S-CAR courses, the Laue and Cormick discussion of third party ethics, and (less often read) Nadim Rouhana and Susan Korper's article on power asymmetry in the context of interactive problem solving (the "Problem Solving Workshop").

The course is structured roughly in the order of the preceding paragraphs: first we discuss power analytically and theoretically, as "objective" social scientists. Then we move to the concerns of conflict resolution, transformation, and peacebuilding: of practice. Another vector in the course is the move from micro (interpersonal) to macro (structural) levels of analysis, around critiques of postconflict peacebuilding. Lurking somewhat behind our investigation of power will be equally contested notions of resistance, culture, and interests. Taught now for the first time, in Approaches to Power we're all explorers together of this complex terrain.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

All George Mason University students have agreed to abide by the letter and the spirit of the Honor Code. You can find a copy of the Honor Code at academicintegrity.gmu.edu. All violations of the Honor Code will be reported to the Honor Committee for review. With specific regards to plagiarism, three fundamental and rather simple principles to follow at all times are that: (1) all work submitted be your own; (2) when using the work or ideas of others, including fellow students, give full credit through accurate citations; and (3) if you are uncertain about the ground rules on a particular assignment, ask for clarification. If you have questions about when the contributions of others to your work must be acknowledged and appropriate ways to cite those contributions, please consult with me. Although I will want all written assignment in hardcopy (unless impossible for other reasons) please keep electronic copies available of all assignments.

GMU Email Accounts

Students must activate their GMU email accounts to receive important University information, including messages related to this class.

The Writing Center

The Writing Center is a free writing resource that offers individual, group, and online tutoring. For general questions and comments please contact us at wcenter@gmu.edu or call: 703-993-4491.

Office of Disability Services

If you are a student with a disability and you need academic accommodations, please see me and contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS) at 993-2474. All academic accommodations must be arranged through the ODS. <http://ods.gmu.edu>

REQUIRED READINGS

Books (available at the Arlington Bookstore):

Kevin Avruch, **CONTEXT AND PRETEXT IN CONFLICT RESOLUTION**
Paradigm Publishers ISBN 978-161205060-7

Kenneth Boulding, **THREE FACES OF POWER**
Sage ISBN 0-8039-3862-4

Michel Foucault, **POWER (The Essential Works of Foucault, Vol. 3)**
New Press, ISBN 978-156584-709-5 (or: 1565847091)

John Gaventa, **POWER AND POWERLESSNESS: QUIESCENCE AND REBELLION
IN AN APPALACHIAN VALLEY**
University of Illinois Press 0-252-00985-1

Steven Lukes, **POWER: A RADICAL VIEW (2nd ed.)**
Palgrave, ISBN 0-333-42092-6

Oliver Richmond, **A POST-LIBERAL PEACE**
Routledge ISBN 0415667844

James Scott, **DOMINATION AND THE ARTS OF RESISTANCE**
Yale University Press, ISBN 0-300-05669-9

Articles/chapters on E-Reserve (password provided in class):

Laue, J and G. Cormick, "The Ethics of Intervention in Community Disputes," In,
ETHICS OF SOCIAL INTERVENTION, G. Bermant et al. eds., Washington:
Hemisphere Publishing Corp., 1978, pp. 205-232.

Martin, B. "Gene Sharp's Theory of Power," **JOURNAL OF PEACE RESEARCH**
2(26):213-222, 1989.

Mitchell, C.R. "Asymmetry and Strategies of Regional Conflict Reduction," In, I.W.
Zartman and V. Kremenyuk, eds. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1995, pp.25-57.

Morgenthau, H.J. **POLITICS AMONG NATIONS**, New York: Knopf, 1948, pp. 13-25.

Rouhana, N. "Group Identity and Power Asymmetry in Reconciliation Processes: The
Israeli-Palestinian Case," **PEACE AND CONFLICT** 10(1):33-52, 2004.

Rouhana, N. and S. Korper, "Power Asymmetry and Goals of Unofficial Third Party Intervention in Protracted Intergroup Conflict," PEACE AND CONFLICT 3(1):1-17, 1997.

Recommended Reading:

Machiavelli, THE PRINCE (inexpensive paperback or free e-book)

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Even given its size, I hope to run the class as a seminar, where full participation is encouraged, and noted. Please have the reading for the week done by class time. The requirements for the class are a midterm exam, handed out on March 11 and due in class after the break, on March 25. The midterm counts for 30% of the final grade. A second exam, handed out on April 29 and due in our final class, May 6, counts for 30% of the grade. A brief case study of a dispute or conflict (one covered in this class or not), *wherein some form of conflict resolution/transformation was invoked*, focused on the dynamics of power, will count for 30% of the final grade. I will have more to say about this requirement, including due dates, later. Class participation will count for 10%.

COURSE PROGRAM

Part One: Introductions

Wk 1 1/28: Course Orientation: The Dilemma of Power in Conflict Resolution

Wk 2 2/4: (A) Introducing "The Dilemma" (for Conflict Resolution)
Read: Laue & Cormick (E-Reserves)
Rouhana and Korper (E-Reserves)
Avruch, chapter 2

(B) Introducing Power
Read: Thucydides, "The Melian Dialogue"
<http://lygdamus.com/resources/New%20PDFS/Melian.pdf>
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Melian_dialogue
Morgenthau (R-Reserves)
Martin (E-Reserves)
Lukes pp. 1-59
Recommended: *The Prince*, any edition

Part Two: Approaches to Power

- Wk 3 2/11:** Three Faces of Power-1: Steven Lukes's Approach
Read: Lukes, pp. 60-151
Gaventa, pp. 1-44
- Wk 4 2/18:** The Three Faces in Appalachia: Powerlessness and the Riddle of "Quiescence"
Read: Gaventa, pp. 47-201
- Wk 5 2/25:** Challenging Quiescence, Challenging Power: Resistance to Domination
Read: Gaventa, pp. 205-261
Scott, pp. 1-44
- Wk 6 3/4:** Public and Hidden Transcripts: What is "False Consciousness?"
Read: Scott, pp. 45-182
- Wk 7 3/11:** Midsemester recess: no class
- Wk 8 3/18:** Infrapolitics and "Acting Out" (Rebellion or Ritual?)
Read: Scott: 183-227
Midterm exam: handout
- Wk 9 3/25:** Post-Structuralism and Power
Read: In Foucault: Introduction (Gordon); Truth & Power; Governmentality; Interview (p.239); The Subject and Power; Useless to Revolt?
Midterm exam: due
- Wk 10 4/1:** Culture and Power
Read: Avruch, chapters 3, 5, 6

Part Three: Power and Conflict Resolution

- Wk 11 4/8:** Three Faces of Power-2: Ken Boulding's Approach
Read: Boulding, all
- Wk 12 4/15:** Resolving the Dilemma-1?
Read: Avruch, chapter 9
Mitchell (E-Reserves)
Rouhana (on Reconciliation): E-Reserves

Part Four: Power, Culture, Practice & Ethics

- Wk 13 4/22:** From Conflict Resolution to Peacebuilding: Context and Pretext Revisited
Read: Richmond, pp. 1-91
- Wk 14 4/29:** Critics of the Liberal Peace: “Peacebuilding” or “Statebuilding?” Neoliberal Governmentality
Read: Richmond, pp. 92-150
- Wk 15 5/6:** Resolving the Dilemma-2? Structural Power and “Hybridity”: A Post-Liberal Peace?
Read: Richmond, pp. 151-225