Topics in Political Theory: Justice and Reconciliation
Political Science 459 / Winter 2017
Course Syllabus
(Tentative. Please check MyCourses for the final official syllabus.)

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Course description

Prerequisites: Undergraduates must have completed at least one upper (300 or 400) level course in political philosophy (preferably 333, 334, 362, 433 or 434).

This course examines the concepts of justice and reconciliation in response to social and political injustices that have culminated in war, atrocity, and/or oppression. Themes to be discussed include victimhood and the sense of injustice; guilt, accountability and punishment; law, politics and morality; compensation, reparation and restorative justice; individual, corporate and collective responsibility; historical injustice and rectificatory justice; transitional justice; structural injustice and political responsibility; institutions of justice and reconciliation such as trials and truth commissions; and the relationship between justice and reconciliation. The course will focus on the concepts and practices of justice and reconciliation in response to contexts of civil and interstate war, as well as to historical colonialism and settler colonialism.

The specific objectives of the course are (1) to clarify the concepts of justice and reconciliation, (2) to identify, understand and assess different conceptions/forms of each as responses to various contexts of political injustice and harms, (3) to engage in a critical evaluation of existing practices of justice and reconciliation, especially in response to settler colonialism. The general objectives of the course include developing the ability to evaluate political and philosophical arguments critically, and improving the skills of communicating normative and interpretative arguments in oral discussion and written work.

Required texts

Students should purchase the following books, available at Paragraphe Bookstore, 2220 McGill College Ave. In addition, some required readings are available through myCourses, other internet sources and the McGill library on-line journal system.

Books to purchase:
2. Glen Sean Coulthard, Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition (University of Minnesota Press, 2014).

Grade distribution

Class attendance and participation: 25%
In-class essay, January 26, 2017: 25%
Paper (due Tuesday, April 11th): 25%
Take-home exam: 25%

Assignments

Class attendance and participation
All relevant readings should be done before each class. Be prepared to discuss and analyze texts in an in-depth manner. Prepare discussion notes and/or questions in advance of each class (maximum of one typed page, double-spaced, 12 point font). Bring two copies of these discussion notes to class: one is for yourself to help guide your oral contributions in the class, and the other copy should be submitted to the Course Professor at the start of the class. The discussion notes that you submit at the beginning of each class count towards your class participation grade, in addition to your physical attendance and oral participation during the class. If you come to class without any notes, your class participation grade for that day cannot be higher than a C. You will receive five free absences with no questions asked. If you miss more than five classes, your absences will be reflected in a lower overall class participation grade. If you miss more than eight classes without a valid excuse (eg death in the family, serious illness), you will be in danger of receiving an F for your overall class participation grade (worth 25% of your final course grade). Please note that work or extracurricular activities do not constitute legitimate excuses for missing class. The class participation grade also includes giving a short presentation on the paper on April 4 or 6, and providing feedback to fellow students on their paper presentations.

Paper (4500-5000 words) on a research question related to the course theme and readings. The paper should engage with course texts as well as additional major texts outside the bounds of the course syllabus. Suggested topics will be distributed and further instruction will be provided. I must approve paper topics by February 23. Due date: Tuesday, April 11. Papers will lose 1/3 of a letter grade per day late (An A will become an A-, etc.) If you are seriously ill or distracted by a serious emergency, it is your responsibility to inform me before the paper is due so that we can make other arrangements.
Policies

The use or display of any mobile computing or communications devices (including computers, recording devices, phones, ipads, or ipods) is strictly prohibited during the seminar, except during student presentations. In exceptional cases, explicit permission from the professor to use such devices may be granted, but will normally require documentation from the Office of Student Disabilities.

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.

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 www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/ 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 www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/).

Course Reading Schedule

Thursday, January 5 / Introduction


January 10 and 12 / Victimhood and the Sense of Injustice

Tuesday, January 17 / Punishment and Retributive Justice


Thursday, January 19th – No class – individual preparation for In-class Essay

Tuesday, January 24 / Legalism and Accountability


Thursday, January 26 – In-class essay (60 minutes)

January 31 and February 2 / Complicity and Collective Harms

- Christopher Kutz, *Complicity* (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 66-112. [myCourses]

February 7 and 9 / Structural Injustice and Political Responsibility


February 14 and 16 / Rectifying Historic Injustices

February 21 and 23 / Benefiting from Injustice

February 28 to March 3 Reading Break – No classes

March 7 and 9 / Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada on Indian Residential Schools
- Truth and Reconciliation commission, Calls to Action

March 14 and 16 / Redressing Settler Colonialism I

March 21 and 23 / Redressing Settler Colonialism II
- *UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*

March 28 / Radical hope

March 30 – No class – individual preparations for class presentations

April 4 and 6 Class paper presentations

April 11 Course Papers due
April 11 Take-home exam distributed

April 13 Take-home exam due at 5 pm