



Call for Papers

Graduate Student Panel of the Interdisciplinary Conference

“The Politics of Interpretation & The Interpretation of Politics”

23 - 24 September 2011

Department of Politics and International Relations, University of Oxford

Within the last fifty years, interpretation has become one of the most important intellectual paradigms of humanities and social sciences scholarship. Theories about law and literature, philosophy and political thought, history and theology all rely on textual interpretation. Issues such as the role of intentions in the interpretation of texts, the question of whether texts determine, or constrain, interpretations of them, and how much, if any, contextual information is required for their understanding, concern all those disciplines, and call for cross-disciplinary collaboration and exchange. Finally, the simultaneous proliferation of certain interpretive approaches such as ‘hermeneutics’, ‘deconstruction’, and ‘feminist (re)readings’ of texts across disciplinary divides has shown the permeability of these boundaries, and has thus made this call for collaboration even more pertinent.

This conference will provide a setting in which distinguished proponents and critics of some of the prevalent interpretive approaches currently used in humanities and social sciences research are able to engage, for the first time, in a rigorous debate about the advantages and costs of each approach, and to discuss the political assumptions that inform them, as well as aims that drive them.

One of the primary goals will be to evaluate the validity of each interpretive method in reference to the readings it produces when applied to texts. Some of the key questions in this respect include: What is it that each method can or cannot claim to be able to show? To what extent do these methods succeed both in theory and in practice? Do they prevent or improve our understanding of texts? A second focus of the conference is to shed light upon the political dimension of interpretive enterprises and to decode their ideological presuppositions. There has virtually been no interdisciplinary exchange about the question of whether these approaches are ideologically sustained, and if so, whether ideologically charged approaches in turn induce interpreters to systematically ignore some aspects of texts, whilst emphasizing others. Here, consequences will be drawn for the interpretation of politics, widely construed.

In order to address these questions properly, the conference will be structured around panels of up to four presenters each on 'Strauss and Esoteric Reading', 'Contextualist Approaches', 'Hermeneutics', 'Deconstruction', and 'Feminist Interpretations'. In so doing, the conference seeks to create a workshop environment in which individual methods are considered as what they are—the results of methodological disputes between different schools of interpretation rather than unconnected monolithic blocs.

In light of the conference theme's significance for postgraduate teaching and award applications, a graduate student panel will give advanced postgraduate students and early career researchers the opportunity to present their research. **Abstracts of up to 500 words are requested by 1 September 2011.** Please submit your abstract to jens.olesen@stcatz.ox.ac.uk. There is a registration fee of £70, which will cover tea/coffee and biscuits, sandwich lunches and the conference dinner at St Catherine's College. Registration is required by **15 September**. Please do not hesitate to contact the conference organizer, Jens Olesen, should you have any questions.

Provisional Programme

“The Politics of Interpretation & The Interpretation of Politics”

23 - 24 September 2011

Conference venue: Seminar Room A,
Department of Politics and International Relations, Manor Road

Friday, 23 September

09:30 – 10:00 Arrival and Registration

10:00 – 10:30 Welcome and Introduction

10:30 – 13:00 **Hermeneutics**
(Chair: Dr Reidar Maliks, Oxford)

Professor Jean Grondin (Montréal): *Are There Political Consequences of Hermeneutics? Impromptus on the Modest Political Competence of Philosophy*

Professor Paul H. Fry (Yale): *Gadamer vs. Hirsch—Are There Consequences?*

Dr Carsten Dutt (Heidelberg): *On the Very Concept of Interpretation*

Professor Dieter Teichert (Konstanz/Lucerne): *Hermeneutics: the Political, Politics, and Political Science*

13:00 – 14:00 Lunch (in common room)

14:00 – 16:30 **Contextualist Approaches**
(Chair: Professor Janet Coleman, LSE/NYU)

Professor Mark Bevir (Berkeley): *The Contextual Approach: Then and Now*

Professor John G. Gunnell (Albany): *Challenging the Received View of Thought and Language: Wittgenstein on Intention, Interpretation, and Context*

Professor Michael Freeden (Oxford): TBA

Dr Michael L. Frazer (Harvard): *The Ethics of Interpretation in Political Theory and Intellectual History*

16:30 – 17:00 Tea/Coffee (in common room)

17:00 – 19:00 **Feminist Interpretations**
(Chair: Professor Lois McNay, Oxford)

Dr Pamela Anderson (Oxford): *The Politics of Interpretation in French Feminist Philosophy*

Professor Terrell Carver (Bristol): *Feminist Curiosities and Gender Troubles: Power, Politics, Metaphor*

Dr Elizabeth Frazer (Oxford): *Feminism and Interpretivism Revisited*

19:00 Dinner (at St Catherine's College)

Saturday, 24 September

9:00 – 11:00 **Deconstruction**
(Chair: TBC)

Dr James Martel (San Francisco): *Hobbes and Spinoza on the Hebrew Republic and the Deconstruction of Sovereignty*

Dr Lasse Thomassen (London): *Aporia: The End of Politics?*

Professor Joshua Foa Dienstag (UCLA): *Interpretation, Language and Authority*

11:00 – 11:15 Tea/Coffee (in common room)

11:15 – 13:15 **Graduate Student Panel**

13:15 – 14:15 Lunch (in common room)

14:15 – 16:30 **Philosophy, Law & Interpretation**
(Chair: TBC)

Professor Al P. Martinich (Texas): *Ideal Interpretation of Political Texts*

Professor Terence Ball (Arizona): *Lincoln's Hermeneutics*

Professor David Boucher (Cardiff): TBA

16:30 – 17:00 Tea/Coffee (in common room)

17:00 – 19:00 **Strauss and Esoteric Reading**
(Chair: Dr Michael L. Frazer, Harvard)

Professor Stanley Rosen (Boston): *Strauss's Hermeneutics*

Professor David Weinstein (Wesleyan): *Using and Abusing the Canon*

Professor James Connelly (Hull): *The Biter Bit, The Writer Writ: Some Straussian Ironies*

19:30 Dinner

The conference organizer is most grateful for the support from the [Gerda Henkel Foundation](#), the [Department of Politics and International Relations](#), the [Centre for Political Ideologies](#), the [Mind Association](#), and [Princeton University Press](#).