POLI 366 (Topics in Political Theory 1): Judgment, Pluralism, and Democracy

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Course Description
The topic of this course is judgment: the nature of the faculty of the human mind and its political potential. The idea that judgment is an inherently political capacity is most prominently articulated by Hannah Arendt, who draws her inspiration from Kant’s third *Critique*. Thus we will begin by with Kant’s theory of aesthetic judgment and its notion of intersubjective validity. After looking at some of Kant’s more explicitly political writings (along with, perhaps, portions of his ethics, anthropology, and history), we will consider how some of his immediate successors (Fichte and Hegel) discuss the concepts of morality, natural right, humanity, and community. This will set the stage for the reception of Kantian and post-Kantian political theory in the 20th century. We will start with the most well-known Kantian approaches (Habermas and Rawls), looking at debates about deliberation, public reason, value pluralism, consensus, and reasonability. We will then look at Arendt’s creative appropriation of Kant’s theory of judgment for politics as an alternative to those which are explicitly grounded in his moral and practical philosophy; we will also read some of her other essays that deal with the question of truth, culture, freedom, and human action. In what remains, we will look at contemporary defenders and critics of the judgment paradigm (Ferrara; Azmanova)—that is, those who are sympathetic to Arendtian politics, as well as those who opt for a more rationalist framework. In particular, we will focus on a cluster of issues and problems that arise in this context, such as: the supposed amoralism of an aesthetic politics (Benhabib; Kateb), the problem of adjudication and normative validity (Zerilli; Dunn), agonism and decisionism (Mouffe; Kalyvas), and the role of imagination and affect (Young; Connolly; Thiele).

Guiding questions
What is the relevance of aesthetics for politics? Can aesthetic judgments serve as a model for political judgment? Do political claims admit of a unique kind of rationality or normativity validity? What place, if any, does ethics have here? What about truth? How do the affective and imaginative dimensions of human experience shape one’s political perspectives? What are the implications of all this for how we conceive of political discourse and debate? What does the judgment paradigm have to offer contemporary pluralist and democratic societies, especially ones characterized by increasingly deep disagreement?

Prerequisites
This is a 300-level course. In accordance with departmental regulations, this means that students have taken a 200-level course in political theory. Due to the philosophical nature of the course material, however, I will accept courses in political philosophy from other departments.
**Learning Outcomes (Course Objectives)**

This course aims has two main pedagogical aims: (i) to introduce students to some important historical and contemporary texts in political thought, and to familiarize them with some key concepts and debates in political theory, and for them to learn (ii) to explain, analyze, and evaluate how different theoretical frameworks bear on current political problems.

**Required Texts**

You are required to purchase the following text(s), which will be made available at The Word Bookstore (469 rue Milton):


All other readings will be made available through MyCourses.

Some texts that are recommended, since several readings appear in them:

- Immanuel Kant, *Political Writings*, ed. H.S. Reiss
- Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought*
- Ronald Beiner and Jennifer Nedelsky, eds., *Judgment, Imagination, and Politics*

Some texts from which I will draw on in my lectures:

- Alessandro Ferrara, *The Force of the Example: Explorations in the Paradigm of Judgment*
- Kennan Ferguson, *The Politics of Judgment: Aesthetics, Identity, and Political Theory*
- Linda Zerilli, *A Democratic Theory of Judgment*

**Assessment**

Your evaluation in this course will be based on the following:

**Engagement and Participation (30%)**

Given the condensed nature of this course and the dense nature of the readings, you will be required to submit a *Question for Consideration* for each class session: an approximately half-page question that is thoughtful and grounded in the text. This will also serve to stimulate classroom discussion. There are 18 sessions in total, and you will be graded on the highest 15. Specific instructions on the format and rubric for these will be provided. You will also be asked to submit a 1-2 sentence *Takeaway* in the final minutes of class; you must submit a minimum of 15 to get full credit. Together, these will also function as attendance.

**Paper (50%)**

This will be an argumentative, thesis-driven essay on an issue from the course material. It will be completed in parts, with due dates staggered over the final half of the course. You will first write a short exposition of a relevant text from one of the three major theoretical frameworks...
we consider. Then, you will produce an introductory paragraph (with a thesis statement) and an outline of the rest of the paper. Prior to submitting the final version, you will both submit a first version and give feedback on others’ first versions. The final version will be due in class on the day of the final exam.

- Exposition (1-1.5 pages): 10%
- Introductory paragraph and outline: 5%
- Peer Review on first version: 10%
- Final version (5-7 pages): 25%

**Final Exam (25%)**
Because this is a summer course, I am required to give a final exam worth a minimum of 25%. This being the case, I will give you an opportunity to apply the position you defend in your final essay to an issue in contemporary politics. You will be given instructions on this the day before the exam, and will be able to use a fact sheet as well as your final essay.

**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](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.
- 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 an alternate name or gender pronoun. Please be in touch early on to advise me.

**List of Topics and Schedule of Readings:**

**Unit 1: Kant and the post-Kantians**

Kant’s aesthetics
- Excerpts from the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* (1790)

Kant’s ethics and politics
- Excerpts from the *Groundwork of the metaphysics of morals* (1785) and the *Metaphysics of morals* (1797)
- “Theory and Practice” (1793)
Kant’s history and anthropology
- Excerpts from *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* (1798)
- “Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose” (1784)
- “Conjectures on the Beginning of Human History” (1786)

Fichte on the separation of morality and right
- Excerpts from *Foundations of Natural Right* (1797)

Hegel on the ethical and the moral
- Excerpts from *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* (1821) and *Introduction to the Philosophy of History* (1840)

Unit 2: Kant in the 20th century

Deliberative Democracy: Habermas
- “Popular Sovereignty as Procedure” (1988) [in *Between Facts and Norms: Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy*]

Contemporary Liberalism: Rawls

The Habermas-Rawls debate
- Rawls, “Reply to Habermas” [in *PL*]

Unit 3: Hannah Arendt

- *Lectures on Kant’s Political Philosophy* (p. 7-85)
- Excerpts from *The Human Condition*
- Excerpts from *The Life of the Mind*
- “The Crisis in Culture: Its Social and Its Political Significance”
- “Truth and Politics”
- “Thinking and Moral Considerations”

Unit 4: Problems of Judgment

Communication
- Habermas, “Hannah Arendt’s Communications Concept of Power” (1977)
- Margaret Canovan, “A Case of Distorted Communication: A Note on Habermas and Arendt” (1983)
Peter Verovšek, “A Case of Communicative Learning?: Rereading Habermas’s Philosophical Project through an Arendtian Lens” (2019)

Amoralism
- George Kateb, “The Judgment of Arendt’

Adjudication and Consensus

Decisionism and the Will

Agonism
- Chantal Mouffe, “Deliberative Democracy or Agonistic Pluralism?” (1999) and excerpts from The Democratic Paradox (2000)
- something by Dana Villa or Bonnie Honig

Imagination and the Turn to Affect
- Arendt, “Imagination,” in LKPP (p. 79-85)
- something by William Connolly or Leslie Thiele