

POLI 613: Theories of Ideology

Winter 2022 | Tuesdays, 14h35-17h25 | Education 434

DRAFT – FINAL SYLLABUS WILL BE ON MYCOURSES BY 19 DEC.

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Office Hours: _____ & by appointment

Course Aims and Objectives:

Ideology is said in many ways. A dizzyingly polyvalent term, it has hitherto resisted all efforts to confine it to any stable or technical usage. Broadly speaking, the term may be taken to name three sets of problems at the intersection of knowledge and power, problems coeval with the modern era, or with the program of secular Enlightenment.

In the first instance, ideology names the problem that Deleuze and Guattari, with reference to Spinoza (and Wilhelm Reich), called “the fundamental problem of political philosophy”: “Why do men fight for their servitude as stubbornly as though it were their salvation?” This has come to be known as the problem of false consciousness.¹ It especially dogs emancipatory movements, whether liberal or radical, as the problem of transforming people’s *interest* in being free into a *desire* to be free.

However, from here it is only one small step into a much more general problem-space, in which ideology refers to the specific effectivity of ideas in politics. Here, ideology is associated not with *false* consciousness but with consciousness as such, at least as consciousness is organized and systematized around political projects. Ideological struggle, the competition among political ideologies for hegemony, comes to the fore here as the inescapable terrain of any politics whatsoever. Where the first sense of ideology is pejorative, this second sense is supposed to be neutrally descriptive.

Finally, ideology also names a knowledge problem that arises from the situatedness of would-be knowers in social systems cross-cut by relations of power and domination. The question arises whether agents enjoy epistemic advantages or suffer epistemic disadvantages depending upon the standpoint from which they examine the social world. Does partisanship, of whatever sort, interfere with or encourage truthful appraisals of the social world? To what extent and under what circumstances do theoretical accounts of the world serve justificatory or apologetic purposes? Are there practical commitments that are prerequisite for social knowledge?

While this seminar cannot and will not sort out these three problems of ideology, much less settle *the* proper use of the term, it does aspire to think through these problems of ideology and to clarify the terms in which they are debated. We will proceed

¹ As we will consider, the coiners of this latter term seem to have meant something quite different by it.

in a roughly chronological manner, diverging from linear calendar time occasionally to trace developing lines of argument and debate.

Course Texts:

I recommend purchasing the following texts, if you do not already own them. They are available at The Word Bookstore, at 469 Milton St. (cash/cheque only). They are also available on course reserve in the Humanities & Social Sciences Library.

- Étienne de la Boétie, *The Politics of Obedience: The Discourse of Voluntary Servitude*, (Ludwig von Mises Institute, 2015): 978-1610161237
- Destutt de Tracy, *A Treatise on Political Economy*, trans. Thomas Jefferson, Jeremy Jennings (Liberty Fund, 2011): 978-0865978133
- Raymond Geuss, *The Idea of a Critical Theory* (Cambridge University Press, 1981): 978-0521284226
- Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (Anchor, 1967): 978-0385058988
- Göran Therborn, *The Ideology of Power and the Power of Ideology* (Verso, revised edition, 1997): 978-1859842126
- Stuart Hall, *Cultural Studies 1983: A Theoretical History* (Duke University Press, 2016): 978-0822362630

Any other readings are either directly linked to in this document 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:

Most weeks have a **focal reading assignment**, and a contextual reading assignment, and many have additional reading recommendations (bulleted). Your reading priorities should be: 1) **focal reading**, 2) contextual reading, 3) additional readings. The additional readings are good places to begin when you want to think about your papers for the seminar.

11 Jan: **La Boétie, *Discourse on Voluntary Servitude* (1576)**

18 Jan: **De Tracy, “Abstract, or Analytical Table,” “Supplement to the First Section of the Elements of Ideology,” and “Second Section of the Elements of Ideology,” from *A Treatise of Political Economy* (1818)**

- 25 Jan: **Marx and Engels, excerpts from the so-called *German Ideology* (1845), Marx, excerpts from *Capital* (1867), Engels to Franz Mehring, 14 July 1893.**
- Balibar, “The Vacillation of Ideology in Marxism” (1993)
 - Mills, “‘Ideology’ in Marx and Engels” (1985)
- 1 Feb: **Lukács, “Class Consciousness (1920) and “Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat,” Part I (1923), from *History and Class Consciousness* (1923)**
- 8 Feb: **Lukács, “Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat,” Parts II & III (1923), from *History and Class Consciousness* (1923)**
- Jameson, “*History and Class Consciousness* as an Unfinished Project” (1988)
- 15 Feb: **Berger and Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (1967); Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia: An Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge*, “II. Ideology and Utopia” (1929)**
- 22 Feb: **Geuss, *The Idea of a Critical Theory: Habermas & the Frankfurt School* (1981); Habermas, “Between Philosophy and Science: Marxism as Critique (1963)**
- 1 Mar: **READING WEEK: NO MEETING**
- 8 Mar: **Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation)” (1970); Therborn, *The Ideology of Power and the Power of Ideology* (1980)**
- 15 Mar: **Hall, *Cultural Studies 1983: A Theoretical History* (1983)**
- 22 Mar: **Hartsock, “The Feminist Standpoint” (1983); Collins, “Learning from the Outsider Within: The Sociological Significance of Black Feminist Thought” (1986); Haraway, “Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspectives” (1991); Scott, “False Consciousness or Laying it on Thick?” from *Domination and the Arts of Resistance* (1992)**

- Smith, “Women’s Perspective as a Radical Critique of Sociology” (1972)

29 Mar: **Harding, “Rethinking Standpoint Epistemology: What Is ‘Strong Objectivity’?” (1993); hooks, “Choosing the Margin as a Space of Radical Openness” (1990); Weeks, “Labor, Standpoints, and Feminist Subjects” (1998); Hekman, “Truth and Method” (1997); Hartsock, “Comment on Hekman: Truth or Justice?” (1997); Collins, “Comment of Hekman: Where’s the Power?” (1997)**

5 Apr: **Mills, “‘Ideology’ in Marx and Engels: Revisited and Revised” (1992); Shelby, “Ideology, Racism, and Critical Social Theory” (2003); Mills, “Ideal Theory as Ideology” (2005); Haslanger, “Racism, Ideology, and Social Movements” (2017)**

12 Apr: **Stanley, “5. Ideology” & “6. Political Ideologies,” from *How Propaganda Works* (2016); Gooding-Williams, “Jason Stanley’s Theory of Propaganda and Ideology” (2017); Srinivasan, “Philosophy and Ideology” (2016)**

Coursework:

This is a seminar; attendance at and participation in all sessions is mandatory. Your participation grade will be based on the best 10 out of 13 weeks, however, since I realize that everyone will have weeks when they are overwhelmed or for some other reason unable to prepare and to participate as fully as usual.

Each session will be divided in two. The first half will be devoted to a continuation of our conversation about the previous week’s reading. The second half will inaugurate discussion of the readings for the current week. Each half will begin with a short, 10-12 minute student presentation. These presentations will attempt to convey the basic arguments of the focal reading under consideration, in as clear and jargon-free a language as possible. They will conclude with 2 or 3 well-formulated questions to kick off discussion.

These presentations should be written out in advance as a complete text and emailed to me no later than 5 pm the evening before class. Test for yourself how much material you can (comfortably and comprehensibly) read aloud in 10 minutes; this will vary in part according to the type of material you’re working with. For most people, 100–125 words

per minute is a comfortable reading pace; using that baseline, presentation texts should be 1000-1250 words total.

Grading:

1. Seminar participation: 30%
2. In-class presentation: 10%
3. One of:
 - a. Term paper of 8,000-10,000 words, 60%
 - b. Two seminar papers of 5000-6000 words, 30% each

I encourage MA students to choose 3b unless they think that the paper they write for this class might become the basis of their MA thesis. Anyone is free, however, to select either option, as they wish. Students must decide which option to select no later than 1 February, and inform me accordingly.

I will make the deadline for the term papers as late as I reasonably can in April, and will fully grant the normal TA extension, but I will not be granting further extensions that go into the summer or next semester. Students choosing 3b should submit their first papers by 8 March. Students choosing 3a should submit a paper proposal of up to 750 words by 22 March.

Rules, Policies, and Pedantries:

Because it is in everyone's interest that the coursework end when the course ends, I will not consider a request for K in the absence of documented extenuating circumstances. (Having too many papers to write is not enough – we all have too many papers to write.)

Conformément à la Charte des droits de l'étudiant de l'Université McGill, chaque étudiant-e a le droit de soumettre en français ou en anglais tout travail écrit devant être noté.

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. Please note that I take plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty seriously, and your work will be reviewed for potential plagiarism issues by means of text-matching software.

As the instructor of this course I endeavour 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/MyAccess (514)398-6009.