

Political Philosophy 1: PHIL 240

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Territorial acknowledgement: McGill University is on land which is the traditional and unceded territory of the Kanien'keha:ka (Mohawk), a place that has long served as a site of meeting and exchange amongst nations.

Description:

This class will introduce political philosophy through the study of several key concepts: Political Authority, Ideology/ Power, Rights/ Contract, Equality, Justice, Oppression, Liberty, Emancipation/ Resurgence.

We will read selections from foundational texts in the history of modern political thought by authors such as Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, and Hume. We will also survey more recent authors with diverse approaches to the problems and concepts in political philosophy. The objectives of the course include the following: (i) acquaintance with foundational texts in political philosophy; (ii) familiarization with key concepts in political thought; (iii) appreciation of different perspectives on politics, power, and the State; (iv) practice reading and posing questions about philosophical texts; and (v) develop skills of discussion, critical thinking, and philosophical writing. The various readings offer opportunities to inhabit what may be new perspectives. We can thereby explore a range of ideas and interrogate our assumptions about what is good, just, and right.

Texts:

Readings will be available on *My Courses*.

Requirements:

Attendance/ Reading/ Participation: Please come to class, having read, and prepared to ask questions as well as to listen to your peers and instructor. Although your attendance at lecture will not be recorded, attentive presence and informed participation are necessary ingredients of a good class. Teaching and learning are dynamic, and I will be better able to teach with the benefit of your questions, challenges, and attention. Likewise, you will get much more out of the class if you attend, listen to your peers, and challenge yourself to arrive with questions. Attendance to conferences, on the other hand, is mandatory. You are permitted two absences. Use them wisely.

- Studies consistently find that devices such as laptops and phones in class harm learning outcomes for most students and distract peers. Please put away your laptops, silence your phones, and refrain from texting during lecture. If you have an urgent communication, please just excuse yourself quietly from class. **Laptops will be permitted only with special permission of the professor.** If 2-3 students would like to volunteer to serve as note-takers and take turns posting the notes for the rest of the class, they will be permitted to use their laptops. Power point slides will be posted. Those with permission to use laptops will need to sit in the front of the class, use their devices only to consult the class material and take notes, and avoid distracting their classmates.

Discussion Board: You must post questions about the reading **8 times** during the semester and reply to your peers **4 times** throughout the course (you are welcome to contribute more frequently for your own edification, or to improve your mark). Questions and replies will be due by noon on the day prior to your conference. Your questions should concern a specific passage or claim from the reading, which you are

trying to understand. They should therefore take the following form: “On page X, Author says ‘.....’ Then you ask your question. Your question may take various forms. For example: I think it means Y, but I am not sure because... Or, if the author means Y, does Z follow? Author B says something else, and so.... Etc. Replies to your peers can take any form that sincerely engages with their questions, ideas, or reflections.

Discussion will be graded based on evidence that you did the reading and reflected on it. Your understanding of the reading does need to be correct to get a good mark – the point of this is to try out your first impressions of what the authors are saying.

Mid-term & Finals: You will have a take-home mid-term and final exam. Submission of rough drafts with your final drafts will be mandatory. Instructions will be posted on My Courses.

Assessment Values:

Conference Attendance	15%
Discussion Board	15%
Mid-Term	30%
Final	40%

Conference attendance mark will be based on attendance:

- 0-2 absences = A; 3 absences = B; 4 absences = B-; 5 absences = C; 6 absences = D; 7+ absences = F;
- Your TA may adjust the grade upward if your participation is engaged and informed by the reading.

Discussion board grades will be both quantitative (i.e., meeting the required number of contributions) and qualitative (i.e., contributions reflect having read and thought about the material).

Exams will be graded according to the rubric below.

Evaluation:

Exam Grading Rubric				
	A (Excellent)	B (Good)	C (Adequate)	D (Inadequate)
Understanding	Accurate (or well-justified), non-superficial grasp of core ideas; consideration of implications, significance, stakes.	Solid understanding of the assigned readings, of the lectures, and of the specific task of the assignment.	Displays a limited or superficial understanding of concepts and texts. Some errors; may misconstrue implications.	Significant errors and/ or misunderstanding of the assignment.
Argument	Non-obvious, clear, interesting, plausible, and contestable thesis.	Clear and plausible thesis; may be unsurprising or too easy to defend.	Thesis is confusing, vague, or especially obvious.	Thesis is missing, difficult to identify, or evinces significant misunderstanding of course material.
Evidence	Cites and analyses assigned texts in a thoughtful, skillful, or original manner. Demonstrates depth of engagement with ideas from the course.	Cites and explains relevant textual evidence.	Insufficient, unhelpful, and/ or unexplained use of textual evidence. Some misunderstandings of concepts, texts, or arguments.	Irrelevant, inappropriate, and/ or missing evidence.
Reasoning	Develops argument in an organized and focused way; explains textual evidence; justifies claims.	Can identify argument and follow paper, but justification of claims, organization, or focus needs improvement.	Reasoning and justification is incomplete, unclear, or underdeveloped. Lacks focus and/ or organization; may be disjointed and somewhat difficult to follow.	Incoherent, confused, and unfocused. Difficult to read. May be off-topic and not sufficiently related to the course material.
Mechanics (least important)	Clear and concise; easy to follow; correct grammar, punctuation, spelling, and citation.	Coherent, readable, and proof-read. Would benefit from some editing and polish.	Problems with word choice, grammar, spelling, and coherence. *Rough* draft.	Significant problems with presentation, organization, clarity.

Work that receives an “F” is absent, incomplete, or makes no serious attempt to meet the formal and substantial requirements. The flaws and gaps in understanding are so grave that the reader cannot detect a concerted effort to apply the course material.

Use of Artificial Intelligence and LLM technology is not permitted in this class.

Grading Scale

All work in this course will be graded on the standard letter grade scale (A to F), equivalent to the 4-point GPA scale. An A on a course component is worth 4 points, an A- is worth 3.7 points, etc. To calculate your final grade, the grade points you earn on each course component will be multiplied by the relative weight of that component, and then the scores will be added to get your final grade-point average. That average will determine your final letter grade for the course. The table below sets out the official scheme used by McGill to convert letter grades to grade points. For example, if your overall grade-point average is a 3.4, you would earn a B+ in the course. Do not rely on the calculator in MyCourses for computing your final grade, as that calculator by default aggregates grades according to the 0-100% scale and will not display the accurate final grade you have earned in this course.

Grade	Grade Points	Grade Range
A	4.0	3.85-4.00
A-	3.7	3.50-3.84
B+	3.3	3.15-3.49
B	3.0	2.85-3.14
B-	2.7	2.50-2.84
C+	2.3	2.15-2.49
C	2.0	1.85-2.14
D	1.0	1.0-1.86
F	0.0	0.00-0.99

Academic Integrity:

McGill University values academic integrity. All students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures (see <http://www.mcgill.ca/integrity> for more information).

Other Notes:

- In the event of extraordinary circumstances beyond the University's control, the content and/or evaluation scheme in this course is subject to change.
- In accord with McGill University's Charter of Students' Rights, students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French any written work that is to be graded.
- As instructor of this course, I endeavor to provide an inclusive learning environment. If you experience barriers to learning in this course, do not hesitate to discuss them with me and the [Office for Students with Disabilities](#), 514-398-6009.
- I will gladly honor your request to address you by the name and pronoun you indicate.

