

# **POLI 617: Ideology, Culture, and Power**

Winter 2024

**DRAFT**

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Office Hours: Thursday, 13h30-15h30h & by appointment (Zoom or in-person)

## **Course Aims and Objectives:**

This seminar examines recent works on the theory of ideology against the background of important twentieth century sources of ideology theory and in light of influential accounts of social norms, reasoning, and epistemic practices. The goal is to assess, in particular, recent work on ideology by Sally Haslanger, Charles Mills, Tommie Shelby, and Jason Stanley. The question animating this philosophical research has been, in Haslanger's words, "why is it that most of us, most of the time, act in ways that perpetuate injustice?" This seminar is oriented by the question of whether that is the right question to ask.

We will begin with two recent works in critical history, Chris Chitty's *Sexual Hegemony* and Jules Gill-Peterson's *Histories of the Transgender Child*. Although these books are not *about* ideology, they exemplify two approaches to the study of ideology. We will then examine some of the most important source texts for the study of ideology before turning to the recent efforts to revitalize this study within philosophy.

## **Course Texts:**

I have ordered the following course texts to The Word Bookstore, at 469 Milton St. (cash/cheque only). They are also available on course reserve in the Humanities & Social Sciences Library.

- Louis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy, and Other Essays* (Verso, 1971): 978-0902308893
- Christopher Chitty, *Sexual Hegemony: Statecraft, Sodomy, and Capital in the Rise of the World System* (Duke University Press, 2020): 978-1478009580
- Karen E. Fields and Barbara J. Fields, *Racecraft: The Soul of Inequality in America* (Verso, new edition, 2022): 978-1839765643
- Amanda Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing* (Oxford University Press, 2007): 978-0198237907
- Jules Gill-Peterson, *Histories of the Transgender Child* (University of Minnesota Press, 2018): 978-1517904678
- Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (International Publishers, 1971): 978-0717803972

- Göran Therborn, *The Ideology of Power and the Power of Ideology* (Verso, revised edition, 1997): 978-1859842126

All other readings are or will be available on myCourses. Students are encouraged to read texts in the original languages when possible. Contact me for bibliographic information if you are having trouble locating original language texts. Note that the amount of reading can vary considerably from week to week. In a lighter week you might well want to get a head start on reading for a future heavy week.

**Schedule:** Much of this is still tentative, but (a) the first three weeks are set and will not be revised, and (b) the rest gives a good idea of what we will be covering.

- 10 Jan: Chitty, *Sexual Hegemony*
- 17 Jan: Gill-Peterson, *Histories of the Transgender Child*
- 24 Jan: Mills, “‘Ideology’ in Marx and Engels: Revisited and Revised” (1992); Marx and Engels, from “The German Ideology”; Marx, Preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*; Lenin, from *What Is to Be Done?*
- 31 Jan: *Decision due on paper options*  
Gramsci, from *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*
- 7 Feb: Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards and Investigation)”
- 14 Feb: Therborn, *The Ideology of Power and the Power of Ideology*
- 21 Feb: Fields and Fields, *Racecraft*
- 28 Feb: Mills, “Under Class Under Standings” and “White Supremacy as Sociopolitical System”; Shelby, “Ideology, Racism, and Critical Social Theory”; Haslanger, “Racism, Ideology, and Social Movements”
- 6 Mar: Winter break
- 13 Mar: *1st seminar paper due*  
“Book Symposium: *How Propaganda Works*,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, vol. 96, no. 2 (March 2018): pp. 470-511

- 20 Mar: *Term paper proposal due*  
Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*
- 27 Mar: Haslanger, “Failures of Methodological Individualism: The Materiality of Social Systems”; Pettit, from *The Common Mind*; Mercier and Sperber, “Précis of *The Enigma of Reason*”; Balkin, from *Cultural Software*
- 3 Apr: *Australasian Philosophical Review*, vol. 3, no. 1 (2019)
- 10 Apr: Haslanger, *Ideology in Practice: What Does Ideology Do?*; Sankaran, “What’s New in the New Ideology Critique?”; Barrett, “Ideology Critique and Game Theory”

### **Coursework:**

This is a seminar; attendance at and participation in all sessions is mandatory. Your participation grade will be based on the best 10 out of 13 weeks, however, since I realize that everyone will have weeks when they are overwhelmed or for some other reason unable to prepare and to participate as fully as usual.

Each session will be divided in two. The first half will be devoted to a continuation of our conversation about the previous week’s reading. The second half will inaugurate discussion of the readings for the current week. Each half will begin with a short, 10 minute student presentation. These presentations will attempt to convey the basic arguments of the focal reading under consideration, in as clear and jargon-free a language as possible. They will conclude with 2 or 3 well-formulated questions to kick off discussion.

These presentations should be written out in advance as a complete text and emailed to me no later than 5 pm the evening before class. Test for yourself how much material you can (comfortably and comprehensibly) read aloud in 10 minutes; this will vary in part according to the type of material you’re working with. For most people, 100–125 words per minute is a comfortable reading pace; using that baseline, presentation texts should be 1000-1250 words total.

### **Grading:**

1. Seminar participation: 30%
2. In-class presentation: 10%
3. One of:
  - a. Term paper of 8,000-10,000 words, 60%
  - b. Two seminar papers of 5000-6000 words, 30% each

I encourage MA students to choose 3b unless they think that the paper they write for this class might become the basis of their MA thesis. Anyone is free, however, to select either option, as they wish. Students must decide which option to select no later than 1 February, and inform me accordingly.

I will make the deadline for the term papers as late as I reasonably can in April, and will fully grant the normal TA extension, but I will not grant further extensions that go into the summer or next semester. Students choosing 3b should submit their first papers by 8 March. Students choosing 3a should submit a paper proposal of up to 750 words by 22 March.

**Writing advice:**

Substantial essays, like those for this or any other seminar, requires steady and continuous writing. They cannot, as a rule, be done well in a short burst of feverish writing. A common mistake people make is to try to outline their argument before writing a draft. This generally doesn't work, as it presupposes that you have a fairly elaborate mental plan of the essay before you even begin to write it. This is an unrealistic expectation, and harboring it magnifies the difficulty of taking the first steps of actual writing.

I **strongly** encourage you to begin a document in the very first week of the seminar in which you write down your thoughts about the seminar material if not every day at least 4 days per week. These (almost) daily writings do not have to be extensive or polished. You might start with a goal of 100-200 words per day, increasing this if you find yourself capable of more. The important things are to establish a) a habit of writing about the course material and b) an ongoing process of articulating your thoughts about that material. Over the course of the term, this document will grow into a substantial body of writing about the themes and texts of the seminar.

As you begin to notice recurrent motifs, questions, or arguments developing in your daily writings, developing these can become the explicit focus of your writing. At this point, you can begin drafting essay outlines (*if* you like working with outlines). A couple weeks before your essays are due to be handed in, you can transform your daily writing into the redrafting – *in a fresh document* – of the arguments you have been developing. In this way, your essay will grow organically and be much more thoroughly thought out, and you won't be caught frantically trying to come up with an argument at the last minute.

**Academic freedom:**

Academic freedom in a university setting differs from freedom of speech in society at large; it is not the right to say just anything you want to say. It guarantees scholars – including both faculty and students – protection for their scholarly inquiries regardless of the conclusions that they reach, while also demanding respect for scholarly methods. One element of this protection is that scholars will not be sanctioned within the classroom for what happens outside of it. The other major element is that scholars will be evaluated on the basis of their use of scholarly methods, not on the basis of the conclusions that they reach.

What this means in a class like this is: *your grade will not be affected by your speech in nonacademic settings, and it will not be affected by such things as whether the political conclusion you argue for is popular among fellow students or is shared by the professor.* We are studying controversial and complicated questions, and you will be evaluated on the basis of considerations such as the quality of your arguments, the quality of your writing, and the careful use of sources, not on the basis of the political orientation of your conclusions.

**Land acknowledgment:**

McGill University is on land which has long served as a site of meeting and exchange amongst Indigenous peoples, including the Haudenosaunee and Anishinabeg nations. We acknowledge and thank the diverse Indigenous people whose footsteps have marked this territory on which peoples of the world now gather.

L'Université McGill est sur un emplacement qui a longtemps servi de lieu de rencontre et d'échange entre les peuples autochtones, y compris les nations Haudenosaunee et Anishinabeg. Nous reconnaissons et remercions les divers peuples autochtones dont les pas ont marqué ce territoire sur lequel les peuples du monde entier se réunissent maintenant.

**Academic integrity:**

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 <https://www.mcgill.ca/deanofstudents/plagiarism> for more information).

L'université McGill attache une haute importance à l'honnêteté académique. Il incombe par conséquent à tous les étudiants de comprendre ce que l'on entend par tricherie, plagiat et autres infractions académiques, ainsi que les conséquences que peuvent avoir de telles actions, selon le Code de conduite de l'étudiant et des procédures disciplinaires

(pour de plus amples renseignements, veuillez consulter le site <https://www.mcgill.ca/deanofstudents/plagiarism>).

**Language of submission:**

In accordance 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.

Conformément à la Charte des droits de l'étudiant de l'Université McGill, chaque étudiant a le droit de soumettre en français ou en anglais tout travail écrit devant être noté.

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