COURSE SYLLABUS
POLI 4440  The Politics of Affect: Theories of Emotion and Political Life

Department of Political Science
Dalhousie University

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COURSE DESCRIPTION:

As an exploration in contemporary political theory, this course draws on recent developments in the burgeoning field of affect studies to address the relation of both conscious and non-conscious emotive experience to public and political life. Drawing on the insights and scholarship from different disciplines, we will examine the social, political and cultural theories of affect, and, more generally, emotion, to explore their role in the formation of social groups, political decision-making and cultural practice.

One focus of this course will be the relation between affect and social movements (i.e., the affective and emotional politics of collective identity and mobilization. Topics will include the affective logic of public threat, the cultural politics of emotion such as fear and shame; sensorial responses to moralistic rhetoric; and visceral responses to social groups and/or cultural practices. We will also look at how sensibility, feeling, and affect have operated in social and political movements, including considering how emotions such as fear, disgust, disdain, and compassion function in social conflict, and in the formative approaches to retribution and reconciliation.

REQUIRED TEXTS AND READINGS:

- Course Reading Package, including supplementary readings, available through the Dalhousie print shop (Basement of Henry Hicks/Life Sciences Building).
Articles in peer-reviewed journals that are accessible through the library (students are asked to download, through access to the library via their Dal account, articles that are neither from the reading package nor from the required textbook, but that are listed on syllabus with the reference to the journal in which they appear)

EVALUATION PROFILE:
Class Participation 10%
Essay 1 30%
Essay 2 30%
In-class Test 30%

ESSAY ASSIGNMENTS:
Assignment 1: Elucidating and Relating Authors

Maximum 2000 words, excluding bibliography

Select an author or two that are listed on the course syllabus. In a carefully organized (structured and developed) essay, demonstrate your understanding of the significance of his/her/their work to the development of affect studies or affect theory within cultural and political thought. You are welcome to relate different authors and their work to each other (say, for example, on a given issue or problem), but it will be important for you to mark and distinguish the differences between them.

Whether or not you choose to focus on one author alone, and whether there is only one article by that author on our syllabus, you are required to draw on a wide variety (a minimum of 4) of the readings listed on the syllabus in developing your discussion of his/her/their work.

You are always encouraged to supplement the course resources with additional research materials or scholarly journals, etc., but you are expected to engage with the course materials, and/or show your mastery of them in your discussion of the author you choose.

You are required to properly document your essays according to either APA, Chicago, or MLA guidelines (which are available on line and at the writing centre). This means, among other things, that all quotations and direct summaries from a text or article must include a properly formatted citation, with a precise page number) and proper corresponding bibliographic reference. Perhaps because it is among the most simple and clear formats, I recommend using the Chicago author/date system.

See below for additional essay objectives.
Assignment 2: Issues in Affect Studies and Why they Might Matter

Maximum 2000 words, excluding bibliography

Choose a very specific issue or question in affect studies that is addressed in one or more of the readings for this course. You are asked to demonstrate your understanding of this issue (e.g., a leading question or central debate on any topic of your choice, or a passing question flagged by one of the authors); clarify the debates around it and/or the analyses or critiques that have been or could be brought to the subject and/or clarify the differences between authors or disciplines or fields on it; and conclude with a consideration of the implications for contemporary political theory or public policy.

Additional Essay Objectives:

a) Concerning comprehension, breadth of the materials that you cover, and accuracy of content. One objective of these assignments is for you to demonstrate your understanding and thoughtful application of a wide selection of the readings covered during the course and listed on the syllabus for this course and/or in the text used for this course.

b) Concerning format. It is also designed to assist you in developing and/or demonstrating the skills and practices of clearly and accurately representing, documenting, contextualizing, and contrasting the ideas and arguments of other writers on a given topic, while organizing and developing them into a coherent scholarly argument, analysis.

c) Concerning focus. It is designed to address theories and/or approaches to violence in a given context. It also is designed for you to show your consideration and understanding of the implications for public policy for your selected issue.

Essays that do not meet the assignment requirements will not accepted/graded.

Test - Oct. 17

This test will be held in-class and will be comprised of up to 12 short-answer questions that will evaluate your understanding (and ability to apply) the work of the authors listed among required readings for this course and those discussed in class. It will cover the readings up to the end of October (i.e., two weeks beyond the date of the test, so you are asked to read ahead for two weeks to be able to integrate their arguments into your answers).

At the very outset of the course, you are encouraged to begin to review (and to begin taking notes on) all the materials covered as requirements for the course, both to ensure that your
essays are informed by what is covered within them, and to prepare for the test, which will grant you an opportunity to demonstrate to summarize and apply them.
Schedule of Weekly Topics and Readings

Weeks and Topics

1. Sept. 5
   Introduction and Overview

2. Sept 12
   Affect Theory Across the Disciplines: The Politics of Intensities and Feelings

   Additional recommended resources

   Discussion questions:
   • What is Affect? Affect theory? And what’s it good for?
   • What is ‘the body’? and how might we understand its appearance in political thought?
   • What accounts for the “turn” to affect? And what else should be taken into account?

3. Sept. 19
   Foundational Themes in Affect Studies
   Framing questions about Bodies, Intensities, Non-Cognitive responses
   • Ruth Leys, The Turn to Affect: A Critique, Critical Inquiry, 37:3, pp. ?? (this is a great accompaniment to Massumi, as she critically engages with the insistent separation of
cognition and affect that is presumed by Massumi). Tomkins, Damasio are also discussed


Recommended resources

- Etienne Balibar, Spinoza and Politics (selections)

Discussion questions:

- What is ‘autonomous’ about affect?
- Why would Gregg and Seigworth mark Massumi’s essay as foundational?
- How does Spinoza’s Ethics ‘fit’ into the canon of western philosophy? What strikes you as particularly unique.
- Against the grain of contemporary political theory, what themes and terms stand out in Sedgwick and Frank’s essay?
- What do you make of the attention to the brain/mind?

4. Sept 26
Spinoza and Deleuze: Configuring the Material and Ideal in Contemporary Theory


Additional resources:

- Teresa Brennan, *The Transmission of Affect*
- Baruch Spinoza, *Ethics….* (selections)
5. Oct 3
The Affecte Body: Bodies without Images

- Mike Featherstone, “Body, Image, Affect in Consumer Culture,” Body Society 16:1 (March 2010), pp. 193-221. (this is a very nicely written, clear and sophisticated discussion of what Patricia Clough has called the ‘biomediated body’... looking at the emergence of new frames of thinking of the body and the difference that new media (via Hansen) makes.

Additional recommendations:


6. Oct 10
The Materialist Context: Embodied Minds, Emergent Properties, and the Post-Human


Additional Readings (with a technological focus)


7. Oct 17: In Class Assignment/Test

8. Oct. 24
   **Affect and Power: Biopolitics and the Cultural Politics of Emotion**


**Discussion questions:**

- How might we understand the relations between affect and power?
- What does Anderson refer to when he speaks of ‘power’? How about for Ahmed?
- Provide/consider examples in which affect is ‘modulated’ today, in what contexts and how?
- What are ‘cultural politics’?
- How does happiness ‘function’ for Ahmed.
- How might what Ahmed does with ‘happiness’ be extended or applied elsewhere? Examples?

9. Oct. 31
   **Subliminal Influence and Moral Psychology**


10. Nov. 7
Micropolitics, Moralism, Public Life


Additional resources:


Discussion Questions

- Who is George Lakoff, and what previous work informs this analysis of ‘moral politics’?
- What do you make of Lakoff’s distinction between the underlying structures of liberal vs conservative frames of thought?
- How might we characterize the (non)religious Left’s ‘emotional cultural war,’ were we to apply Stein’s approach to the question.

11. Nov. 14

Emotion and Political Identity in the International Politics Resonance Machines


Additional considerations:


Discussion questions

- What is the role of affect in the forging of political identities?
• How might Ross’s account—or that of any other theorist—help account for specific ethnic or other conflicts?
• What do you make of the idea of ‘resonance’? and how might it be made to work in different contexts?

12. Nov. 21

Emotions and Social Movements
Queer Politics and AIDS Activism


Additional suggestions:

13. Nov. 28

A Politics of Hope: Affective Philosophies of Change


Additional considerations:
