POLI 614 Political Theory Pro-Seminar

Preliminary Syllabus Version 2023-08-25
Fall 2023

Instructor: Arash Abizadeh
Officially allotted time: Mondays 11:35am-2:25pm
Office hours: In person at Ferrier 472
      Drop-in: Mondays 2:30-3:30pm
      By appointment: https://www.supersaas.co.uk/schedule/Abizadeh/Office_Hours_by_Appointment
Email: arash.abizadeh@mcgill.ca
(Due to the unmanageable volume I receive, if you send an email please put "POLI 613:" followed by your subject in the subject entry.)

Description

This is the pro-seminar in political theory, whose aim is to help prepare PhD students to take the comprehensive exam in political theory. "Help prepare" is not the same as "prepare." This syllabus includes only a selection of the required reading list for the exam and all of the texts are richer and more complicated than can be adequately studied in the time available. Exam preparation should include several of the following:

      1) Taking at least one, but preferably two, iterations of the proseminar; its coverage and theme changes every year.

      2) Taking additional graduate seminars in political theory that study fewer texts in greater depth.

      3) Attending lectures and/or TAing in some or all of the courses in the undergraduate sequence on the history of political thought: 333, 334, 433, 434.

      4) Taking part in a study group with others taking the exam.

This seminar is not and will not try to be a substitute for items (2), (3), or (4). But one thing the seminar aims to offer, which (3) and (4) may not, is practice in thematically synthesizing across thinkers. An exam question could be something like: "How high should we set our sights about the contributions politics can make to the moral life?" or "Is it possible to govern morally?", with instructions that say "Your answer must draw on three authors from at least two time periods [pre-16th c, 16th-18th c, 19th-20th c] and they must not all agree with each other on the answer to the question. Your answer must take a stand on the question asked, and seriously consider arguments on the other side." So, while we will try to do justice to each text we read in its own right and will explore each text beyond its connections to the overall theme, we will also try to build a thematic conversation over the semester that draws on all of the authors we read.

Prerequisites

None for graduate students. Undergraduates will receive permission only in rare circumstances (by permission of instructor only, only if grades of A- or better in at least two political theory courses at the 400 level or above, and even then permission usually not forthcoming)

Required Texts

You should have hard copies (and not just electronic copies) of the texts for this class. The English-language editions are available for purchase at Paragraphe bookstore:

      Thomas Hobbes. *Leviathan*. Ed. David Johnston. Introduction by Kinch Hoekstra. Norton, 2021.
      John Locke. *The Political Writings*. Edited, with Introduction, by David Wootton. Hacket Publishing,
           2003.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Basic Political Writings*, Trans. Donald A. Cress. 2nd ed. Hackett Publishing, 2012.
John Rawls. *A Theory of Justice*. 2nd ed. Harvard UP, 1999.
Jürgen Habermas. *Between Facts and Norms*. Trans. William Rehg. MIT Press, 1996.
Michel Foucault. *Discipline and Punish*. 2nd ed. Vintage, 1995.

If you are comfortable reading French and/or German, I strongly encourage you to read texts in the original language; I welcome any class discussion based on the original French or German text.

CLASS SCHEDULE

NOTE: The first class on Sept 11 is substantive. All seminar participants must complete assigned reading before coming to the first class.

NOTE: There are two rescheduled classes in this course, on Thursdays Sept. 14 and Oct. 12. This means the course is somewhat front-loaded: we will hit the ground running. The benefit is that late in the semester, when your energy is lagging and it's time to write seminar papers, you will have a lighter load than it otherwise would have been: the regularly scheduled classes for Nov. 6 and Nov. 30 are cancelled.

Thomas Hobbes

1. Sept. 11: *Leviathan*, entire

John Locke

2. Sept. 14 (Thursday): Selections from *Political Writings* [146pgs total]

   Note: this is a rescheduled class

   Item 17: From *The First Treatise of Government* [17pgs]
   Item 19: *Second Treatise of Government* [126pgs]
   Item 23: Preface to *Two Treatises of Government* [3pgs]

3. Sept. 18: Selections from *Political Writings*: [92pgs total]
   Item 9: *Fundamental Constitution of Carolina*, [22pgs]
   Item 21: *Letter Concerning Toleration* [47pgs]
   Items 24-26: "Labour," "Venditio," and *Draft of a Representation* [23pgs]

Jean-Jacques Rousseau

4. Sept. 25
   Required Reading: Selections from *The Basic Political Writings* [155pgs total]
   Discourses on the Sciences and the Arts [27pgs]
   Discourses on the Origin of Inequality including Rousseau's notes [95pgs]
   Discourse on Political Economy [33pgs]

5. Oct. 2: Selections from *The Basic Political Writings*: [114pgs total]
   On the Social Contract [100pgs]
   The State of War [14pgs]

John Rawls

6. Oct. 12 (Thursday): *A Theory of Justice*, preface and Part 1 [176pgs]

Note: this is a rescheduled class

7. Oct. 16: *A Theory of Justice*, Part 2 [176pgs]

8. Oct. 23: Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, Part 3 and preface to revised edition [186pgs]

Jürgen Habermas

9. Oct. 30: *Between Facts and Norms*, preface and chapters 1-4 [198pgs]

Note: Nov. 6 class is cancelled

10. Nov. 13: *Between Facts and Norms*, chapters 5-9, postscript, appendices [303pgs]

Seminar paper (option 1) or research paper proposal (option 2) due Thursday Nov. 16, 5pm

Michel Foucault

11. Nov. 20: *Discipline and Punish*, parts 1-2 [135pgs]

12. Nov. 27: *Discipline and Punish*, parts 3-4 [174pgs]

Note: Class on Nov. 30 (McGill's designated "Monday make-up day") is cancelled.

13. Dec. 4: TBA

Research paper (option 2) due Wednesday Dec. 6, 11:59pm

DISTRIBUTION OF MARKS:

Option 1:

In-class Participation	25%
In-class Presentation (15-18 minutes)	20%
Seminar Paper (4500-5500 words)	30%
Practice Comprehensive Exam	25%

Option 2:

In-class Participation	25%
In-class Presentation (15-18 minutes)	20%
Research Paper Proposal	15%
Research Paper (7000-8000 words)	40%

For either option, you must pass each portion of the class to receive a grade of D or above in the class as a whole.
For option 1, if you give only one presentation, your seminar paper topic must be different from your in-class presentation.
The practice comprehensive exam will be held at the end of semester on a date to be determined in consultation

with those taking option 1.

Participation, Reading, and Talking Points

It is essential that readings be completed before class, and that everyone participate actively in class discussions. Besides reading each assigned text, you are expected to prepare three sets of talking points on each assigned text for each class:

       1. be prepared to state and explain the key *concepts* used by the author

       2. be prepared to state the main thesis (in the case of articles or excerpts) or main theses (in the case of a longer assignment such as a book) in two or three concise sentences

       3. be prepared to give your own evaluation of the persuasiveness of the main thesis/theses

You are *not* expected to hand in your talking points in writing; you *are* expected to be able to speak about them orally in class.

Your participation grade will be assessed as follows: At every session, I will assign a letter grade for oral participation. If your participation is excellent (you show a command of the assigned readings, some originality and enthusiasm in the discussion, and your arguments are clear and solid) you will receive an A range grade; if it is good to very good (your remarks are competent, interesting, and well-articulated, even though you may not have fully digested the material) you will receive a B range grade; if it is fair (you have not really developed a point of view based on reasoned analysis of the assigned material and/or your comments are inaccurate and inconsistent) you will receive a C range grade, which indicates that you are not performing adequately for graduate level studies. If it is clear that you have not done the reading at all, you will receive an F; and if you fail to attend, you will earn a 0 for that day. Your class participation grade will be an average of your best 11 (eleven) classes.

Absences

You get one free absence, no questions asked. Use it wisely.

(Please note that if you are absent from the first class, you are absent from the first class.)

For each class you are counted absent after the free absence, you will be required to write one 1000 word make-up essay, due at the beginning of the next class, on the material from the missed class. Each time that you fail to hand in the make-up essay at the next class, or each time your make-up essay is of below B level quality, your final course mark will drop down by one third of a grade (i.e., from A to A- to B+ etc.), unless you have made arrangements with me beforehand. This is all your responsibility; I will not be chasing you down for make-up papers.

The ONLY exception to this is if you have a note from a doctor indicating you had a communicable disease. Please do not attend class if you have symptoms of such a disease.

Make-up essays are not "punishments" for missing class: you are adults and what you do with your time is really none of the professor's business, and you will no doubt sometimes have extremely valid reasons for not coming to class. But it is the professor's business to ensure a successful seminar, and this depends on all of us being on the same page. The purpose of the make-up essay requirement is to provide you the opportunity to digest the material for the class you missed. Our discussions in subsequent classes will build on our previous classes; it is absolutely imperative for a successful seminar that everyone be on the same page.

In-Class Presentations

At the first session of the course, students will sign up for at least one in-class presentation during the rest of

the course. Starting with the second session, each session will be divided in two. The first 60 to 90 minutes will be devoted to a continuation of the previous week's reading, beginning with a 15-18-minute presentation by a student. If there are less than twelve students in the seminar, then some students will give two in-class presentations; for these students, their lowest presentation grade will be dropped. The second presentations will be distributed first voluntarily, then, if there still remains slots, by random selection.

Your presentation should be outlined in writing, and you should practise it beforehand to ensure you are able to do it in the allotted time. You are required to submit a copy of your oral presentation notes (maximum 2 pages, 12-point font, single-spaced, bullet point form) to the professor at the start of your presentation, but your fellow students may also appreciate a copy. Please note that you should not be reading from a text for the in-class presentation: a superior in-class presentation requires you to develop your verbal presentation skills.

Since everyone is expected to have studied the material beforehand, the goal of your presentation is not to summarize the readings for the class. Presentations should be synthetic and thesis-driven, not book reports, summaries, or outlines: they are primarily critical analyses, not expository. For the session you are giving your presentation, you should plan to read a few supplementary readings (secondary literature) beyond the required readings; your presentation should ordinarily draw connections with past readings and incorporate insights from your supplementary readings beyond the required readings. However, your presentation need not, and usually should not, aspire to cover everything in a day's readings. Your goal is to spark discussion by arguing for a thesis, critically engaging with the assigned texts, and raising issues and objections that you think will be of interest to the class. You may of course need to summarize some points, but only to serve the fundamentally critical, analytical goals of your presentation. To be thesis-driven, a presentation must contain an argument about a question on which disagreement is possible. "I will summarize" is not a thesis. Theses may be interpretive ("As between plausible interpretations of the text X and Y, Y is correct, for the following reasons") or evaluative ("the text offers this important argument, which I will show to be incorrect"). You are encouraged to continue themes from the previous week's discussions. If we have done our work well in one week, we'll leave with some things that we have been debating; it's entirely appropriate for the presentation to be an attempt to resolve (or "defend one position in") one of those debates.

Research Paper Proposal (Option 2)

Your research paper proposal will comprise 5 sections, which must strictly conform to the indicated word counts. Each section should be numbered, and introduced with the appropriate heading (the underlined words below).

1. A statement of the problem and of your overriding <u>thesis</u> (100-200 words)

2. An explanation of your <u>research methods,</u> i.e., the methods you have used to find the literature that is relevant to your thesis. (For example, you should indicate which library resources, citation databases, search words, bibliographies, etc. you have used.) If you have not written a research paper of this kind before, I strongly recommend that you make an appointment with a research librarian to learn the research methods available to you. The quality of the literature review and of your annotated bibliography (and, as a consequence, of your research proposal) will depend heavily not just on the quantity of items you find, but more importantly on the quality of the items. The quality of the literature review will also depend on your bibliography not having a random quality to it, i.e., not seeming like the principle of selection was simply "those texts I happened to come across." Remember not to ignore more general books may have a section or chapter specifically on your topic – you won't necessarily find these through bibliographic searches, but, once you figure out what the most important books on your topic are, you need to actually go skim their tables of contents. (90-110 words)

3. A <u>review of the literature</u> relevant to your thesis. This section needs to (a) give the reader a sense of what work has already been done in your topic, and (b) make the case that, given what is out there in the literature, the problem you raise and the thesis you advance is an interesting one about which more should be said. You can consider this section to be an introduction of sorts to your annotated bibliography. (400-500 words)

4. A prose outline of <u>the main arguments</u> *for and against* your thesis (400-500 words)

5. An <u>annotated research bibliography</u>, which will supplement (and to some extent overlap with) your review of the literature

    a. Format:

        i. Each annotation should be preceded by a full bibliographic citation.

        ii. For articles, the annotation should be between 50 and 100 words. It should summarize the main thesis of the article, the main arguments, and very briefly indicate the article's importance to your paper.

        iii. For books, you need to be selective. Not everything that is in the book needs to be annotated. You should choose all the chapters or issues that are relevant to your paper and, in an introductory sentence, indicate what these chapters or issues are (i.e., tell the reader what you are selecting from the book to annotate). Then provide one or more annotations, each of which is in the same format as that for articles (e.g. 50-100 words) and each of which is either be focussed on a particular section of the book (e.g. a chapter), or on one particular issue/theme running through the book. Remember, you do not need to cover every chapter or every theme.

    b. Length:

    There is no magic number for how many books and articles you need to consult. (You should have a balance of books and articles.) The length of your bibliography will depend on the topic you choose and the literature that is available. However, there is a straightforward principle that you must use in figuring out how much to put in. The principle is this: when you write your research paper, you must safeguard yourself from the objection "But if you had only read such-and-such a paper or book, you would have known that your argument faces the following obvious objection…" You do not necessarily need to have read ALL the secondary literature on the issue that you are dealing with—which may be impossible—BUT you do need to have covered enough of it so that you have a sense of the lay of the land, enough so that you are confident that you have covered your back. The less likely it is that a reader could come back to you and say, Oh, but you missed this article/book which is crucial to your argument, the better.

Paper-Writing Guidance

For guidance on how to write a good political theory paper for an upper-level course, see my "[Guidance for Writing Essays for your Upper Level Political Theory Class](https://abizadeh.wixsite.com/arash/post-1/guidance-for-writing-essays-for-your-upper-level-political-theory-class)."

https://abizadeh.wixsite.com/arash/post-1/guidance-for-writing-essays-for-your-upper-level-political-theory-class

Paper Format

Papers are handed in as a PDF file via MyCourses. The name of the file you upload to MyCourses must be "Your-student-ID#_Paper#." All papers must be <u>double-spaced</u>, at least 11-point font, proper <u>reference citation,</u> with no separate title page but your title placed at the top of your first page. At the **end** of your paper, put your name and final <u>word count</u> (including footnotes, excluding works cited). (So: do not put your name at the beginning of your paper.) If you are using notes, use numbered footnotes (not endnotes, and Arabic not Roman numerals). I do not care which reference citation system you use, as long as you are consistent and complete. (You may wish to use the Modern Language Association (MLA) system.) Papers that fail to meet these criteria will be penalized by dropping to the next possible letter grade (e.g., from A to A-).

On the word count: you need to observe the word count. If you find yourself going over the word limit, go back and edit, trying to cut out every single sentence or word that is not absolutely necessary to make your point and to defend your thesis. At each point in the paper, you should honestly be able to answer "yes" to the question: is this bit here really necessary for the defence of my thesis? You will not be penalized if you go over the word limit only if it is clear that the extra length was crucial to your argument and hence warranted. Otherwise, cut.

Teaching Assistant Extension

Teaching assistants will receive a two-week extension on their final paper upon request. However, to receive the extension, you must officially request in in writing, by email, by Nov. 1, 2023.

Late Work

Your paper must be completed on time. **Late work** will be penalized by dropping each day (including Saturday and Sunday) by one third of a grade (i.e., from A+ to A to A- to B+ etc.), unless you have secured explicit permission in advance to turn in your paper late.

Be proactive. If there are any foreseeable problems, come talk to me early, rather than waiting until after the fact. I will not grant extensions a couple of days before the due date.

MARKING CRITERIA

Papers will be marked according to the following criteria:
1. Written Expression: spelling, punctuation, grammar, style, quality of prose, etc.
2. Structure and Organization: sensible use of paragraph breaks, sensible order of paragraphs, smooth transitions, etc.
3. Format: consistent system for references, word count indicated, etc.
4. Analytical Rigour: clarity of thesis and argument, logic, precision, consideration of counterarguments, etc.
5. Originality / Creativity
6. Scholarship: proper citation of sources, accurate representation of author's cited, other works engaged with when appropriate, quality of research if a research paper, etc.
7. Miscellaneous: meets purposes of assignment, etc.

Each paper will be returned with a grade corresponding to each of these 6 or 7 items, in addition to your overall paper grade. Please note that (with the exception noted in the next paragraph) these itemized grades are purely meant to provide you with feedback, so that you have an idea of what areas require improvement in future work. Your final grade is NOT an average of these itemized grades.

However, an F on any one of the seven criteria (except criterion 3) will result in an F on the written assignment

as a whole. In particular, a minimum level of originality (criterion 5) and knowing when and how to provide proper references to works that you have used in crafting your essay (criterion 6) are substantive requirements for all written assignments, without which the maximum grade is an F.

Explanation of Grades

Grades for papers will range from F to A+. Since I do not believe in grade inflation, and since I use the whole range of grades, to help you interpret your performance in the course, I provide here a very rough idea of what grades in the C to A ranges mean. A grade in the **C** range indicates some basic problems that require immediate attention and perhaps some pedagogic help. I take a **B-** to be a below average grade which suggests some problem that needs attention. A **B** reflects average work; it is a respectable though perhaps unhappy grade. It indicates a need for improvement in future work. Usually there are no major errors, and there is a good, above-average comprehension of the material – though there may be problems of written expression, or of precision, or the work amounts to a regurgitation of texts or class discussion, etc. I consider a **B+** to be a very good grade reflecting above average and promising work. General qualities usually include an excellent comprehension of the material, excellent organization of paper, excellent written expression, no major errors, meeting all basic requirements of assignment, attaining a basic level of analytical rigour, and going beyond a mere regurgitation of texts and class work. Moving into the A-range requires not just comprehending the material and presenting it well, but a critical engagement with the material that captures its subtleties and displays some spark of creative originality and/or superior analytical rigour. (All of this means that an excellent paper that is also excellent because it was a "safe" paper to write will probably end up with a B+. And, in fact, sometimes, depending on where you are at with the material, that is exactly the kind of paper you need to write.) An **A-** is an excellent grade reflecting a paper that is almost flawless in the basic requirements (excellent comprehension of material, organization of paper, written expression, etc.); there is also a critical engagement that captures the complexities and subtleties of the material, and that displays some combination of superior analytical rigour and/or creative original insight. A grade of **A** reflects a top-notch work that is flawless in the basic requirements and that reflects an outstanding comprehension of the material in all its complexities and subtleties and displays a combination of superior analytical rigour and creative original insight. The writer had likely set themselves up with an intellectually challenging project (which of course sometimes carries with it some risk) and was able to pull it off. The very rare **A+** is similar; the plus comes from the fact that I was saying "wow!" while reading your paper.

What Grades are Not

Although it takes intelligence to write good papers, at the end of the day grades are NOT an evaluation of your intelligence. And grades are certainly not an indicator for how much the professor likes you or how smart he or she thinks you are. To write well, you have to take risks, and often those risks will not pay off. If you do poorly on your paper, remember that many very smart people write papers receiving poor grades. Sometimes it's simply because you have not learned the relevant skills yet. Sometimes it is a matter of sheer luck (you got unlucky and picked a topic or line of argument that turned out to be a dead-end, and you had no way of knowing in advance!) University is an opportunity for you to take risks from which you can learn.

Notices

McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore, 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 www.mcgill.ca/integrity for more information)

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.

In the event of extraordinary circumstances beyond the University's control, the content and/or evaluation scheme in this course is subject to change.

Instructor-generated course materials (e.g., handouts, notes, summaries, exam questions, slides, video recordings, lectures, etc.) remain the instructor's intellectual property and are protected by law and may not be copied or distributed in any form or in any medium without explicit permission of the instructor. As such, you may use these only for your own learning (and research, with proper referencing/citation) ends. You are not permitted to disseminate or share these materials; doing so may violate the instructor's intellectual property rights. Copyright infringements could be cause for disciplinary action and follow-up by the University under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures.