Call For Papers
A Graduate Student Conference in Political Theory
27-28 May 2005
University of California, Berkeley

Note: to facilitate participation, the conference will provide accommodation and, funding permitting, up to $300 towards transportation costs for invited participants.

<u>Thinking the Present</u>:
The Beginnings and Ends of Political Theory

Keynote speaker: **Bonnie Honig**, Professor of Political Science at Northwestern University and Senior Research Fellow at the American Bar Foundation, Chicago, will be speaking on the topic: "The Time of Rights: Emergent Thoughts in an Emergency Setting."

Closing remarks will take the form of a roundtable discussion, featuring the keynote speaker and several distinguished panelists from UC Berkeley.

Our present can be characterized as a time of new and old forms of political and military domination and dramatic re-organizations of power. We face a widespread redefinition of rights, liberties, and constitutions, alongside and intertwined with patterns of segregation, exclusion, and occupation; a global network of interrogation and torture camps, a perpetual war, sustained invocations of emergency powers, bulldozed and bombed homes and cities. But what is the status of this "present," this particular historical era? How does (or should) this present define, condition, or circumscribe the activity of theorizing? What erasures of the past are performed in theorizing the present?

In confronting the present, the political theorist also confronts the beginnings of political theory itself. What are the conditions, grounds, and triggers from which theorizing proceeds? What histories and genealogies impel and inform political theory, and how does the location of this beginning limit the horizons of political theory, either in its specific iterations or in its status as a historical discourse and as a vocation?

What is the relationship between political theory's beginnings and its ends? Is theory instrumental, pursuing specific ends? If so, how should we articulate these ends? Can political theory one day achieve its ends, thereby exhausting itself? Or, conversely, can theory irrevocably fail to achieve its ends, proving itself inadequate to the demands of the present? Can we perhaps theorize without end(s)? What would a non-instrumental, unending political theory look like, especially in relation to the present? Is there a moment in politics when theory becomes improper?

In asking these questions, we mean to direct attention to the role of "the present" in the practice of political theory. How do ideas about the present as a teleological end, or an interruption of history, or a return of history partially constitute the very act of theorizing about politics?

Potential topics might include:

* Representations of "Newness" and "Nowness"
* Thinking the Event: Theorizing Continuity and Discontinuity
* Historical Iterations and the Politics of Déjà Vu
* Nationalism, Natality, and Narration
* Constitutional Fictions
* The Function of "Crisis" in Theory and Theorizing
* The Violence of Beginnings: Genocides, Colonization, Insurrections
* The Violence of Ends: Foreclosures, Horizons, "Solutions"
* Theorizing Body Counts and (Neo-)colonial Warfare
* Contemporary Despotism: the Politics of Emergency Powers
 Situating, Contextualizing, and Provincializing Political Theory

The Conference invites paper submissions from all graduate students working on topics in political theory. Please send proposed paper abstracts of 750 words to critsens@socrates.berkeley.edu by 31 January 2005.

Proposals should include:
* a proposal title and summary
* name, departmental affiliation, address, telephone number and e-mail address of the applicant

For further enquiries, please contact theoryconference@lists.berkeley.edu

<u>Organizing Committee</u>:
George Ciccariello Maher, Political Science
Tucker Culbertson, Jurisprudence and Social Policy/Boalt Hall
Jack Jackson, Political Science
Sharon Stanley, Political Science
Yves Winter, Rhetoric