

**Poli 365: Democratic Theory**  
**Fall 2023**  
**Dr. Jason Ferrell**  
**MW: 8:45-9:55**  
**Birks 111**  
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**Office Hours: by appointment**

### ***1. Aims and Learning Objectives***

This course will examine the theory and practice of democracy, as found within the writings of significant thinkers. We will begin with a brief review of the history of democratic practice as found in ancient Athens and the Roman republic, before studying the historical reception of democratic ideals by modern and contemporary thinkers. For the latter part of the course the focus will be on the various visions of democracy scholars provide: republican, liberal, deliberative, and multi-cultural. Along these lines, two points need to be kept in mind: (1) the historical contingency of democracy (that there are no guarantees that democracy, in any form, will prevail) and (2) the diverse and plural visions of democracy (that democracy is espoused in a variety of ways).

The aims of the course are:

- a. To give you substantive knowledge of an important tradition of political theory.
- b. To give you an ability to read, understand, and interpret difficult theoretical texts that were written in quite different social and political contexts than our own.
- c. To give you an ability to understand theoretical arguments about political ideas and concepts and construct them in a precise, rigorous, and logical way.
- d. To give you an ability to think independently and critically about the texts you read and about interpretations of those texts.
- e. To give you an ability to communicate ideas and arguments effectively in both oral and written form.

The assessment of the course will be closely tied to these aims (see below for more on assessment). Keep them in mind when you prepare for class and study for the exams.

### ***2. Teaching Arrangements***

Each week there will be two lectures by me (unless otherwise determined). The lectures will be mostly me talking, but I will encourage students to ask questions, and may ask students to participate in other ways at times.

### ***3. Assessment***

Mid-term Exam	25%
Paper (2,000-2,500 words)	35%
Final Exam	40%

The mid-term exam will be held during normal class time, while the final will be held according to the university's schedule. The paper will be by midnight, December 4. **NO LATE PAPERS WILL BE ACCEPTED.**

#### 4. *Readings*

You should buy a copy of Rousseau's *The Social Contract* (Hackett Publishing), which will be available at the McGill Bookstore. All other readings will be posted on MyCourses. All of them are required readings.

#### 5. *Course Calendar*

The calendar below tells you what you should be reading for each day of the term. It is essential that you consult this regularly so that you don't fall too far behind.

##### Week of August 27

Wednesday: Introduction to the course

##### Week of September 3

**Monday: Labour Day (No class)**

Wednesday: Historical Context Lecture for the Athenian conception of democracy

##### Week of September 10

Monday: Pericles, "Funeral Oration"

Wednesday: Plato, selection from *The Republic*

##### Week of September 17

Monday: Historical Context Lecture for the Roman conception of republicanism

Wednesday: Niccolo Machiavelli, selection from *the Discourse on Livy*

##### Week of September 24

Monday & Wednesday: Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *the Social Contract* (books 1 & 2)

##### Week of October 1

Monday & Wednesday: Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *the Social Contract* (books 3 & 4)

Week of October 8

**No Class: Thanksgiving and Fall Reading Break**

Week of October 15

**Monday: Mid-term**

Wednesday: Special Class on the Research Paper

Week of October 22

Monday & Wednesday: Benjamin Constant, “The Liberties of the Ancient Compared with that of the Moderns”

Week of October 29

Monday & Wednesday: Philip Petit, selections from *Republicanism*

Week of November 5

Monday & Wednesday: Isaiah Berlin, “Two Concepts of Liberty”

Week of November 12

Monday & Wednesday: Amy Gutmann & Dennis Thompson, selections from *Democracy and Disagreement*

Week of November 19

Monday & Wednesday: John Rawls, selections from *Political Liberalism*

Week of November 26

Monday: Will Kymlicka, “Neoliberal Multiculturalism?”

Wednesday: Giovanni Sartori, selections from *The Theory of Democracy Revisited*

Week of December 3

Monday: George Washington, *Farewell Address* & Course Wrap-up

**PAPERS DUE BY MIDNIGHT December 4 (NO LATE PAPERS ACCEPTED)**

## 6. *Additional Considerations*

### **Course and University Policies**

*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](#).” (Approved by Senate on 29 January 2003) (See McGill’s [guide to academic honesty](#) 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 [guide pour l’honnêteté académique de McGill](#).)»

*Special Needs:* As the instructor of this course I endeavor to provide an inclusive learning environment. However, 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.

*Language:* 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.

“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 (sauf dans le cas des cours dont l’un des objets est la maîtrise d’une langue).”

*Course-Evaluations:* End-of-course evaluations are one of the ways that McGill works towards maintaining and improving the quality of courses and the student’s learning experience. You will be notified by e-mail when the evaluations are available. Please note that a minimum number of responses must be received for results to be available to students.

### **Netiquette:**

The University recognizes the importance of maintaining teaching spaces that are respectful and inclusive for all involved. To this end, offensive, violent, or harmful language arising in contexts such as the following may be cause for disciplinary action:

1. Username (use only your legal or preferred name)
2. Visual backgrounds
3. "Chat" boxes

To maintain a clear and uninterrupted learning space for all, you should keep your microphone muted throughout your class, unless invited by the instructor to speak. You should follow instructors’ directions about the use of the “chat” function on remote learning platforms.

**Note:** In the event of extraordinary circumstances beyond the University's control, the content and/or evaluation scheme in this course is subject to change. **The privilege of additional work will not be granted.**

### **Acknowledgement of Land**

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.