

# The Project Report

*A Quarterly Report on The Political Theory Project at Brown University*



POLITICAL  
THEORY  
PROJECT

## From the Director

Friends,

The Political Theory Project's Postdoctoral Research Associates give shape and substance to the Project's mission of invigorating political discourse at Brown. This year's group is already proving to be one of the most dynamic we've hosted. Through their work with Brown students, they are already having a significant impact on the future of education in America. The Project's ability to bring a new cohort of Research Associates to campus each year ensures the constant flow of new ideas that is so central to the mission of the Project.



In addition to the infusion of fresh ideas, the Political Theory Project is able to enhance Brown's curriculum with new courses taught by the PTP Postdocs. New spring semester courses sponsored by the Project include: Political Theory of Capitalism; Political Theory for a Global World; Cosmopolitanism, Economic Development, and Welfare Rights; Early Modern Orders; and Environmental Ethics. The postdocs' time with the Project not only gives them the chance to teach in their area of expertise, but it also allows them to devote a large portion of their time to pursue their own research initiatives.

Right now, we are actively engaged in securing our next group of Postdoctoral

Research Associates. We are pleased to report that we have received a total of 170 applications, up 48 percent from the 115 applications we received last year. We've received applications from top universities across the country and beyond. From Singapore to Spain, from Canada to United Kingdom, we are delighted at the high caliber of candidates who have applied for next year. We are currently in the process of making offers and soliciting commitments from our top choices. I look forward to announcing our new group of Postdoctoral Research Associates in our spring *Quarterly Report*.

On a personal level, I am always encouraged by the enthusiasm the PTP engenders among Brown Alumni. I recently traveled to Florida to meet with the Brown Alumni Clubs of the Treasure Coast and Southwest Florida. As always, I had the great pleasure of encountering a number of concerned alums that have been inspired by the mission of the Project. I look forward to continuing to reach out to these individuals and to share with them, and with you, a vision for a new standard of political education at America's colleges and universities.

*John Tomasi*



*Photos by Peter Goldberg*

## Thinking Uncomfortable Thoughts

The Political Theory Project is pleased to announce what promises to be an especially stimulating Janus Lecture. On February 21<sup>st</sup>, we will host former UN Ambassadors John Bolton and Richard Holbrooke in a discussion on what should be the role of the US in the UN. *Divided World, United Nations?: The Role of the U.S. Within the U.N.*, is scheduled to take place in Salomon 101 at 3pm.

The student-run Janus Forum Lecture series, sponsored by the Political Theory Project, bring together two speakers with different viewpoints on relevant political topics. The speakers share their views and engage the audience in an intellectual, but civil, discussion.

As always, each Janus Lecture features a "Hardball Question Award" contest recognizing the student who politely asks the most challenging question. The Project also sponsors an essay contest, granting cash prizes to the top three essays submitted after each Janus Lecture.

The final Janus Lecture of the year will be this spring. The topic will be global climate change and will feature Bjorn Lomborg (*Cool It – The Skeptical Environmentalist's Guide to Global Warming*) and Robert Mendelsohn (*The Impact of Climate Change on the United States Economy*). We look forward to a lively exchange on this timely issue.



Janus audience members  
photo by Peter Goldberg

## Spotlight on a Course

**Sahar Akhtar** is a postdoctoral research associate with the Political Theory Project. She earned her PhD in economics from George Mason University and her PhD in Philosophy from Duke University. Her research interests focus on areas intersecting economics and political philosophy, including globalization, international ethics, and liberal democracy. This semester Sahar is teaching "Cosmopolitanism, Economic Development and Welfare Rights" in Brown's Department of Economics.

**Tell us about your course:** This course was designed to help students think about the relationship between economics, politics, and ethics in the context of globalization. Specifically, we'll be exploring the view of cosmopolitanism, which maintains that people have equal moral standing regardless of their nationality, and global economic rights. An important focus in this course will be on examining the role of international institutions and economic arrangements in the economic development of poor countries. The question of what makes

people poorer or richer is intricately connected to the question of whether and/or how to implement a framework of economic rights and, more generally, how to help people get out of extreme poverty.

**What major texts are students reading in the course?** The main readings will be from political philosophy texts, such as John Rawls' *Law of Peoples*, Thomas Pogge's *World Poverty and Human Rights*, and *Political Theory and International Relations* by Charles Beitz, but we will also read from economic development and political economy texts, such as by Amartya Sen, Robert Bates, and William Easterly.



**What would you hope your students will take away from this course?** I think students are already starting to care a lot about problems outside of a single nation. So I would like for them to understand the need to take seriously both ethical concerns and economic principles in thinking about problems related to global poverty. It's easy to get swept up in the belief that all it takes to eradicate extreme poverty is the moral will to do it, but there are important economic and political constraints that anyone interested in these topics needs to have an appreciation for.



Sidewalk outside the PTP offices

## Fast Fact

Interested in seeing first hand the difference the Political Theory Project is making? You can. C-span filmed the PTP's last Janus lecture, *The Great Divide: Is America in the Midst of a Culture War?* The piece

aired on January 9 and 10. To view the lecture online or to purchase a DVD, visit [C-spanstore.org](http://C-spanstore.org). Choose the search button from the menu at top and search using the program ID "202596.

## Champagne Launchings

Carmen Pavel earned her PhD in Political Theory from Brown University last May. As a graduate student, she spent two years in residence with the Political Theory Project. She is currently a postdoctoral research fellow in the Program in Political Philosophy, Policy and Law at University of Virginia.

Carmen brought to the Project a wealth of insight. "Growing up in communist Romania, I became interested early on in how certain political and economic ideals can have such a profound impact on people's lives," she stated recently. "I came to Brown eager to explore and to question those ideals." Carmen found the Project to be an excellent environment to pursue her research objectives. "From its inception, the PTP invited people into a conversation across different disciplines and theoretical persuasions, so it became

an ideal home for me. I have not only benefited from generous financial assistance, as a graduate research fellow for two years, but also from the unique world of ideas the PTP created. I have made friends and honed my professional skills among the postdoctoral fellows, faculty, and guest speakers for the political philosophy workshop that the PTP has sponsored over the years."

When asked about her current research projects, she responded, "I am working on a number of articles on the morality of international institutions. I am interested in particular in evaluating both state-generated and non-state forms of authority at the international level from the point of view of justice, legitimacy and efficacy, and providing a model for a global institutional architecture that goes beyond the existing institutional structures and the dominant approaches in the normative literature."



## The Bottom Line

The Political Theory is organic in origin and porous by design. We are organic in that we have arisen in response to a genuine need expressed by Brown students. We are porous in that our activities are open to all students whatever their political viewpoint.

In the Project's few years of existence, we have made great strides in improving the quality of political discourse at Brown. But we urgently need the help of friends, parents, and alums to help us continue our work. The Project has no

endowment and receives no direct financial support from the University. We are funded entirely by gifts from individuals and foundations. If you are making a gift to Brown, please consider supporting the PTP. Each gift, of any size, is a vote of support for the Project. In this electoral season, we need every vote we can get.

If you'd like additional information, you may contact us at [ptp@brown.edu](mailto:ptp@brown.edu) or by calling 401-863-6092. For more information, please visit our website at [www.politicaltheoryproject.net](http://www.politicaltheoryproject.net).



Photo courtesy of Brown University

## **Political Theory Project**

Brown University  
Box 1844  
Providence, RI  
02912

PHONE  
401-863-6092

FAX  
401-863-6492

E-MAIL  
[PTP@brown.edu](mailto:PTP@brown.edu)



**BROWN**

## **About the Political Theory Project**

The mission of the Political Theory Project is to invigorate the study of the fundamental principles of human social life. Distinctively, the Project brings to this study a novel and powerful synthesis of humanistic and social scientific tools. We focus on questions about what actually works in the world. The Project creates at Brown a space where students of good faith, and diverse viewpoints, can come together to debate one

another other, freely and passionately, about the most pressing political problems of our day.

The Project sponsors a variety of activities: new courses for undergraduates, public lectures, an Open Seminar in Philosophy, Politics, and Economics for undergraduates, research opportunities for undergraduate and graduate students, support for faculty research, and a postdoctoral fellowship program.



*Photo by Clark Quin*

*"While other types of communities devise covenants so as to avoid conflict, our covenant is rooted in quarrel, in opposition. We encourage ideas and opinions to collide in the service of learning.*

*We freely trespass boundaries, criticize each other's views, test every theory. No idea is beyond range or out of bounds...I believe that learning at its best is the antithesis of comfort."*

*Ruth J. Simmons  
President of Brown University*

**VISIT US ONLINE: [www.politicaltheoryproject.net](http://www.politicaltheoryproject.net)**

**BROWN UNIVERSITY**  
The Political Theory Project  
Box 1844  
Providence, RI 02912