

POLI 614: Proseminar in political theory
Fall 2021, McGill University
Tuesdays, 11:35 am- 2:25 pm, Leacock 927
Jacob T. Levy, jtlevy@gmail.com, Ferrier 416
Office Hours: TBA

Syllabus of readings and meetings

September 7: Read for background *before* the first class: Genesis chapters 1-4. Romans chapters 5 and 13. Jeremiah chapters 24-29.

Plato, *Republic*, Books 7 and 9.

September 14: Augustine, *City of God* books 1-10

September 21: *City of God* books 11-18

September 28: *City of God* books 19-22

October 5: Augustine, *The Confessions*

October 12: No class, fall break

October 15: (Friday follows a Tuesday schedule) John Calvin, *Institutes*, Book 2 ch 1-11, Book 3 ch. 7-19, Book 4 ch. 3-5, 20

Recommended: Ronald VanderMolen, "Political Calvinism"

HD Foster, "The Political Theories of Calvinists before the Puritan Exodus to America"

October 19: Junius Brutus, *Vindiciae Contra Tyrannos*. Excerpts from Beza, *On the Duty of Magistrates*, and Hotman, *Francogallia*.

October 26: Althusius, *Politica*

November 2: Rousseau, First and Second Discourses

November 9: Rousseau, *Emile*

November 16: Rousseau, *The Social Contract* and the Geneva manuscript

November 23: Rousseau, *The Confessions*

November 30: Arendt, *Love and Saint Augustine*. Elshtain, *Augustine and the Limits of Politics*. Niebuhr, "Augustine's Political Realism."

Readings will be available for purchase at Paragraphe, or text or links to electronic versions accessible through the library will be posted on MyCourses. Additional secondary readings and short excerpts from primary sources will likely be added as the course develops.

Grading

1. Discussion. 10%. See below for the use of waivers.

2. Proposal for the final paper due November 19, 10%

3. Final paper of 8000-10000 words due December 19, 80%

This class is graded on a 4.0 scale not a 100-point scale as per https://www.mcgill.ca/study/2010-2011/university-regulations-and-information/gi_grading_and_grade_point_averages

Everything else

1. Objectives and learning aims

This is a graduate seminar in the history of political thought focussing on the legacy of Augustine and Calvinism, roughly divided into thirds: one-third Augustine, one-third Rousseau, and one-third Calvin and various pre-Rousseau Calvinist political theorists.

The proseminar and the comprehensive exam

This course will also help prepare PhD students to take the comprehensive exam in political theory. "Help prepare" is not the same as "prepare." This syllabus includes less than half of the required reading list for the exam, and all of the texts are richer and more complicated than can be adequately studied in the time available. Exam preparation should include several of the following:

- 1) Taking at least one, but preferably two, iterations of the proseminar; its coverage and theme changes every year.
- 2) Taking additional graduate seminars in political theory that study fewer texts in greater depth.
- 3) Attending lectures and/or TAing in some or all of the courses in the undergraduate sequence on the history of political thought: 333, 334, 433, 434.
- 4) Taking part in a study group with others taking the exam.

This seminar is not and will not try to be a substitute for items (2), (3), or (4). But one thing the seminar aims to offer that at least (3) and (4) may not is practice in thematically synthesizing across thinkers. An exam question could be something like: "How high should we set our sights about the contributions politics can make to the moral life?" or "Is it possible to govern morally?", with instructions that say "Your answer must draw on three authors from at least two time periods [pre-16th c, 16th-18th c, 19th-20th c] and they must not all agree with each other on the answer to the question. Your answer must take a stand on the question asked, and seriously consider arguments on the other side."

So, while we will try to do justice to each text we read in its own right, and will explore each text beyond its connections to the overall theme, we will also build a thematic conversation over the semester that draws on all of the authors we read.

Note fall 2021: We have no students in the class who are preparing to take the comprehensive exam, which frees us up somewhat to take a more deliberate pace.

2. Prerequisites:

None for graduate students

Permission of instructor for undergraduates (which will probably not be forthcoming, but don't even ask unless you've got grades of A- or better in at least two political theory courses at the 400 level or above)

3. Class format

The class will be a three-hour in-person discussion seminar with one break.

Every week after the first 1-3 discussion prompt questions will be distributed to help prepare for the following week.

There will be no set student presentations. Everyone who attends will be expected to take part in discussion every week, including but not limited to being able to speak to each of the discussion prompt questions when called on to do so. Each student has three waivers, invoked by e-mailing me before class. During those three sessions a student is free to attend without participating (but may speak up if they wish), won't be cold-called on, and their participation won't be graded.

Throughout, we will be following provincial and University regulations about public health. At the beginning of the term, that means all students must wear procedural masks throughout class, unfortunately.

4. McGill Statement on 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>).

Suspected cases of plagiarism will be vigorously pursued. I support expulsion for a first offense; and plagiarism or research fraud of any kind are career-ending offenses for a graduate student.

5. 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.

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).

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

7. While I am bureaucratically required to put item 6 on the syllabus, I am not bureaucratically forbidden to make fun of it So, on the one hand: if a highly contagious disease epidemic breaks out, we will meet in person less frequently and less mandatorily. This was the worry that first prompted the addition of that language to syllabi, and the fact that it needed to be said demonstrates how foolishly bureaucratized and legalistic the interpretation of the *Handbook on Student Rights and Responsibilities*, ch. 1, Articles 10-11 has become over the years thanks to challenges to any change made in the syllabus after the second week. It should also be noted that if an earthquake destroys the building in which our classroom is located, we may change classrooms, and that shall not be interpreted as a breach of contract; and if the End of Days arrives before the end of the semester, it is possible that final grades will be delayed. Of obvious interest in 2021:

everything is always subject to change in light of COVID-related public health requirements.

On the other hand, you have my commitment that I will not invoke "extraordinary circumstances" unless health, safety, or physical necessity demand it, or the University or province mandate it. Strikes, protests, and boycotts, for example, will not alter either my or your responsibilities to the class; no classes will be canceled, no deadlines delayed, etc.

8. Academic freedom

Academic freedom in a university differs from freedom of speech in the wider society; it is not the right to say just anything. It guarantees scholars—whether faculty or students—protection for their scholarly inquiry regardless of the conclusions that it reaches, while demanding respect for scholarly methods.

One aspect of that is that scholars will not be sanctioned within the classroom for what happens outside of it. The other aspect 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 conclusion you argue for is popular, 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 quality of argument, quality of writing, and the careful use of sources, not on the basis of the political orientation of your conclusions.

9. 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 peoples whose presence marks this territory on which peoples of the world now gather.