

The Project Report



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

From the Director

Friends,

The 2007-08 academic year is upon us and I am happy to report we are moving full speed ahead. The Political Theory Project Postdoctoral Research Associates have settled in and have begun teaching their classes. The Janus lectures got off to a rousing start with the opening lecture – *Playing God? Biotechnology and the Future of Humanity* – featuring Professors Francis Fukuyama and Lee Silver. And for the second consecutive year, the Project hosted the annual Constitution Day Lecture in association with the Provost's Office. This year's lecture – *Constitutional Cliches: Does trite make right?* – featured Professor Randy Barnett (Georgetown University Law School/Cato Institute) who spoke on the reading and interpretation of the U.S. Constitution.

As we seek to expand our boundaries and extend our reach, we are pleased that outside support and recognition for the Project continues to grow. We recently received a comprehensive multi-year grant from the Tom W. Smith Foundation to support the Political Theory Project's Postdoctoral Research Associates Program. The grant allows for five postdoctoral fellows to reside with the Project for up to three years, thereby ensuring the Project's continued impact on Brown's curriculum. The Project has also received support from the ISI's Jack Miller Center for the teaching of America's Founding Principles, the Searle Freedom Trust, the Anthem Foundation, the Manhattan Institute, and more.

We continue to find new ways to meet the intellectual demands of Brown's undergraduates, largely through our association with the student group, the

Janus Forum. Recently, several Janus students approached the Project about establishing a new student society for the discussion of political issues on campus. The proposed "Brown Political Union" would be closely associated with the Janus lecture series. I am intrigued by this innovative proposal, which further emphasizes independent thought among students and I look forward to working with the Janus group on this initiative.

While we are actively engaging in our academic pursuits, we are also looking toward our future and planning for our continued growth. It gives me great pleasure to announce that Brown's administration has just assigned the PTP a new building of its own in which to take residence. The Project is scheduled to move to the historic Carriage House next summer. With our demonstrated ability to attract top-rate scholars, engage large numbers of students, and add new courses in Political Science, Philosophy, and Economics, the Political Theory Project is well on its way to becoming a permanent research center at Brown. I look forward to opening the doors of our new home to all of you.

John Tomasi



Photo by Peter Goldberg

Thinking Uncomfortable Thoughts

The Political Theory Project is dedicated to invigorating and deepening the intellectual discourse on campus. One way we do this is by sponsoring the student-run Janus Forum Lecture series. Janus lectures bring together two speakers with differing viewpoints on a given topic. Rather than debate, the speakers engage the audience in a lively discussion.

Last year's lectures were immensely popular and we are pleased to be bringing them back for a second season. We opened this year's series with a discussion on human genetic engineering, featuring speakers Francis Fukuyama (Johns Hopkins) and Lee Silver (Princeton) on October 4, 2007.

The Political Theory Project's upcoming Janus Lectures include:

November 29, 2007

Is America in the Midst of a Culture War?

Speakers: James Davison Hunter and Morris Fiorina

February 21, 2008

What should be the role of the US in the UN?

Speakers: Ambassadors John Bolton and Richard Holbrooke

The Project will also be hosting an April Janus lecture on managing global climate change.



Francis Fukuyama (foreground) and Lee Silver; photo by Peter Goldberg

Spotlight on a Course

Jason Brennan is a second-year postdoctoral research associate with the Political Theory Project. He earned his PhD in philosophy from the University of Arizona and is currently working on a book entitled *A Brief History of Liberty*. For the second consecutive year his freshmen seminar, Freedom, offered in both Philosophy and PS, has had a waiting list of students hoping to get in.

Tell us about your course. My course is about freedom. What is freedom? How important is it? What should we do about it? We examine various aspects of freedom —political, personal, social, economic, psychological, and moral—and try to determine what sorts of institutions promote or undermine these aspects.

What major texts are students reading in the course? Hobbes's *Leviathan*, Locke's *Second Treatise*, Mill's *On Liberty*, De Soto's *Mystery of Capitalism*, Wollstonecraft's *The Rights of Woman*, various articles on the psychology of conformity, a biography of Stalin in conjunction with works by totalitarians, among others.

Was there any topic or text that generated a discussion that particularly surprised or pleased you? We played a game auctioning \$10. The rules were that the highest bidder would pay her bid and win the \$10, while the second highest bidder would have to pay her bid and win nothing. After the bids crept up past \$20, I cancelled the game, and asked them what went wrong. They noted how the rules created perverse incentives. This game—known as the Dollar Auction—was our introduction to the idea of institutions. We discussed how some political, social, and economic institutions, such as trade, are like games in which everybody can win, while others, such as tragic commons, are games people can only lose. One goal for the course is to determine which institutions create winners and which create losers.



What do you hope your students will take away from this course? I hope students come away not just with something intelligent to say about the value of freedom, but also with a better idea about what strategies actually promote freedom. I also hope this course helps them become aware of how their own biases can limit their freedom, and that in response they become more active-minded, self-critical thinkers.



Fast Fact

The PTP's recent Janus lecture featuring Francis Fukuyama and Lee Silver attracted 323 students, dozens of whom were turned away by Brown's fire marshal due to over-crowding concerns. We are currently seeking larger venues for subsequent lectures.



Sidewalk outside the PTP offices

Champagne Welcomings



The Political Theory Project is pleased to host our first visiting Fulbright Scholar, Qing Liu. Qing teaches history of western political thought at East China Normal University (Shanghai, China). His research examines and evaluates the impact of certain western ideas imported to China and the Chinese perceptions of America as a desirable model of modernity, especially in regards to the American model of free-market systems and liberal democratic institutions.

Qing discovered the Political Theory Project after reading an article on John Tomasi's book *Liberalism beyond Justice*. Some further research led him to the Political Theory Project's web site. "The statement of the Project caught my attention immediately," reflects Qing. "It calls for not only theoretical reflections on easy ideological labels but also confronting some of the most concerned and controversial problems

in our social and political life. I believe this place will serve my research best."

Qing is participating in Project activities on various levels. He is attending John Tomasi's graduate seminar on Market Liberalism, participating in PPW workshops, and interacting with Postdoctoral fellows. "My experience with the Project has been simply stimulating," states Qing. "What I am learning here has great relevance to my research and, in fact, to China's current situation where the market reform is facing the problem of uneven economic distribution, and liberalism has been morally accused for its increasing social injustice. Yes, we must take seriously the problem of social injustice, but the best way to do so is through careful and critical reading of what liberalism, modern as well as classic, really means and deal with the problem through engaging deep and open-minded discussion rather than simply accepting the recklessly moral accusation and half-cooked radical criticism."

The Bottom Line



Photo courtesy of Brown University

As the Political Theory Project becomes increasingly more stable and represents a permanent presence on Brown University's campus, we are increasingly shifting our fundraising efforts to include more multi-year commitments.

One of the Project's most successful programs is the student-driven Janus Forum lecture series. To ensure the continued success of these lectures

and to be able to entice top-rate scholars to speak at the PTP's Janus lectures, we are seeking multi-year commitments to support this initiative.

We are also always grateful for any gifts designated to the Project for general operating expenses. If you are interested in learning more or are prepared to make a gift, please visit us online at www.politicaltheoryproject.net or email us at ptp@brown.edu.

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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

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