

POLI 434: 19th & 20th Century Social & Political Thought

Winter 2024

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

Course Aims and Objectives:

This is a course in 19th and 20th century Western political theory. It concludes the four-semester historical sequence (POLI 333-334-433-434) and introduces students to key texts in the late modern “canon” of political theory.

The 19th century saw the emergence of liberalism, conservatism, and socialism as party ideas, the transformation of the meaning of “democracy” into the sense it has today, and the formulation of nationalism as an ideology of state legitimation and social movement making. It also birthed the great movements for emancipation and enfranchisement that largely eliminated both chattel slavery and serfdom, and that made universal manhood suffrage a reality in some states and an urgent demand in many more. Finally, it also produced the second industrial revolution and the most aggressive empire building that the world had ever seen, developments that together inspired unprecedented murderous violence, initially in Africa and Asia, and then in the catastrophic world wars that dominated the first half of the 20th century.

In other words, a century (~1790-1890) that gave rise to most of the glittering ideals and slogans that still motivate and mobilize so much of our politics today culminated in a century (~1884-1984) in which some of the bloodiest massacres and most horrific wars that humanity has ever known followed those ideals and slogans around the world.

In this course, we will read some of the works of political theory that have best expressed the contradictions and conflicts of this period. Some have helped to shape the political and social movements that have defined late modernity. Others have done a great deal to explain or make sense of the developments we have seen. While we will not be able to exhaust the insights and influences of these texts in a single semester, each of the readings will help us to appreciate the complexity and significance of the modern social and political world.

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.

- G.W.F. Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* (Cambridge University Press, 1991): 978-0521348881

- Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America: The Arthur Goldhammer Translation, Volume Two* (The Library of America, 2012): 978-1598531527
- Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (International Publishers, 1994): 978-0717800568
- W.E.B. Du Bois, *Darkwater: Voices from Within the Veil* (Verso, 2021): 978-1839764073
- Max Weber, *The Vocation Lectures* (Hackett, 2004): 978-0872206656
- Hannah Arendt, *On Violence* (Mariner/Harvest, 1970): 978-0156695008

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:

- 8 Jan: Introduction
Read: [Haitian Declaration of Independence](#)
- 10 Jan: Benjamin Constant, “On the Liberty of the Ancients Compared with That of the Moderns”
- 15 Jan: G.W.F. Hegel, “Independent and Dependent Self-Consciousness: Lordship and Bondage,” from *The Phenomenology of Spirit*
- 17 Jan: Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, III. Ethicality, A. The Family
- 22 Jan: Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, III. Ethicality, B. Civil Society
- 24 Jan: Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, III. Ethicality, C. The State
- 29 Jan: Questions and discussion
- 31 Jan: Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, Author’s Introduction and Vol. Two: II.1-III.12
- 5 Feb: Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, Vol. Two: III.13-IV.8
- 7 Feb: Frederick Douglass, “What, to the Slave, is the Fourth of July?”

- 12 Feb: Questions and discussion
- 14 Feb: Karl Marx, “On the Jewish Question”
- 19 Feb: Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, Chaps. I-III
- 21 Feb: Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, Chaps. IV-VII
- 26 Feb: Questions and discussion
First essay due
- 28 Feb: In-class exam
- 4 Mar: Winter break: no class
- 6 Mar: Winter break: no class
- 11 Mar: W.E.B. Du Bois, *Darkwater*, Credo, II. The Souls of White Folk, and III. The Hands of Ethiopia
- 13 Mar: Du Bois, *Darkwater*, VI. Of the Ruling of Men and VII. The Damnation of Women
- 18 Mar: Max Weber, “Science as a Vocation”
- 20 Mar: Weber, “Politics as a Vocation”
- 25 Mar: Questions and discussion
- 27 Mar: Hannah Arendt, *On Violence*
- 1 Apr: Easter Monday: no class
- 3 Apr: John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, I.1-4 and II.11-15
- 8 Apr: Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, III.20, 22-25; VIII.77; and IX.78-79
- 10 Apr: Questions and discussion, and conclusions
Second essay due
- 11 Apr: In-class exam

Coursework:

This is an advanced course in political theory; attendance at and participation in all sessions is expected. Your participation grade will be based on the best 20 out of 25 classes, however; I realize that everyone will have days when they are overwhelmed or for some other reason unable to prepare and to participate as fully as usual.

Grading:

1. Class attendance & participation: 10% each
2. Two in-class exams (28 Feb. & 11 Apr.): 10% each
3. Two 2000-word essays: 30% each

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.