

Divergent approaches in political theory
POLI 561 Seminar: Political Theory – WINTER 2024
Political Science

Course details

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Course description:

A topic in political philosophy such as democracy, liberty, property or nationalism, or a political philosopher, is studied to enable students to research a topic in depth, to present their papers to the seminar, and to engage in and profit from discussion and debate.

Prerequisites: This course is best suited for U3 or U4 Honours Political Science students who have taken at least three courses in political theory at the 300 level or above, and for graduate students with equivalent preparation.

Specific description:

As a capstone course, the students will be provided with a broad engagement with a diversity of distinctive, divergent, and often oppositional substantive and methodological approaches to political theory. The course looks at more canonical approaches, like rationalism and conservatism, but bears a significant focus on contemporary and emergent approaches like the deparochialization of political theory, theory in the Anthropocene, and decolonial and Indigenous approaches.

The aim of this capstone course is for students to integrate their past studies in political theory to demonstrate their ability to autonomously further their engagement with the field through critical engagement, in seminar-style settings, with scholarly texts and through the production of a significant research contribution.

Course calendar

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

Texts assigned may be changed with proper notice.

Some of the texts assigned touch on topic that may be difficult to engage with and may contain problematic terms. We need to approach these issues carefully and care about one another. There is no need to reproduce problematic terms during lectures, discussions, on MyCourses or in assignments.

WEEK 1	8 January: Introduction and syllabus	Syllabus Selection of the texts to present.
WEEK 2	15 January: Rationalism and the Politics of Faith	Oakeshott, Michael Joseph. <i>The Politics of Faith and the Politics of Scepticism</i> . Edited by Timothy Fuller. Selected Writings of Michael Oakeshott / Gen. Ed.: Shirley Robin Letwin. New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1996, 1-67 (66) https://mcgill.on.worldcat.org/oclc/34193248 At the reserve. Oakeshott, Michael Joseph. "Rationalism in politics," in <i>Rationalism in Politics and Other Essays</i> . New and Expanded ed. Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1991, 5-42 (37) https://mcgill.on.worldcat.org/oclc/23141305
WEEK 3	22 January: Conservatism and the politics of scepticism	Oakeshott, Michael Joseph. <i>The Politics of Faith and the Politics of Scepticism</i> . Edited by Timothy Fuller. Selected Writings of Michael Oakeshott / Gen. Ed.: Shirley Robin Letwin. New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1996, 68-133 (65) https://mcgill.on.worldcat.org/oclc/34193248 At the reserve. Oakeshott, Michael Joseph. "On being conservative," in <i>Rationalism in Politics and Other Essays</i> . New and Expanded ed. Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1991, 407-437 (30) https://mcgill.on.worldcat.org/oclc/23141305
WEEK 4	29 January: Political Realism	Williams, Bernard. <i>In the Beginning Was the Deed: Realism and Moralism in Political Argument</i> . Edited by Geoffrey Hawthorn. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 2008. 1-28, 52-96, 128-138 (81) https://mcgill.on.worldcat.org/oclc/336603664
WEEK 5	5 February: Legal and Political constitutionalism	Bellamy, Richard. <i>Political Constitutionalism: A Republican Defence of the Constitutionality of Democracy</i> . Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007. 1-12, 90-141, 145-175 (92) https://mcgill.on.worldcat.org/oclc/191887192
WEEK 6	12 February: Moral and Political responsibility	Young, Iris Marion. <i>Responsibility for Justice</i> . Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011. 3-122 (119) https://mcgill.on.worldcat.org/oclc/700952556
WEEK 7	19 February: The racial contract	Mills, Charles W. <i>The Racial Contract</i> . Ithaca, NY: Cornell Univ. Press, 2011, 1-89. (88) https://mcgill.on.worldcat.org/oclc/1284920273

WEEK 8	26 February: Theory in the Anthropocene	Charbonnier, Pierre. <i>Affluence and Freedom: An Environmental History of Political Ideas</i> . Translated by Andrew Brown. English edition. Cambridge, UK ; Medford, MA: Polity Press, 2021 1-29, (187-208), 209-264 (84) https://mcgill.on.worldcat.org/oclc/1235904597
WEEK 9	4 March: READING WEEK	READING WEEK
WEEK 10	11 March: Deparochializing Political theory	Williams, Melissa S. "Introduction." In <i>Deparochializing Political Theory</i> , edited by Melissa S. Williams. Cambridge, United Kingdom ; Cambridge University Press, 2020, 1-6 (5) https://mcgill.on.worldcat.org/oclc/1137752669 Tully, James. "Deparochializing Political Theory and Beyond." In <i>Deparochializing Political Theory</i> , edited by Melissa S. Williams. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020, 25–59 (34) https://mcgill.on.worldcat.org/oclc/1137752669 Williams, Melissa S. "Deparochializing Democratic Theory." In <i>Deparochializing Political Theory</i> , edited by Melissa S. Williams. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020, 201-229 (28) https://mcgill.on.worldcat.org/oclc/1137752669 Sherwin, Daniel. "Comparative Political Theory, Indigenous Resurgence, and Epistemic Justice: From Deparochialization to Treaty." <i>Contemporary Political Theory</i> 21, no. 1 (March 1, 2022): 46–70. (24) https://doi.org/10.1057/s41296-021-00486-w . (91)
WEEK 11	18 March: Epistemologies of the South and Pluriversal politics	Santos, Boaventura de Sousa. <i>Epistemologies of the South: Justice against Epistemicide</i> . Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2016, 19-46 (27) https://mcgill.on.worldcat.org/oclc/957634424 Escobar, Arturo. <i>Pluriversal Politics: The Real and the Possible</i> . Durham: Duke University Press, 2020, Chapter 1 and 4: 11-30, 67-83 (35) https://mcgill.on.worldcat.org/oclc/1126349391 Hutchings, Kimberly. 2019. "Decolonizing Global Ethics: Thinking with the Pluriverse." <i>Ethics & International Affairs</i> 33 (2): 115–25. (10) https://doi.org/10.1017/S0892679419000169 . (72)
WEEK 12	25 March: Decoloniality in/as praxis	Mignolo, Walter, and Catherine E. Walsh. 2018. <i>On Decoloniality: Concepts, Analytics, Praxis</i> . Durham: Duke University Press. Sections by Catherine Walsh: 15-102 (87) https://mcgill.on.worldcat.org/oclc/1013509033

WEEK 13	1 April: Holiday	Holiday
WEEK 14	8 April: Grounded normativity and anarcho- Indigenism	Burkhardt, Brian Yazzie. 2020. "The Groundedness of Normativity or Indigenous Normativity Through the Land." In <i>Comparative Metaethics: Neglected Perspectives on the Foundations of Morality</i> , edited by Colin Marshall, 40–59. New York ; London: Taylor & Francis. (19) https://mcgill.on.worldcat.org/oclc/1123193635 Dupuis-Déri, Francis, and Benjamin Pillet. <i>Anarcho-Indigenism: Conversations on Land and Freedom</i> . London: Pluto Press, 2023. 1-61, (62-103), 104-147 https://mcgill.on.worldcat.org/oclc/1395184100 (120 – the pages of <i>Anarcho-Indigenism</i> are shorter)
	11 April (THURSDAY – Make-up day)	In-class workshop for the term papers.

Evaluations:

Assignments and weight	Short description	Deadline
In-class participation 24%	Average of all participation points earned: excludes week 1, week 2, the week when the student presents one of the texts. The worst participation will be dropped.	N/A
Critical presentation of one of the texts 30%	2000-2500 words critical analysis of one of the assigned texts. 25% In-class 15-to-20 minutes presentation of the critical analysis. 5%	From week 3. Before the class when the text is presented.
Term paper proposal 5%	A 750-1000 words research proposal and bibliography for the research paper.	19 February
Research essay 40%	8000-9000 words research essay.	12 April
Self-evaluation 1%	Self-evaluation of the essay, using the grading criteria.	12 April

Unless specified otherwise in the description of the assignment, the point grade system is used for all assignments. In general, the grade reflects a holistic assessment of the criteria. This means that the grade is not an average of the feedback provided on each grading criteria: more importance may be given to the learning outcomes directly related to the assignments, but all criteria matter. In practice, this means that a very well-written and well-presented essay, that is very well-structured, and which demonstrates excellent research skills, but that completely misunderstands the material will not receive a high grade. Similarly, a well written and convincing essay that demonstrates clear understanding of the material, but which does not include references and sources is not a good piece of academic scholarship – it shows significant problems – and will thus not receive a high grade.

The following guidelines will be used and constitute descriptors for each level of performance:

- 4 is an excellent assignment for which not much can be improved;
- 3.7 is an excellent assignment for which minor improvement for at least one of the criteria is possible;
- 3.3 is a good, average assignment, but for which some desirable improvement for at least one, but possibly more than one, criteria is possible;
- 3.0 is an assignment a bit below average and requires specific improvement for at least one, but generally more than one, criteria;
- 2.7 is an assignment below average that requires various improvements for some of the criteria;
- 2.3 is an assignment that shows significant problems for some of the criteria;
- 2.0 is an assignment that shows significant problems for multiple criteria;
- 1.0 is an essay that is barely passing given the severe problems with one or more criteria.

Final grades will not be ‘bumped up’ and you cannot complete other assignments to increase your grade.

Policy for late assignments:

Assignments will not be penalized if submitted less than 48 hours after the deadline. After 48 hours, late submission will be penalized by 5% per day. This does not apply to the summary of the text to be presented in class: this is a firm deadline.

In-class participation cannot be replaced by other make-up assignments. Medical excuses, or related excuses, will be considered for dropping a class from the participation average.

Longer extensions need to be asked in advance, you only need to email the professor to discuss your situation.

Major extensions beyond a few days need to be supported with valid and strong enough reasons (illness, family emergency, etc.).

Language of Submission:

“In accord with McGill University’s [Charter of Student Rights](#), students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French written work that is to be graded. This does not apply to courses in which acquiring proficiency in a language is one of the objectives.” (Approved by Senate on 21 January 2009)

« 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. » (Énoncé approuvé par le Sénat le 21 janvier 2009)

Academic Integrity:

If you feel unable to complete an assignment, reach out for help instead of seeing plagiarism as a solution.

“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 procédures disciplinaires](#). » (Énoncé approuvé par le Sénat le 29 janvier 2003) (pour de plus amples renseignements, veuillez consulter le [guide pour l'honnêteté académique de McGill](#).)

Work submitted for evaluation as part of this course may be checked with text-matching software within myCourses.

Disability and accessibility:

The Office for Students With Disabilities (<https://www.mcgill.ca/osd/>) works with students who have documented disabilities, mental health issues, chronic health conditions, or other impairments. Students with any accessibility considerations are advised to communicate with the instructor and contact the OSD for information regarding its services and resources.

Other student resources:

- For all physical and mental health services there is the new Student Wellness Hub (<https://www.mcgill.ca/wellness-hub/>).
- If you or someone close to you has been impacted by sexual violence, the Office for Sexual Violence Response, Support and Education (OSVRSE) (<https://mcgill.ca/osvrse/>) is here to help, offering services like drop-in hours, connection to resources, and reporting support.
- Scholarships and Student Aid (<https://www.mcgill.ca/studentaid/>) will help you find all the resources and advice you need to help pay for university, from step-by-step guides on how to apply for funding to information on how to budget effectively.
- First Peoples' House (<https://www.mcgill.ca/fph/>) supports McGill Indigenous students by providing a series of academic, community, and cultural based supports.

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/or [Student Accessibility and Achievement](#).

Learning objectives:

1. *Knowledge development:* Students should develop their knowledge and understanding of a diversity of theoretical and methodological approaches in political theory through direct engagements with texts and through critical discussions in seminar-style settings.
2. *Integration:* Students should develop an ability to synthesize what they have learned, to autonomously rely on foundational knowledge, and to make connections between views to articulate sound positions. Students should aim to understand and appropriately use new concepts, theories, and methodological approaches.
3. *Critical thinking:* Students should develop an ability to autonomously assess and question positions, claims, and arguments. Students should develop an ability to reflect on the consequences and entailments of adopted positions and interpretations. Students should develop an ability to argue and support a position or an interpretation, both in writing and in discussion.
4. *Research competences development:* Students will work on developing their research competences through the production of a significant piece of autonomous research in political theory, specifically a research essay.
5. *Critical discussion skills:* Students will work on developing their critical discussion skills through active participation in seminar-style discussions of assigned texts and by leading the critical examination of one of the assigned texts.
6. *Thinking comparatively and differently:* Students should nurture a capacity to engage with course material and sources in a comparative manner to perceive dominant ways of theorizing and alternatives articulated and disclosed by other traditions.

Instructional method and course format:

This course is a seminar. The instructor will not lecture about the material but will act as a facilitator to move the critical examination of texts forward and to ensure accuracy of understanding. Students are expected to have read the material before class and to come prepared for discussion. Student participation is expected and essential. It is up to the students, collaboratively, to advance the discussion, in ways that are facilitated by the instructor. Given the format of the course and its reliance on student participation for its success, in-person attendance is mandatory.

Each week, from week 3, one student – depending on the number of registered students – will be asked to prepare a 15-to-20 minutes critical examination of assigned texts for that week. This presentation will set the stage for the following group discussion. The instructor will endeavor to vary the format of the seminar to increase engagement, especially for weeks without presentation in case there are fewer students than the number of weeks.

Instructor-generated course materials (e.g., handouts, notes, summaries, exam questions) are protected by law and may not be copied or distributed in any form or in any medium without explicit permission of the instructor. Note that infringements of copyright can be subject to follow up by the University under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures.

Communication plan:

I respond to emails usually within 24 hours during the week. If you email me very late at night, on weekends or during a holiday, please do not expect a reply before the next working day.

I use myCourses announcements to post weekly updates.

Course material:

Most of the course material is accessible online, through the library. A few texts are only available at the course reserve.

You can find links to the assigned texts on this syllabus. If a link does not work, try copying and pasting it instead of clicking on it. Finally, I also post the links on myCourses.

Course reserve: <https://mcgill.on.worldcat.org/courseReserves/course/id/20185347>