POLI 617: Problems in Political Theory
Proseminar: Justice and Politics, Ancient and Modern
Winter 2020
(tentative November 2019)

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Office hours: TBA

Course Description and Objectives

This course is designed 1) for Ph.D. students preparing for the Political Theory comprehensive examination or 2) for MA and Ph.D. students who want to do an intensive course covering seminal works in the history of western political philosophy. This proseminar will focus on seminal works in political thought from the ancient Mediterranean world, and from early modern Europe. It will focus on themes surrounding the relationship between justice and politics, centering on virtue, constitutions, reason, the social contract, property, political authority, political obligation, freedom, equality, and the law.

Note on comprehensive exam preparation to PhD students: Although this course will help you to prepare, it is only one component, involving a selective syllabus that is not at all comprehensive. In addition to taking proseminars, you should also do the following:
1. Take the proseminar, and audit other proseminars offered in subsequent terms, since the coverage and themes change every year.
2. Take additional graduate seminars in Political Theory that study fewer texts in greater depth.
3. Attend lectures and/or TA in some courses in the undergraduate sequence on the history of western political thought: 333, 334, 433, and 434.
4. Take part in a study group with others taking the exam.
5. Write partial and full practice exams.

Eligibility and Prerequisites: To take this course, you must be a PhD student who is preparing to write the comprehensive exams in Political Theory. Other PhD and MA students are permitted to take this course if they have completed at least three undergraduate courses in Political Theory.

Required texts
The following books are available for purchase at Paragraphe Bookstore, 2220 McGill College Ave. In addition, some required readings will be available through myCourses.

Grade distribution
For all students:
Class participation: 30%
Two in-class presentations: 10% each (20% total)

For PhD students, in addition:
One seminar term paper, 6,000 words: 40%
One practice comprehensive exam: 10%

For MA and other students, in addition:
Two seminar papers, 3,000 words each: 25% for each paper (50% total)

Course schedule: Wednesdays 8:30-11:30 am, Ferrier 422. Please note that there is no class on March 25, and a make-up final seminar on April 15.

Assignments

Class participation
All assigned readings should be done before each class. As this class is a seminar, attendance and participation are mandatory. Be prepared to discuss and analyze texts in an in-depth manner. Prepare discussion notes, questions, or commentaries in advance of each class (maximum of one typed page, single-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. Please note that emailed notes will not be accepted. The discussion notes that you submit at the beginning of each class contribute to 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 B.

Your class participation grade will be assessed as follows (in addition to the discussion note submission requirement above): Every time we meet (except for the first week), I will assign a letter grade for oral participation. If your participation is excellent (you show a command of the assigned readings, some originality and enthusiasm in the discussion, and your arguments are clear and solid) you will receive an A range grade; if it is good to very good (your remarks are competent, interesting, and well-articulated, even though you may not have fully digested the material) you will receive a B range grade; if it is fair (you have not really developed a point of view based on reasoned analysis of the assigned material and/or your comments are inaccurate and inconsistent) you will receive a C range grade, which indicates that you are not performing adequately for graduate level studies. If it is clear that you have not done the reading at all, you will receive an F; and if you fail to attend, you will earn a 0 for that day. Your class participation grade will be an average of your best 11 (eleven) seminars.

In-class presentations
At the first session of the course, students will sign up for two in-class presentations during the rest of the course. Each presentation will consist of a 15-minute oral presentation on the readings.
to be discussed on the day of the presentation. A written text or outline of the presentation (approximately 1500-2000 words) should be submitted to me via email by 5 pm the day before the presentation. Please note that you should not be reading from your submitted text for the in-class presentation, but a superior in-class presentation requires you to develop your verbal presentation skills. Please also note that if you miss that deadline of 5 pm (the day before your presentation), then you will need to choose another date for another in-class presentation. Presentations should not summarize the readings, but should assume that your colleagues have done the readings. Presentations should synthesize the readings and be thesis-driven. Rather than aiming to be comprehensive (in terms of covering everything in the readings), the presentations should aim to be constructively critical, either by focusing on interpretive challenges of the texts, or by critically evaluating a major argument in the text for the date of the presentation. While the presentations may draw on readings and arguments from previous weeks or from outside the course, it is expected that they will focus primarily on the readings assigned for the week of the presentation.

**Term papers**

For those writing two seminar papers (3,000 words each), the Course Professor will provide a list of topics in advance.

For those writing the long term paper (6,000 words), students are encouraged to formulate their own paper questions that engage with the course readings and reflect the general course themes or relate to their own particular research interests that overlap with the course themes and texts. The Course Professor must approve these paper topics by March 17.

**Deadlines:**
Short seminar papers (3,000 words): February 25, and April 16. If you are a TA during this term, you can have a maximum 2 week extension on each paper.
Long term paper (6,000 words): April 16. If you are a TA during this term, you can have a maximum 2 week extension. *Note that the practice comprehensive exam is scheduled for Tuesday, April 21.*

Submission policy: Hard copy and/or electronic submission of papers are acceptable, as long as they appear in either form by 4:30 pm on the deadline dates in my mailbox in Leacock 414 or in my email inbox.

Late submission policy:
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. *Receiving an F on any paper will result in a final course grade no higher than D.*

**Practice Comprehensive Exam**

The practice comprehensive exam will be scheduled for Tuesday, April 21, location TBA. The exam will last 2.5 hours, and require you to answer two questions, one on the Ancients and one
on the Early Modern section. This exam is thus a practice of only half of an actual comprehensive exam in Political Theory, as it will exclude the 19th/20 Centuries, and the Thematic section.

Additional Policies

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. 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).

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).

Course reading schedule

Week 1 (Jan 8): Organizational meeting and Introductions
Week 2 (Jan 15): Plato, Gorgias
Week 3 (Jan 22): Plato, The Republic, Books I-V
Week 5 (Feb 5): Plato, Apology and Crito
Week 6 (Feb 12): Aristotle, The Politics, Books 1-IV
Week 7 (Feb 19): Aristotle, The Politics, Book V-VIII
Week 8 (Feb 26): Thomas Hobbes, Leviathan, Part I

Reading Week: no seminar

Week 9 (March 11): Thomas Hobbes, Leviathan, Part II, Review and Conclusion
Week 10 (March 18): John Locke, Second Treatise on Government
Week 11 (March 25): No class – make-up seminar on April 15
Week 12 (April 1): Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Discourse on the Origins of Inequality
Make-up Seminar (April 15): Immanuel Kant, Political Writings

April 21: Partial Comprehensive Exam