



UNIVERSITÉ  
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# GECOPOL

## THE GENEVA COLLOQUIUM IN POLITICAL THEORY

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#### Abstracts

**Jeudi 17 et février | 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.

**Vendredi 18 février | Jason Brennan** (Georgetown University)

*Nudging heretics: a conditional defence*

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.

**Mardi 1 mars | Theodore Lechterman** (University of Oxford)

*#StopHateForProfit and the ethics of boycotting by corporations*

In June 2020, the #StopHateForProfit campaign convinced many companies to pull their ads from social media platforms as a way of protesting the proliferation of hate speech and disinformation. These events invite reflection on an understudied topic: the ethics of boycotting by corporations. The paper argues that corporate boycotts represent extra-democratic tactics and, as such, should be undertaken only in exceptional circumstances and with specific constraints. However, there are at least certain cases where corporate boycotts may be morally required.

**Lundi 21 mars | Helder De Schutter** (KU Leuven)

*Two alternatives to subsidiarity*

Principles of levellism provide normative guidance on the allocation of competences in a multilevel system. As a principle of levellism, the subsidiarity principle entails a rebuttable presumption for placing competences at the local level. In this talk I examine its normative credentials vis-à-vis two alternative levellist principles: 1) levellist neutrality, which holds that there is no principled reason to hold a presumption for either higher or lower levels, and 2) supersidiarity, which entails a rebuttable presumption for the higher level. I argue that while normative subsidiarity theories successfully argue that there are reasons for placing competences at the local level, they fail to provide a successful argument as to why these reasons should cash out as a presumption for the local. Based on a defense of what I call the Highest-Level-Solidarity principle – the view that the funding of core redistributive competences ought to be transferred to the highest possible level in a multilevel polity – I argue that supersidiarity, which is in fact the logical opposite of subsidiarity, stands on firmer presumptive grounds than subsidiarity.

**Mercredi 4 mai | Anna Milioni** (King's College London)

*Mobile migration and the right to democratic participation*

My paper presents mobile migration as a particularly interesting category of human movement at the intersection of mobility and migration. Inspired by recent critiques of methodological nationalism, I first present the broader framework of mobility within which migration takes place. I then delineate mobile migration and provide a typology of mobile migrants. I argue that the unequal access of mobile migrants to rights should be justifiable from a mobile perspective, in order to be considered as just.

**Lundi 9 mai | José Luis Martí** (Universitat Pompeu Fabra) & **Samantha Besson** (Université de Fribourg, CH; Collège de France)

*Multiplying sovereignties in the international multiple representation system*

Most accounts of international democratic legitimacy have relied on the idea of democratic states sovereignty to elaborate complex theories of the legitimacy of international organizations and international law making. States have thus been regarded as the primary, perhaps even the only, legitimate representatives of people and peoples in the international system. But the idea of democratic state sovereignty has several important shortcomings in non-ideal circumstances. These shortcomings lead us to open the door to an International Multiple Representation System in which different actors of different nature may be regarded as legitimate representatives of the people and peoples. Under this perspective, the traditional understanding of concentrated, absolute state sovereignty is compromised. In the paper we argue for an alternative republican notion of sovereignty that sees public power as dispersed, relative and limited. Thus, we argue for multiplying sovereignties in the international system in order to maximize the system's democratic legitimacy.

**Mardi 17 mai | Marta Giunta Martino** (Université de Genève)

*Public servants' role and contestation*

Current normative studies in political philosophy focus on citizens' contestatory reactions to large-scale institutional failures as injustices or legitimacy deficits. The debate has paid less attention to the acts of contestation of another class of institutional role occupants, i.e., *public servants*, to the dysfunctions that may affect otherwise broadly just or legitimate institutions (e.g., systemic corruption). Among the forms of contestation public servants might engage in are unauthorized leaks; covert resistance; radical rule departure; role contestation; resignation from office; "noble cause corruption." This chapter aims at offering a discussion of the role of public servants and the background conception of institutional action that are needed to address a bundle of questions relating to the conceptual and normative status public servants' acts of contestation.