

THREE PhD SCHOLARSHIPS, 2017–2021

The **Centre for Political Theory** at the Université libre de Bruxelles is offering three doctoral scholarships, tenable from **1 October 2017 to 30 September 2021**, as part of the research project ‘Why Lefort Matters’.

An outline of the project can be found below. Full details are available on demand from the Centre administrator, Béatrice Vandenaebelle (bvdabeel@ulb.ac.be). For further information, please write to the project PI, Justine Lacroix (jlacroix@ulb.ac.be).

Candidates must be in possession of a Masters in Political Science or Philosophy (or equivalent) by the start date of the contract. Please send a complete CV including transcripts and a doctoral research proposal (maximum three pages) to the Centre’s secretariat (bvdabeel@ulb.ac.be) by **1 June 2017**. The proposal must fall within at least one of the main research topics of the ‘Why Lefort Matters’ project.

Successful candidates will benefit from a four-year stipend of around 1700 Euros net/month, as well as the use of a shared office at ULB, computer equipment and a travel and book allowance. They must be resident in Brussels for the duration of the scholarship in order to take part in the academic life of the Centre and fulfil teaching duties (one seminar, 24 hours per year).

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Why Lefort Matters *A Conceptual Genealogy of Contemporary Normative Cleavages*

Claude Lefort (1924-2010) may be seen today as one of the leading political theorists of the late twentieth century. Yet the secondary literature on his output remains peculiarly sparse, especially outside the French-speaking world. Except a few specialist circles that recognise the ‘matricial’ place of his work, Lefort’s threefold contribution to the history of contemporary ideas, democratic theory, and understanding of current political issues remains undervalued or even unknown. Our research project sets out to bridge this gap using an approach that marries the history of ideas with normative theory. The aim is neither to write Lefort’s intellectual biography nor to offer an analysis of his work itself, but rather to treat Lefort’s writings as a gateway to four goals.

- **Offering an account of the complexities of recent French intellectual history**

There are two aspects to this. Firstly, the conceptual and historical advances of Lefort’s work have inspired a strain of thought driven by demands for a so-called ‘integral’ or ‘radical’ democracy, which differ substantially from liberal or conservative critiques of socialism. Lefort’s own interpretation of several nineteenth-century authors, secondly, opens up new understandings of the relationship between French political thought and the French Revolution.

- **Outlining a form of republicanism concerned with shaping social issues**

In refusing to see the ties between individual and social context as a dichotomy, and remaining faithful to the Machiavellian idea that social conflict holds positive political value, Lefort's work paves the way towards a type of republicanism that does not circumscribe the political domain to the boundaries of the nation-state, and gives social issues their due importance.

- **Rethinking the relationship between human rights and politics in today's world**

This facet of our research sets out to put the potential of Lefort's thought to the test: can it indeed furnish a conceptualisation of democracy and rights clearly distinct from two ideas at opposite extremes? These are, at one end of the spectrum, the utopia of a 'self-creating' people with its own constitutive power; and at the other a market liberalism that destroys the connection between rights and political autonomy.

- **Assessing the relevance of the totalitarian concept to current debates**

Though public debate still periodically calls the idea of totalitarianism into service as a weapon of rhetoric – either to proclaim the irreversible gains of liberalism or to condemn the rise of religious terrorism – political theory has largely lost interest in the concept. How, we ask, can Lefort's 1970 analyses of Nazi and then Soviet totalitarianism help us to understand current issues?