

**POLI 614: Proseminar in political theory: Political economy and commercial society**

**Fall 2024, McGill University  
Fridays 2:45 pm- 5:35 pm**

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Office hours Tuesday 11am -1 pm, Wednesday 3-4 pm

**Section I**

**A. Syllabus of readings and sessions**

Primary texts are required. Those that are available for purchase at Paragraphe should in fact be purchased and brought to class on the relevant days.

Secondary texts are recommended; you will not be held responsible for them and need not read any one in particular. But you should do *some* of them over the course of the semester, to see what it's like when contemporary political theorists do things with these authors. To some extent the listed secondary readings are examples, and you may also satisfy this norm by finding and reading other examples of your own. And if you find yourself lost when reading one of the primary texts about why anyone would still read this book, have a look at some secondary reading.

August 30: introduction

September 6: no class (APSA) but the reading for next week takes account of the two-week gap.

September 13:

**Polybius**, *Histories*, selection available on MyCourses.

**Cicero**.

*On Duties*, Newton trans. <https://doi-org.proxy3.library.mcgill.ca/10.7591/9781501705977>

*The Republic* and *On Laws*, Rudd trans., Oxford. (for purchase)

Rob Goodman, *Words on Fire*, ch. 1-2 <https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/words-on-fire/FEB517ABF09F8A067773B2F563F45150>

Remer and Kapust, eds., *The Ciceronian Tradition in Political Theory*, <https://muse.jhu.edu/book/81818>, at least the introduction and Michelle Clarke, "Machiavelli"

Martha Nussbaum, "Duties of Justice, Duties of Material Aid," *Journal of Political Philosophy*, MyCourses

September 20.

**Augustine (1)**

*City of God*, excerpts in Hackett *Political Writings*, Tkacz trans. (for purchase)

BUT: instead of the excerpts from Books XIV-XIX, read the whole thing on MyCourses

AND: *Political Writings* pp. 202-229

September 27

**Augustine (2)**

All on MyCourses:

Selections from *The Confessions*

Niebuhr, "Augustine's Political Realism" <https://doi.org/10.12987/9780300162646-013>

Miller, "A tale of two cities," in *Justice for Earthlings*, <https://www-cambridge-org.proxy3.library.mcgill.ca/core/books/justice-for-earthlings/0944CB6197EE82A5EC0934B0A36AFF1B>

Elshtain, *Augustine and the Limits of Politics*, ch. 2, 4 <https://muse-jhu-edu.proxy3.library.mcgill.ca/book/59661>

Brandon Turner, "Augustine's Reception of Cicero", in *The Ciceronian Tradition...* <https://muse.jhu.edu/book/81818>

October 4

### **John of Salisbury**

*Policraticus*, Nederman ed., <https://www-cambridge-org.proxy3.library.mcgill.ca/core/books/john-of-salisbury-policraticus/EC9FDFDE9C8DB448FBAE4F54DE240DC8>

Nederman, "A duty to kill," [doi:10.1017/S0034670500036305](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034670500036305)

Harold Berman, *Law and Revolution*, pp. 277-289, on MyCourses

Nederman, "Organic metaphor," <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26213292>

Nederman, "A medieval Ciceronian: John of Salisbury," in *The Ciceronian Tradition...* <https://muse.jhu.edu/book/81818>

October 11

### **Aquinas (1)**

Thomas Aquinas, *Political Writings*, Dyson trans. For purchase at Paragraphe.

October 18: no class, fall break

October 25:

### **Aquinas (2)**

Finnis, *Natural Law and Natural Rights*, ch. 1, 7, 12; recommended, ch. 6, 9, 10

Weithman, "Augustine and Aquinas on Original Sin..." [10.1353/hph.1992.0058](https://doi.org/10.1353/hph.1992.0058)

Markus, "Two Conceptions of Political Authority..." on MyCourses

Aroney, "Subsidiarity, Federalism..." in *Aquinas and Modern Law* <https://www-taylorfrancis-com.proxy3.library.mcgill.ca/books/edit/10.4324/9781315097145/aquinas-modern-law-jamesbernard-murphy>

November 1: **Dante**, *Monarchy*, Shaw ed. (for purchase)

Claude LeFort, *Dante's Monarchy* <https://books.google.ca/books?hl=en&lr=&id=OOonNDwAAQBAJ>  
(just LeFort's introductory essay)

November 8: **Marsilius**, *Defender of the Peace*, excerpts

Alan Gewirth, *Marsilius of Padua, the Defender of the Peace, vol. 1*, ch. 2, 5, 8

Brian Tierney, "Marsilius on Rights," <https://doi.org/10.2307/2709579>

Annabel Brett, "Politics, Right(s), and Human Freedom in Marsilius of Padua"

[https://link.springer.com/content/pdf/10.1007/1-4020-4212-4\\_4?pdf=chapter%20toc](https://link.springer.com/content/pdf/10.1007/1-4020-4212-4_4?pdf=chapter%20toc)

November 22: **Christine de Pizan**, *Book of the City of Ladies*, Kingston ed. (for purchase)

Jean Bethke Elshtain, "Introduction," and Kate Langdon Forhan, "Polyocracy, Obligation, and Revolt," in *Politics, Gender, and Genre*, <https://books.google.ca/books?id=BgeiDwAAQBAJ>

November 29: **Francisco de Vitoria**, *Political Writings*, Pagden ed. (for purchase)

John Carter, "Reconsidering the Relationship Between Vitoria's and Grotius' Contributions..." <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/jore.12337>

## **B. Prerequisites**

None for graduate students, but this would not be an easy first-ever class in political theory. (I often offer courses that are intended to be accessible for Ph.D. students in other subfields aiming to satisfy their requirement to take one course in political theory, but this is not such a case.)

No undergraduates will be admitted to the class.

## **C. Class format and grading**

This is a discussion-based class.

There will be no set student presentations. Everyone who attends will be expected to take part in discussion every week. 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.

Sometimes I will distribute discussion questions in advance; when I do, class discussion will focus on them early on, and every student who hasn't invoked a waiver should be prepared to talk about each of them (and about each other's answers to them).

## **Grading**

### **1. Discussion. 10%**

#### ***Option 1***

Practice take-home comprehensive exam question, weekend of November 2-3, 40%

Practice take-home comprehensive exam, weekend of December 7-8, 50%

The practice comp questions will be assigned mock grades on the comp exam scale (Honours, High Pass, Pass, Fail) in addition to letter grades normalized to grades in graduate courses. There will be a correlation, of course, but only the latter will be used as the basis for class grades.

#### ***Option 2***

**2. Proposal for the final paper** due March 13, 10%

**3. Final paper** of 8000-10000 words due December 20, 80%

Both options are available to either M.A. or Ph.D. students.

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](https://www.mcgill.ca/study/2010-2011/university-regulations-and-information/gi_grading_and_grade_point_averages)

## Section II.

**A. Aims and Learning Objectives:** This is a graduate seminar in Roman and post-Roman (mainly medieval) political thought; and it is the proseminar in political theory for this academic year.

### *The proseminar and the comprehensive exam*

This course will help prepare PhD students to take the comprehensive exam in political theory. “Help prepare” is not the same as “prepare.” It used to be the case that the proseminar could cover about half of the comp exam list each time it was offered. But in response to student demand, the comp exam list has been made larger with more opportunity for choice and selection by students; this means that the proseminar can no longer reliably do that for every student. This is the first offering of the proseminar since that change. I interpret the new situation to call for a syllabus drawn from the exam list that will seriously prepare students for at least one question, and will model what exam reading, studying, and exam-writing can be like.

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 can offer that at least (3) and (4) may not is practice in thematically synthesizing across thinkers. 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.

**B. Language.** Students in this course have the right to submit any written work that is to be graded in either English or French.

### **C. 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 is said extramurally. 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 (including political 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.

### Section III.

**A. 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 <http://www.mcgill.ca/integrity/> 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 <http://www.mcgill.ca/integrity/>).

Addendum : You must not use machine-generated prose for any part of this course.

**B. Land acknowledgement.** 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.

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

**D. A comment on the emergency syllabus exit.** While I am bureaucratically required to put item 3C 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* 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.

It is worth noting that the “extraordinary circumstances” clause may not be invoked either by individual instructors or by individual students; it requires a determination at the level of the University or the Faculty of Arts. So there is really, truly no point in putting this obvious “if there's another pandemic we're allowed to change the structure of the class” language onto each and every syllabus.