



Language

This sub-section includes a number of texts by major theorists of the 20th century that bear directly on debates about civil disobedience and civil resistance, and also includes a few important contributions to the theory of revolution that take account of the phenomenon of unarmed or 'velvet' revolutions.

Arendt, Hannah, [Crises of the Republic](#) [1], New York, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1972

The essay 'Civil Disobedience' discusses consent and the right to dissent in the context of the US Civil Rights Movement and Vietnam anti-war protests. It distinguishes between disobedience motivated by citizenship responsibility and that motivated primarily by individual conscience. The essay 'On Violence', examines the nature of power and violence (with examples from contemporary movements and politics), and argues that power (as she defines it) is not only distinct from violence but its opposite.

Arendt, Hannah, [On Revolution](#) [2], [1963], Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1973

Explores the concept and experience of revolution, drawing on the history of the American and French revolutions in particular, but also Russia, and develops the theme of the 'lost treasure' of revolutionary experience, which is the upsurge of creative and organisational energy in forms of direct democracy, and the conflict between popular political cooperation and the centralising tendencies of political parties.

Fanon, Frantz, [The Wretched of the Earth](#) [3], London, MacGibbon and Kee, 1965

Eloquent and influential defence of revolutionary violence as a necessary psychological reaction to the prolonged experience of structural domination by colonialism, and as a socially radicalising experience promoting the possibility of genuine political freedom.

Foucault, Michel; Kritzman, L.D., [Politics, Philosophy, Culture: Interviews and Other Writings](#) [4], ed. Kritzman, L.D., London, Routledge, 1990

Covers a range of issues, including Foucault's interpretation of power and resistance, in accessible form (and also includes interesting discussion on the 1977-79 Iranian Revolution). See also Foucault, M., 'Truth and Power' in Rabinow, ed., *The Foucault Reader: An Introduction to Foucault's Thought*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1991. For a brief survey of Foucault's evolving thought see Bleiker, [Popular Dissent, Human Agency and Global Politics](#) [5] ([A. 1.a.ii. Theories of Civil Disobedience, Power and Revolution](#) [6]), pp. 530-73.

Frazer, Elizabeth ; Hutchings, Kimberly, [On Politics and Violence: Arendt Contra Fanon](#) [7], *Contemporary Political Theory*, Vol. 7, 2008, pp. 90-118

Compares views of Arendt and Fanon on the role of violence in politics.

Garton Ash, Timothy, [Velvet Revolution: The Prospects](#) [8], *New York Review of Books*, Vol. 56, issue 19, 03/12/2009, pp. 20-24

Essay by observer and analyst of many recent movements of unarmed resistance (see later sections). Garton Ash looks back after 20 years on 1989 in the Soviet bloc, but also other movements involving large scale unarmed resistance and culminating in negotiated agreement for a transfer of power (as in South Africa) that suggest a new model of revolution has emerged challenging older models.



Gellner, Ernst, [The Price of Velvet: Thomas Masaryk and Vaclav Havel](#) [9], Czech Sociological Review, Vol. 3, issue 1, 1995, pp. 45-57

Explores the disadvantages of 'velvet revolutions' with a specific focus on Czechoslovakia and comparing Vaclav Havel with the earlier president and theorist Thomas Masaryk.

Goldstone, Jack A ; Gurr, Ted Robert ; Moshiri, Farrokh, [Revolutions of the Late Twentieth Century](#) [10], Boulder CO, Westview Press, 1991, pp. 395

Includes chapters by Moshiri on the evolving theory of revolution since Marx, including Tilly, Skocpol and Goldstone. It also comprises Goldstone's analytical framework for understanding revolutions, case studies of a range of violent and unarmed movements (chapters on Iran, Poland, the Philippines and the Palestinian Occupied Territories are referenced under appropriate sections later), and a concluding chapter 'Comparison and Policy Implications' by Gurr and Goldstone that incorporates reflections on the role of violence and nonviolence.

Habermas, Jürgen, [Civil Disobedience: Litmus Test for the Democratic Constitutional State](#) [11], Berkeley Journal of Sociology, Vol. 30, 1985, pp. 95-116

Habermas, one of today's major social theorists, is associated with the concept of 'new social movements' in the 1970s, and developing the theory of 'deliberative democracy'. Argues for the potential value of civil disobedience as a means of upholding democratic principles.

Other important essays by Habermas are: 'Hannah Arendt's Communicative Concept of Power' in Steven Lukes ed., *Power*, Oxford, Blackwell, pp. 75-93, arguing for a structural interpretation of power.

And, [What does Socialism Mean Today? The Rectifying Revolution and the Need for New Thinking on the Left](#) [12] *New Left Review*, 1990, pp. 3-21, an interpretation of the nature and significance of the 1989 revolutions from a democratic socialist perspective.

Havel, Václav/Vladislav, Jan, [The Power of the Powerless](#) [13], ed. Vladislav, Jan, In, [Living in Truth: 22 Essays Published on the Occasion of the Award of the Erasmus Prize to Vaclav Havel](#) [14] London, Faber, , 1987, pp. 36-122

(Also available in other collections.)

Influential analysis of 'post-totalitarian' society and politics in the Soviet bloc in the 1970s and eloquent argument for individual integrity and acts of dissent by lead Czechoslovak playwright and dissident, who became President after 1989. This text inspired many activists in Eastern Europe and others round the world, including Aung San Suu Kyi, leading figure in the nonviolent resistance in Burma from 1988.

Lukes, Steven, [Power: A Radical View](#) [15], [1974], Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2005, pp. 192

Substantially expanded second edition (with two new chapters) of his influential 1974 short book. His delineation of 'three dimensions of power' has influenced debates about power in the social sciences, and provided a reference point for some debates about resistance to domination.

Luxemburg, Rosa, [The Mass Strike: The Political Party and the Trade Unions](#) [16], [1906], London, Merlin Press, 1963, pp. 87

Also available in Mary Alice Waters, ed., *Rosa Luxemburg Speaks*, New York, Pathfinder Press, 1970; and in *The Complete Works of Rosa Luxemburg*, 14 vols, London, Verso Books, 2011.

Discusses the evolution, nature and significance of the (predominantly unarmed) 1905 Revolution in Russia, and reflects Luxemburg's emphasis on the importance of popular initiative and cooperation, as opposed to centralised party leadership – themes developed in her pamphlets 'The Russian Revolution' and 'Leninism or Marxism', both republished in 1961 under those joint titles (Ann Arbor paperback, University of Michigan Press). The standard



study of Luxemburg is: Peter Nettl, *Rosa Luxemburg*, Oxford University Press, 1966 and 1969 (abridged edition).

Lyons, David, [Moral Judgment, Historical Reality and Civil Disobedience](#) [17], *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, Vol. 27, issue 1, 1998, pp. 31-49

Explores standard philosophical writings on civil disobedience and queries the assumption of political obligation in contexts of major injustice and oppression, such as slavery and segregation.

Michnik, Adam, [Letters from Prison and Other Essays](#) [18], Berkeley CA, University of California Press, 1985, pp. 354

Influential intellectual oppositionist in Poland from the 1960s to the 1980s argues for adhering to nonviolent methods for moral and political as well as pragmatic reasons (i.e. threat of Soviet military response to a violent uprising).

Pateman, Carole, [The Problem of Political Obligation: A Critique of Liberal Theory](#) [19], [1979], 2nd edition, Berkeley CA, University of California Press, 1985, pp. 222

Critiques individualist liberal theories of civil disobedience, including the notion that civil disobedients should willingly accept punishment (pp. 57-60 and 161-2). Rather 'political disobedience ... may be the only way in which freedom and equality can be preserved', and minorities have the right to refuse or withdraw consent.

Rawls, John, [A Theory of Justice](#) [20], Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1972, pp. 605

Chapter Six, 'Duty and Obligation' (pp. 333-91) of this extremely influential philosophical restatement of liberal principles explores in depth the circumstances in which civil disobedience is justifiable in a liberal democracy. He summarises this argument in 'The Justification of Civil Disobedience' in Bedau, [Civil Disobedience: Theory and Practice](#) [21] ([A. 1.a.ii. Theories of Civil Disobedience, Power and Revolution](#) [6]), pp. 240-55.

Sassoon, Anne Showstack, [Gramsci's Politics](#) [22], Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1987, pp. 261

Antonio Gramsci, the prominent Italian Marxist activist and thinker who died in 1937, is known for his elaboration of the Marxist theory of ideology and hegemony, and has been consulted by students seeking inspiration from Marxist thought – for example in Poland and South Africa in the 1980s. Gramsci's major work, *Prison Notebooks*, is by its nature long and disjointed, and its interpretation subject to debate.

Singer, Peter, [Democracy and Disobedience](#) [23], Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1973, pp. 150

Concise philosophical examination of disobedience within types of democracy by scholar now better known for writings on animal rights and radical arguments about responsibilities of the wealthy to the poor. Ends by briefly applying the principles to Northern Ireland in the late 1960s.

Skocpol, Theda, [Rentier state and Shi'a Islam in the Iranian Revolution](#) [24], *Theory and Society*, Vol. 11, issue 3, 1982, pp. 265-283

Skocpol is well known for her theoretical contribution to the theory of revolution, stressing the role of the state (*States and Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia and China*, Cambridge University Press, 1979), here she applies her framework to the Iranian Revolution of 1977-79.

Tilly, Charles, [European Revolutions, 1492-1992](#) [25], Oxford, Blackwell, 1993



Well-known exponent of the theory and history of resistance and revolt. In later part of book discusses whether the events in the Soviet bloc in 1989-91 count as revolutionary, and the possibility of nonviolent revolution.

Walzer, Michael, [Obligations: Essays on Disobedience, War and Citizenship](#) [26], Cambridge MA, Harvard University Press, 1973

Series of essays discussing issues of obligation and disobedience from a standpoint emphasising citizens' obligations and with an awareness of the traditions of the labour movement ('Civil Disobedience and Corporate Authority' for example discusses the right to strike) and concepts of honour and solidarity.

See also:

April Carter, [Direct Action and Democracy Today](#) [27], ([A. 1.a.ii. Theories of Civil Disobedience, Power and Revolution](#) [28]), Chapters 5 and 6 for overview of classical and contemporary political theorists on resistance and civil disobedience.

Source URL (retrieved on 28/01/2020 - 04:06): <https://civilresistance.info/section/introduction-nonviolent-action/1-theory-methods-and-examples/1a-iii-social-and-political>

Links

- [1] <https://civilresistance.info/biblio-item/1972/crises-republic>
- [2] <https://civilresistance.info/biblio-item/1973/revolution>
- [3] <https://civilresistance.info/biblio-item/1965/wretched-earth>
- [4] <https://civilresistance.info/biblio-item/1990/politics-philosophy-culture-interviews-and-other-writings>
- [5] <https://civilresistance.info/biblio-item/2000/popular-dissent-human-agency-and-global-politics>
- [6] <https://civilresistance.info/section/introduction-nonviolent-action/1-theory-methods-and-examples/1a-ii-theories-civil>
- [7] <https://civilresistance.info/biblio-item/2008/politics-and-violence-arendt-contra-fanon>
- [8] <https://civilresistance.info/biblio-item/2009/velvet-revolution-prospects>
- [9] <https://civilresistance.info/biblio-item/1995/price-velvet-thomas-masaryk-and-vaclav-havel>
- [10] <https://civilresistance.info/biblio-item/1991/revolutions-late-twentieth-century>
- [11] <https://civilresistance.info/biblio-item/1985/civil-disobedience-litmus-test-democratic-constitutional-state>
- [12] <https://civilresistance.info/biblio-item/1990/what-does-socialism-mean-today-rectifying-revolution-and-need-new-thinking-left>
- [13] <https://civilresistance.info/biblio-item/1987/power-powerless>
- [14] <https://civilresistance.info/biblio-item/1987/living-truth-22-essays-published-occasion-award-erasmus-prize-vaclav-havel>
- [15] <https://civilresistance.info/biblio-item/2005/power-radical-view>
- [16] <https://civilresistance.info/biblio-item/1963/mass-strike-political-party-and-trade-unions>
- [17] <https://civilresistance.info/biblio-item/1998/moral-judgment-historical-reality-and-civil-disobedience>
- [18] <https://civilresistance.info/biblio-item/1985/letters-prison-and-other-essays>
- [19] <https://civilresistance.info/biblio-item/1985/problem-political-obligation-critique-liberal-theory>
- [20] <https://civilresistance.info/biblio-item/1972/theory-justice>
- [21] <https://civilresistance.info/biblio-item/1969/civil-disobedience-theory-and-practice>
- [22] <https://civilresistance.info/biblio-item/1987/gramscis-politics>
- [23] <https://civilresistance.info/biblio-item/1973/democracy-and-disobedience>
- [24] <https://civilresistance.info/biblio-item/1982/rentier-state-and-shia-islam-iranian-revolution>
- [25] <https://civilresistance.info/biblio-item/1993/european-revolutions-1492-1992>
- [26] <https://civilresistance.info/biblio-item/1973/obligations-essays-disobedience-war-and-citizenship>
- [27] <https://civilresistance.info/biblio-item/2005/direct-action-and-democracy-today>
- [28] <https://civilresistance.info/taxonomy/term/5>