



**UNIVERSITÉ
DE GENÈVE**

**FACULTÉ DES SCIENCES
DE LA SOCIÉTÉ**

DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE & INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

3RD GENEVA GRADUATE CONFERENCE IN POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

17 – 18 FEBRUARY 2022

GECOPOL

THE GENEVA COLLOQUIUM IN POLITICAL THEORY



KEYNOTE SPEAKERS

Sandrine Baume

Université de Lausanne

Jason Brennan

Georgetown University



PROGRAMME

ZOOM ONLINE EVENT, ALL TIMES ARE CET

17 February 2022



13:00 – Welcome Address

Emanuela Ceva (Université de Genève)



Keynote Talk – Virtual Room 1

Chair: Matteo Gianni (Université de Genève)

Sandrine Baume (Université de Lausanne)

Against Compromise in Democracy?

A Plea for a Fine-Grained Assessment

14:35-16:05 **Graduate Session 1**

A. Virtual Room 1 – Theories of Institutions | Chair: Matthieu Debief
(Université de Genève)

- Karolina Jedrzejczak (University of Manchester): How Should We Talk about a Crisis of Liberal Democracy?
- Colin Rowe (KU Leuven): Between State Governments and Governance: Polycentric Government as a Framework for Normative Theories of Competency Placement.



B. Virtual Room 2 – Identity Politics | Chair: Esma Baycan Herzog
(Université de Genève)

- Francesca Cesarano (Vita-Salute San Raffaele University, Milan): Femininity and the Legitimacy of Blanket Bans on Harmful Bodily Modifications.
- Ali Ekmekci (Üsküdar University): Is There a Conflict between the Concepts of Freedom of Speech and Identity?



16:05-16:15 Break



16:15-17:45 Graduate Session 2

A. Virtual Room 1 – Democratic Elections | Chair: Nenad Stojanović
(Université de Genève)

- William Chan (University of Manchester): What, if at All, is Objectionable About Appearance-based Voting?
- Eleonora D'Annibale (KU Leuven): On the Justification of Electoral Rights.

B. Virtual Room 2 – Freedom and Equality | Chair: Serkan Şeker
(Université de Genève)

- İlkin Huseynli (University of Milan): Freedom without Ability
- Xuanpu Zhuang (Bowling Green State University): How to Relate as Equals in Ordinary Life.



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18 February 2022
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13:00-14:45 **Graduate Session 3**

A. Virtual Room 1 – Democratic Theory

Chair: Alexander Matthias Geisler (Université de Genève)

- Vincent Harting (London School of Economics): Random Selection, Incentives-based Capture and Class Specificity.
- Palle Bech-Pedersen (Hamburg University): On the Problem of Blind Deference. A Lafontian Challenge to Landmore's Open Democracy.
- Eric Shoemaker (University of Toronto): What Does Democracy Have to Do with the Public Interest?

B. Virtual Room 2 – Property

Chair: Maria Carolina Jiménez García (Université de Genève)

- Sergei Sazonov (University of Tartu): The Entrepreneurial Theory of Ownership.
- Arianna Dini (University of Turin and University of Vienna): Property and Realism as Genealogy Critique.

14:50-16:20 **Graduate Session 4**

A. Virtual Room 1 – Responsibility

Chair: Marta Giunta Martino (Université de Genève)

- Elena Matías Casacuberta (Sciences Po Paris): Transnational Firms and the Narratives of Responsibility.
- Giulia Balossino (University of Milan): A Place for Desert in Distributive Justice: Role-responsibility.



B. Virtual Room 2 – Distributive Justice

Chair: Melis Pinar Akdag (Université de Genève)

- Elena Icardi (University of Milan): Neo-republicanism and Distributive Justice: the Threat of Wealth Inequality to Freedom as Non-domination.
- Augusto Sperb Machado (University of Lausanne): Does “Manna from Heaven” Matter for Theories of Justice? Some Lessons from a Thought Experiment Used by Nozick and Cohen against Rawls.



16:20-16:30 Break



16:30-18:00 **Keynote Talk** – Virtual Room 1

Chair: Emanuela Ceva (Université de Genève)

Jason Brennan (Georgetown University)

Nudging Heretics: A Conditional Defense



Conference ends



ABSTRACTS



🎤 Keynote Talks 🎤

Sandrine Baume (Université de Lausanne)

Against Compromise in Democracy? A Plea for a Fine-Grained Assessment.

Compromise is often considered to be an indispensable source of stability in democratic governments and is perceived as inevitable in collective action (Carens 1979: 126). However, compromises have often been and still are the subject of some disdain. In the first part of the talk, I intend to provide a systematic mapping of the objections against political compromises that 20th- and 21st-century scholars have developed within the field of political theory. A preliminary survey of the literature allowed for identifying five main arguments against compromise. The first two objections both appeal to the respect for values. The anti-relativist objection asserts that compromises are made at the expense of universal moral principles (Menkel-Meadow 2016: 3), whereas concerns about integrity are animated by fears that compromise solutions may infringe on principles with which we must demonstrate consistency (Dworkin 1986). The third objection concerns the incompatibility between compromise and a specific understanding of politics as marked by its irreducible conflictual dimension (Mouffe 1998). The fourth and fifth objections concern inequality, either because the outcome of a compromise may disadvantage less-privileged groups due to the unequal power resources of the compromising parties (Ruser and Machin 2017: 12-28), or because it may be detrimental to less audible claims and hence reduce the diversity of political debates (Ruser and Machin 2017: 44). In the second part, I intend to explore possible rebuttals to the aforementioned objections with existing arguments. The systematic scrutiny of objections and their rebuttals show that the counterarguments do not annihilate but rather qualify the validity of most normative and empirical claims against a politics of compromise. A fine-grained arbitration between possible objections and rebuttals pleads for a multidimensional and nuanced assessment of the value of compromise in democracy, which challenges political discourses that convey the polymorphic disdain of compromise.



Jason Brennan (Georgetown University)

Nudging Heretics: A Conditional Defense.

Nearly half the world believes that failing to believe the right things condemns a person to eternal damnation. This paper argues that most such people cannot advocate a principled stance in favor of freedom of religion. Instead, they should favor using various forms of nudges and soft paternalism to greatly increase the chances that others will adopt the correct beliefs. We argue that various attempts to rebut this position fail. The unfortunate upshot of this is not that we should endorse such doctrinal paternalism, but rather that a large percentage of the world cannot consistently commit themselves to freedom of religion.



↻ Graduate Papers ↻

Graduate Session 1

Karolina Jedrzejczak (University of Manchester)

How Should We Talk about a Crisis of Liberal Democracy?

Recently, there has been much concern that liberal democracies face an existential crisis. However, this claim has been criticised as unfounded and unduly alarmist. In particular, some question whether the popular use of 'crisis' is a result of problematic adherence to overly high and unrealistic normative ideals. Put differently, the current use of the label is unwarranted, critics say, because it merely denotes an inescapable distance between the actual regime and its ideal. I call this the worry of 'permanent crisis'.

In this paper I defend the concept of crisis against this worry. It has two main lines of defence. First, I develop a conceptual safeguard against the worry of permanent crisis. This is done by introducing a conception of crisis wherein it denotes a systemic shortfall in reaching a fundamental aim and is diagnosed using a historical or comparative benchmark. Second, the paper unpacks the worry as a part of a wider concern which arises in a discussion on the state of liberal democracy. This concern is addressed by re-examining a popular conceptualisation of liberal democracy as composed of a liberal and a democratic strand. I argue this two strand view diminishes the clarity of the evaluative analysis.

Colin Rowe (KU Leuven)

Between State Governments and Governance: Polycentric Government as a Framework for Normative Theories of Competency Placement

We are represented at many levels of government: cities, regions, states, and transnational organizations. Each has its own set of powers or areas of jurisdiction and the trend towards trans-state cooperation on the one hand and recognition of local governments on the other means that these different governing bodies have only increased in



importance. In this context it is important to have good justifications for which level of government should be in charge of a particular area of jurisdiction (such as healthcare or education). Normative theories which provide this guidance, such as subsidiarity are conceptually unclear and normatively unconvincing. This is due, in large part, to political philosophy's contextualization of the political landscape as either state-centric or as a network of stakeholders (governance). The state-centric approach fails to recognize the importance of the multiple levels of government, while governance theories fail to recognize the importance of distinct governments (instead, focussing on networks). Thus, neither approach is well suited to tackle the question of which level of government should have a particular power. I argue that a shift in political philosophy away from a context of state governments and governance to a context of polycentric government is needed to answer these questions. In this new context, I propose a potential normative theory that provides guidance for what level of government should have a particular area of jurisdiction.

Francesca Cesarano (Vita-Salute San Raffaele University, Milan)

Femininity and the Legitimacy of Blanket Bans on Harmful Bodily Modifications

The controversial relation between gendered social norms of appearance and people's agency casts a shadow on the prioritisation of autonomy in the liberal state, as women may come to opt for harmful or potentially harmful practices, such as female genital cutting (FGC) or cosmetic surgery, just to conform to the standards of femininity force in their community (Bartky, 1997).

The liberal state is called to make a tough decision: either intervening to protect these women's health and bodily integrity, breaching its commitment to neutrality, or leaving them free to choose what they believe is best for them, even though this decision may result from the internalisation of contingent and often unjust social norms. I shall analyse two different accounts that have attempted to find a solution to this dilemma: Nussbaum's Capabilities Approach (2013) and Chambers' Mixed Paternalism (2008).

While I argue that Nussbaum's prioritisation of autonomy does not allow



her to carry out her purpose of contrasting harmful practices deriving from unequal social norms – like FGC, while being committed, at the same time, to a political liberal framework; I also contend that Chambers' account burdens people's autonomy and hinders their self-development, as long as specific social standards, even if unjust, are still widely recognised in their society and so highly valued by them.

Ali Ekmekci (Üsküdar University)

Is There a Conflict between the Concepts of Freedom of Speech and Identity?

This work aims to make an inquiry whether there is a conceptual conflict between notions of identity and freedom of speech, especially with the latter's reliance on the concept of autonomy. Being committed to value of freedom of speech is similar in its form as any other value commitment, but at conflict with all others for its logical content. To be committed to freedom of speech is to be committed to a general value of never-ending possibility of changing one's own mind about other conceptions of good life, while commitments to certain identity is about committing to values that will serve as constant reference points for future decisions and actions and about seeking coherence. Managing continuity in one's identity, in terms of coherence between the past judgments and future ones requires a certain discursive control over the opinions and speech on the content related to that identity. Since such discursive control over an identity cannot be maintained by an individual member of a group, different group dynamics takes over such process. It is at this point when it becomes a high possibility of conflicts within such group between criticism of individual members and the mainstream discourse of the identity in general. On the other hand, when committed to freedom of speech, it is irrational to censor alternative opinions since value I endorses as vital parts of my identity, might turn out be false or not so valuable anymore in future.



Graduate Session 2

William Chan (University of Manchester)

What, if at All, is Objectionable About Appearance-based Voting?

Voters often vote for/against some candidates based on considerations of their appearance, such as skin colour, facial features and height. However, whether and why appearance-based voting is morally objectionable is a question receiving relatively little attention. This article considers three responses to that question: (a) the Merit Argument, (b) the Egalitarian Argument and (c) the Democratic Stability Argument. I argue that (c) best explains the moral objectionability of appearance-based voting. The Democratic Stability Argument says that, if appearance-based voting prevails in society, individuals might be put off from running for elections when they see that their appearance can diminish their prospects of electoral success. A political culture in which individuals see appearance as a constraint on their opportunity to participate in politics should be avoided, because one important source of people's faith in democracy is that citizens have equal and effective opportunities for political participation regardless of their physical features. To maintain people's stable faith in democracy, therefore, citizens have reason not to legitimise appearance-based voting, through engaging in such behaviour themselves. This view does not only circumvent the shortcomings of the other two arguments, but it also takes seriously the value of enhancing citizens' motivation for political participation.

Eleonora D'Annibale (KU Leuven)

On the Justification of Electoral Rights

This paper conducts a normative inquiry into the question of the justification of electoral rights, which in turn is crucial to the understanding of the broader issue of electoral rights differentiation between citizens and denizens. Existing approaches to the question of distribution of electoral rights fall within two streams of argument. On the one hand, all affected interest approaches (e.g. Dahl 1990) claim that every individual who is affected by political institutions should have



a say in the electoral process. On the other hand, coercion theories hold that everyone who is expected to comply with the laws of a polity should be involved in their shaping (e.g. Lopez-Guerra 2005). I argue that these two criteria stem from the implicit use of different theoretical frameworks we use to understand electoral rights in the first place. I show that all affected interests justifications derive from an interest-based conception of rights whilst coercion theories stem from a discursive (or contractarian) understanding of rights. Because they are better capable of capturing the specific nature of electoral rights as means for collective decision making, I suggest that coercion theories are a better suited approach to electoral rights distribution, especially in the broader optic of democracy as public justification.

Ilkin Huseynli (University of Milan)

Freedom without Ability

When I am unable to ϕ but will be prevented if I could ϕ , am I free to ϕ ? Most political philosophers assume that ability is necessary for freedom and in the absence of ability, the question of freedom does not arise. If they are right, then a hypothetical prevention has no impact on my freedom when I lack the relevant ability. I argue that I am unfree because I do not enjoy the freedom to ϕ if I am (actually or hypothetically) prevented. Suppose that the UK government declared me persona non grata. Also suppose that I jump over a cliff in order to become paralyzed and I make myself unable to enter the UK. On ability-based account, while before I was prevented by the UK government and this prevention reduced my overall freedom, now this prevention does not matter. Thus, by becoming paralyzed I made myself freer. Note that virtually all contemporary theorists reject the direct relevance of one's desires to one's freedom because a desire-based conception implies that a prisoner who reduces her desires to the set of actions which are allowed by her guards does not suffer from any unfreedom. However, as the prisoner increased her overall freedom by reducing her desires, I increased my overall freedom by reducing my abilities. If desire-based conception is rejected, ability-based conception should be rejected too.



Xuanpu Zhuang (Bowling Green State University)

How to Relate as Equals in Ordinary Life

Elizabeth Anderson argues that “(t)he proper negative aim of egalitarian justice is not to eliminate the impact of brute luck from human affairs, but to end oppression.” We ought to view equality as a matter of the terms on which relationships are structured following relational egalitarianism, i.e., people should be related as equals.

However, Anderson’s theory of relational equality becomes unclear gradually when we examine certain cases in real life. Some relationships which are quite ordinary: employer and employee, supervisor and student, and lovers. I argue that there are some possible inequalities in these cases, while it is not easy to clarify them in the terms used by Anderson. I consider such a possible solution, i.e., for a demand in a relation to be justified and thus shows equal respect and concern, it must be supported intrinsically by the relationship and thus could be endorsed by different people.

Graduate Session 3

Vincent Harting (London School of Economics)

Random Selection, Incentives-Based Capture and Class Specificity

Political theorists increasingly argue that ‘lottocratic’ political institutions (whereby representatives are selected on a random basis and then frequently rotated) could relevantly cure the oligarchic tendencies of elections. This paper argues that we should relax this optimism while venturing alternative ways to vindicate it. Drawing on recent ‘plebeian’ approaches in democratic constitutional theory, I defend the claim that agents sharing a non-wealthy class-specific profile, who are actually under-represented and more directly harmed by oligarchic capture, are also more likely to produce the necessary bonds of class solidarity underpinning reluctance to follow wealthy-generated incentives – meaning that offices within these anti-oligarchic institutions should be of their exclusive access. In turn, I elaborate on the idea that taking the importance of class-based solidarity seriously involves a commitment to



a partisan vision of lottocratic political institutions that conflicts with other values championed by people interested in selection by lot – such as the idea that randomly-selected assemblies are attractive because they ensure impartial deliberation. But I will argue that these conflicts should be downplayed: the urgency of materializing plebeian ends should be weightier for those genuinely interested in anti-elitist forms of popular democracy, and more ‘inclusionary’ arrangements might be inaccessible under conditions of oligarchic plutocracy.

Palle Bech-Pedersen (Hamburg University)

On the Problem of Blind Deference. A Lafontian Challenge to Landemore’s Open Democracy

In this article, I examine whether citizens would be expected to blindly defer to the decisions of the minipublics under Landemore’s new model, open democracy. To address this question, I focus on four institutional mechanisms of the model that appear to either retain or enhance citizen control, arguing that only one of these four mechanisms facilitates the form of democratic control that would release open democracy from the charge of blind deference. By incorporating direct democracy mechanisms that would enable citizens to overturn laws enacted by minipublics, open democracy steers free of the problem of blind deference. I argue however that this achievement comes at the cost of internal coherency. It is difficult to see how a political system would achieve stability in which decisions based on the deliberatively filtered counterfactual opinion of the people would be subject to democratic control facilitated through direct democracy mechanisms that originate in the actual, raw, and possibly manipulated public opinion. A partial solution I conclude might consist in adopting a deliberative-system perspective that more aggressively theorizes how to connect the minipublics to the larger public to prevent the gulf between the two publics from widening.



Eric Shoemaker (University of Toronto)

What Does Democracy Have to Do with the Public Interest?

Instrumentalists such as Joseph Schumpeter, argue that democratic procedures are only valuable instrumentally, insofar as they are able to bring about desirable outcomes which are in the public interest. Schumpeter's view and views like it fail to appreciate the ways in which democratic procedures and the public interest are essentially related. In this paper I argue both that the achievement of the public interest is a part of the democratic ideal, and that there is a public interest in having democratic procedures as such. I highlight three ways in which these concepts are intertwined: (1) the notion that the public interest is worth achieving already presupposes egalitarian concerns for the interests of people, and these same concerns motivate a commitment to democracy, (2) just as an individual rules themselves defectively when their ineptitude prevents their means from ever bringing about their ends, so it is for a public, who is self-governing defectively when their policies fail to bring about the public interest, and (3) any reasonable definition of what the public interest consists in would have to include that there is a public interest in democratic procedures as such.

Sergei Sazanov (University of Tartu)

The Entrepreneurial Theory of Ownership

In my paper, I introduce a version of the historical entitlement theory of property rights that is rooted in the theory of entrepreneurship of Israel Kirzner. The central idea of my proposal is that natural resources are not available to us automatically. Before we can start using any resource, we need to make an entrepreneurial judgment about it – a judgment that connects a particular natural object with a particular human end. This judgment has the normative force to create a relationship of ownership between the person who made it and the thing about which it was made. Once we put this act at the center of a theory of property rights, we would be able to put the idea of ownership as a natural right on a firmer normative foundation. Instead of trying to justify the acquisition of initially unowned resources, I argue that resources, in a certain technical sense, come into being as privately owned, and it is the burden of my opponents to show how these original



rights of private ownership can be overcome. This approach allows to respond to many traditional challenges to natural property rights, most importantly to a so-called private duty imposition objection.

Arianna Dini (University of Turin and University of Vienna)

Property and Realism as Genealogy Critique

This paper is a critical examination of a subset of political realism propounded by Enzo Rossi (2019) and Rossi and Carlo Argenton (2020). Following Marxian tradition, these realists view morality suspiciously, as the tool of the powerful. They therefore advocate for political realism, which dispenses with moralised critique in favour of empirical evidence. Rossi develops a form of “realism as genealogy” (638). Rossi and Argenton apply this methodology to argue that Robert Nozick’s (1974) reliance on private property (“PP1”) to justify the minimalist state is anachronistically circular and ideologically biased.

I argue that the authors’ methodological claims do not stand up to scrutiny. Non-realists have also pointed out Nozick’s ideological bias; genealogy critique is therefore unnecessary. Secondly, despite the authors’ opposition to allowing moral considerations to weigh in political theory, their arguments appear to be motivated by implicit normative commitments. Finally, the authors risk committing the genetic fallacy due to their selective focus on the state’s role in forming private property, to the exclusion of other factors. I conclude that a concern with facts must come hand-in-hand with normative commitments. Otherwise, it is unclear which facts we ought to deem relevant, and on what basis.

Graduate Session 4

Elena Matias Casacuberta (Sciences Po Paris)

Transnational Firms and the Narratives of Responsibility

Our societies are facing what Pierre Calame calls “unlimited irresponsibility”. A paradigmatic example of this is the transnational



enterprise, an international actor who functions as a network of corporations, incorporated in different countries. Those corporations are connected to each other, but their relationships are protected by limited liability. This legal concept makes it possible for firms to compartmentalise risk and fragment their responsibilities. This compartmentalisation contributes to the diffusion of causality of actions. The modern conception of responsibility struggles to navigate the complexity of this globalised world, where individuals' actions are intertwined and their impacts tangled in worldwide causality chains. The goal of this contribution is to show that firms are political actors playing a key role in international relations and responsibility has to be reconceptualised to be able to seize this phenomenon. The presentation would suggest that we need to move away from the modern conception of responsibility, grounded on Aristotelian, Christian and Kantian traditions, to take into account the fact that responsibility and its attribution are social practices which are inherently political. Individuals have a key role to play, by questioning the existing roles and responsibilities distributions, and this political project can partly be done through narratives.

Giulia Balossino (University of Milan)

A Place for Desert in Distributive Justice: Role-responsibility

The debate on the role of desert in distributive justice pivots on the conception of responsibility. John Rawls argued that one should be responsible in order to be considered deserving. People are not responsible for the characteristics influencing the position they acquired in society and they cannot claim to be more or less successful on the basis of merit. The aim of this paper is to propose the association of desert with a conception of role-responsibility based on sense of community and reciprocal respect. The investigation argues that only moral responsibility should be rejected in distributive justice. To start with, the paper presents three ways in which the concept of desert is used. The analysis of attempts to involve desert in distributive justice sheds light on the importance of the relation between desert and responsibility. Therefore the study explores the conception of role-responsibility by Herbert Hart, compares it to moral responsibility and



applies it to the debate on desert. By suggesting a relational approach to desert and an analysis of the concepts of respect, status and esteem, this paper offers a hint to renew the debate around merit.

Elena Icardi (University of Milan)

Neo-republicanism and Distributive Justice: the Threat of Wealth Inequality to Freedom as Non-domination

Is basic income enough to secure freedom as non-domination? This is what Neo-republican advocates generally support. Although Pettit argues for basic income as a contingent measure, while others, such as Raventos and Lovett, understand it as a necessary condition, they overall agree that providing citizens with an economic minimum would be sufficient. However, such a proposal neglects another important threat that the unequal distribution of resources poses to freedom as non-domination. Namely, the one related to the asymmetry of power between rich and poor. As both McCormick and Pansardi highlight, such an asymmetry especially undermines the status equality within the public decision-making process. Rich citizens indeed enjoy a greater political influence than their fellows because of their wealth. What I want to argue in this paper, thus, is that, for preventing domination, Neo-republicans should focus not only on granting everyone material independence, but also on decreasing the economic divide among citizens itself. While the former measure would avoid what Pettit calls dominium, i.e., the horizontal dependency on fellows, the latter would definitely be needed to stop imperium, i.e., the vertical imposition of public decisions. A Neo-republican theory of distributive justice therefore should not overlook this issue.

Augusto Sperb Machado (University of Lausanne)

Does “Manna from Heaven” Matter for Theories of Justice? Some Lessons from a Thought Experiment Used by Nozick and Cohen against Rawls

Nobody has ever seen manna falling from heaven. Yet, philosophers as different as Robert Nozick and G. A. Cohen have used this



counterfactual scenario to criticize John Rawls's theory. Nozick, on the one hand, admits that the difference principle would be plausible if things fell from heaven like manna. But, for him, this is not our world, given that things are produced by people, creating differential entitlements and allowing inequality. For Cohen, on the other hand, strict equality would be the right principle if manna fell from heaven. He accepts, though, that this is a representation of our world, since the natural resources of Earth might be regarded as being manna from heaven. Now, all this talk about "manna" seems inappropriate from a Rawlsian perspective. Justice, he asserts, is about the values which apply to the political relationship between citizens within the basic structure of society. Heavenly things are outside this scope. So, what can these different approaches to "manna-from-heaven" idealizations teach us about justice? In this paper, I analyze them in detail and claim that they matter because they draw attention to the important role of conceptions of society in theories of justice.



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