

POLI 367: Liberal Political Theory (Winter 2019)

Lecture Location: Trottier (ENGTR) 1100
Hours (wks w/o conferences): WF 11:35am-12:55pm
Hours (wks w/ conferences): WF 11:35am-12:30pm

Instructor: Dr. Samuel Bagg
Email: samuel.bagg@mcgill.ca
Office Hours (Ferrier 498): W 4:00pm-6:00pm

Conferences: Mondays and Tuesdays, hours TBA, beginning Jan 28/29 and skipping weeks papers are due (Feb 4/5, Feb 25/26, and Apr 15/16)

Teaching Assistant: John-Andrew Petrakis
Email: john-andrew.petrakis@mail.mcgill.ca
Office Hours: by appointment

Objectives

This course explores important themes in the liberal tradition of Western political thought through the work of both canonical and contemporary authors within that tradition, as well as several of its critics. The course is organized thematically, considering two distinct modes of liberal theorizing in the first half of the course, before turning in the second half to consider a range of ways that people have used liberal theory in practice.

The first theoretical tradition we consider is that of the social contract, stretching from Locke in the 17th century to Rawls in the 20th. We turn next to a more disparate set of “pluralist” theories, ranging from Montesquieu’s separation of powers doctrine to the utilitarian liberalism of Bentham and Mill, to Judith Shklar’s “liberalism of fear.” In the second half of the course, we consider liberalism as a philosophy of revolution, moderation, and reaction; reading authors such as Mary Wollstonecraft, Frederick Douglass, Alexis de Tocqueville, Karl Marx, and Michel Foucault.

By the end of the course, successful students will be able to:

- understand the characteristic ideals and institutions of liberalism
- compare the foundational arguments motivating different strands within the liberal tradition
- critically evaluate the political implications of liberal theory

Prerequisites

This is an intermediate course in political theory. You should have taken at least one prior course in political theory (normally POLI 231, 232, or 333). If you have questions about your preparedness, please feel free to contact me.

Requirements

There will be two 80-minute lectures per week in all weeks without conferences. There will also be eight conferences during the semester, beginning on January 28/29 and going through the end of the semester, skipping weeks when papers are due (February 4/5, February 25/26, and April 15/16). In weeks with conferences, lectures will run 55 minutes. Attendance is required at both lectures and conferences, as explained below. Reading assignments are limited to a maximum of 50 pages per lecture—meaning that you will be expected to do them, thoroughly, before class. There will be opportunities for questions and discussion, and you will also write eight reading responses: one for each week that you have a conference. The majority of your grade will consist of three papers, weighted as follows:

- 20%: Participation (including reading responses and attendance at conference and lecture)
- 25%: First paper (1500-1800 words, due February 4, 5pm)
- 25%: Second paper (1500-1800 words, due February 25, 5pm)
- 30%: Final paper (1700-2000 words, due April 15, 5pm)

Attendance, Participation and Reading Responses

Beginning on January 23 (after the add-drop deadline), we will use the following system for attendance. Each of your names will be printed on a small sheet of paper, which will be laid out on the front table at the beginning of class. Assuming you get to class on time (by 11:40am at the latest), you may choose to declare yourself “present and prepared” by finding your name on the front table and dropping it in a box. During lecture, several names will be drawn randomly from the box, and the people whose names are chosen may be called on to answer questions or do other tasks related to the readings.

There are 22 lectures after the add-drop deadline, and your baseline participation grade will be determined by how many times you mark yourself “present and prepared,” out of 20. If you do so 18 times, your baseline participation grade will be 18 / 20 (i.e., 90% or A). If you do so 12 times, your baseline participation grade will be 12 / 20 (i.e., 60% or C+). Note that 20 / 20 (i.e., 100%) is the highest baseline you can have, so there will be no extra credit for those with a score of 21 or 22. In other words, everyone gets two “free” unexcused absences from lecture. Because this policy is already lenient, I will not consider any other absences in lecture to be “excused” without a written note from your academic dean.

If your name is chosen and you are not in fact present, this will be considered academic dishonesty, and your baseline participation grade in the course will be a 0. If your name is chosen and you fail to demonstrate a basic understanding of the readings, your baseline participation grade will be reduced by ten points. Thus, you should declare yourself “present and prepared” only if you actually are.

We will not use this system for attendance in conference, as everyone is always expected to be present and prepared for conference. You may miss one of the eight conferences for “free,” but beyond that, you will lose two points from your baseline participation score for each conference you miss.

Reading responses should be 300-500 words, and they are due to your TA at 6pm on Sunday of each week for which there is an upcoming conference (either on Monday or Tuesday). They should address the readings from the previous week—normally focusing on one of the readings, though comparisons are also acceptable. Rather than summarizing the assigned reading or lectures on the material, you should assume familiarity with the text(s) under discussion, using the opportunity to reflect on something you found interesting, puzzling, inspiring, or infuriating about the text. The main requirement, aside from the word count and basic coherence, is that you go *beyond* what has already been discussed in lectures. You may expand *significantly* on a theme from lecture, or develop an entirely new line of thought. Your TA will use them to gauge general comprehension and to stimulate discussion in class.

Both your reading responses and your substantive participation in conferences present opportunities to either gain or lose participation points from your baseline. If either or both are consistently and exceptionally high quality, you may gain up to five points (combined, in total) from your participation baseline, at the TA’s discretion.

If you fail to turn in reading responses, or turn in responses that do not meet minimum standards of coherence and originality, you will lose participation points: one point for each missing or unacceptable response. You will also lose a third of a point for every response that is turned in after 6pm on the day it is due. No responses will be accepted after 11:59pm. You will not receive substantive feedback on your reading responses unless they fail to meet minimum standards (and are therefore counting against you).

Finally, you may lose up to three points (in total) from your participation baseline for failing to participate actively or constructively in conference, at the TA’s discretion. Barring exceptional circumstances, you will not receive substantive feedback on your participation in conference unless you ask for it.

Papers

You will write three papers, two each of 1500-1800 words (due February 4 and February 25), and one of 1700-2000 words (due April 15). The paper topics will be sent out about two weeks before the due dates. Papers must be turned in twice. First, they must be uploaded by 5pm on the due date, using the following dropbox request link: <https://tinyurl.com/poli367>. Your name and time of submission will be automatically added to the file, and this is what will count for purposes of the deadline. Then, you must also put a printed copy in the box outside of Dr. Bagg's office (Ferrier 498) by 9am the next morning. A third of a letter grade will be deducted from your paper grade for each 24-hour period it is late.

Course and University Policies

1. Use of cell phones and laptops is prohibited in both lectures and conferences, unless Dr. Bagg gives you special permission. Tablets without keyboards are acceptable for displaying electronic readings but should not be used for note-taking. This is for your benefit! Well-designed studies have demonstrated that taking notes by hand improves retention.¹ Moreover, a wealth of human experience reveals that we are weak beings forever subject to temptation, and must be restrained in order to achieve our own best interests.² However, there are exceptions, and if you feel that you are among them, please contact me.
2. You must receive a passing grade on each of the papers to pass the course as a whole. This means that an F on any one of them will automatically result in a final course grade of F.
3. 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).

4. 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). Note also that your assignments may be submitted to text-matching or other appropriate software.
5. In the event of extraordinary circumstances beyond the University's control, the content and/or evaluation scheme in this course is subject to change.
6. Students with disabilities should arrange a meeting with the course instructor at the start of the course to arrange any special accommodations. Please contact the Office for Students with Disabilities (OSD) at (514) 398-6009 (<http://www.mcgill.ca/osd/>) for information on accommodating your needs before this meeting. However, please remember that the OSD has no authority to approve changes to course assignment due dates or exam dates, to devise alternative assignments or to waive course requirements.

¹ Mueller, Pam A. and Daniel M. Oppenheimer (2014), "The Pen is Mightier than the Keyboard: Advantages of Longhand over Laptop Note Taking," *Psychological Science*. 25 (6): 1159-1168.

² See, e.g., Homer, (~750 BCE), *The Odyssey*. In Book XII, Odysseus famously binds himself to the mast of his ship, instructing his crew to plug their own ears with wax and refuse to untie him until after they have passed the island of the Sirens. This allows him to experience their seductive song without steering his ship into the rocks, as every other sailor to pass by the island has done. So you see, not having laptops in class is just like that. See Elster, Jon (1984), *Ulysses and the Sirens*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Texts

Readings in this course fall into two categories:

A) The books listed below are available at the McGill textbook store (*Le James*). All are reasonably priced, and used copies are often available even more cheaply. It is very **strongly recommended** that you purchase a hard copy: this will help you read, remember, and study the texts, and they will all be worthwhile to have in your library in the future. If you use a different edition, moreover, it may be difficult in some cases to locate the precise selections you are assigned to read. Nevertheless, all these books are also available legally online, and those with less ability to purchase books may prefer to read them that way.

- John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government* (Hackett)
ISBN: 978-0-915144-86-0 (~ \$10 used or online)
- Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Basic Political Writings*, trans: Cress (Hackett, 2nd edn)
ISBN: 978-1-60384-673-8 (~ \$10 used or online, or online in French)
- David Hume, *Selected Essays* (Oxford)
ISBN: 978-0-199-54030-3 (~ \$5 used or online)
- John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty, Utilitarianism, and Other Essays* (Oxford)
ISBN: 978-0-199-67080-2 (~ \$10 used or online)
- Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (Oxford)
ISBN: 978-0-199-55546-8 (~ \$10 used or online)

B) All other readings are included in the **course pack**, as indicated in the course schedule below with the label **(CP)**. A few of these texts can be found online, but the editions or translations may be different, and others are not online at all. Thus, all students are required to purchase the course pack.

Course Schedule

Jan 9 (W): Benjamin Constant, "Liberty of the Ancients..." **(CP 5-18 / online)**

Part I: The Social Contract

Jan 11 (F): **CLASS CANCELED**. Reading postponed to Jan 16, which now has twice the reading load of a normal class session (i.e., ~80 pages instead of 40). Please get a head start!

Jan 16 (W): John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, §4-51, 87-122, 123-158, 199-230, 240-243

Jan 18 (F): Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality* (p. 39-47, 61-64, 69-75, 78-80, 90-92 in Hackett 2nd edn; with other edns read all of Preface and Part Two)
Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *On the Social Contract*, Book 1: Ch. 1, 5-9

Jan 23 (W): Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *On the Social Contract*, Book II: Ch. 1-10; Book III: Ch. 12-18; Book IV: Ch. 1-3, 8-9

Jan 25 (F): Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals* (Ak 4:421-441) **(CP 20-31)**
Immanuel Kant, *On the Common Saying... [Theory/Practice]* (Ak 8:289-306) **(CP 33-40)**
Immanuel Kant, *The Metaphysics of Morals* (Ak 6:311-318) **(CP 41-44)**

- Jan 28/29 (M/T): *Conference #1 – about Locke / Rousseau / Kant*
- Jan 30 (W): John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (§1-6, 11, 24) (CP 46-67)
- Feb 1 (F): John Rawls, “The Idea of Public Reason Revisited” (CP 68-110)
- Feb 4 (M): *First Paper Due (5pm) – no conferences this week*

Part II: Pluralist Traditions

- Feb 6 (W): Baron de Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*, Book 3; Book 11 (§1-7); Book 12 (§1-7, 12-13); Book 19 (§4-5, 27); Book 20 (§1-5); Book 24 (§5-7, 14) (CP 112-136 / online in French)
- Feb 8 (F): David Hume, “Of the First Principles of Government,” “Of the Origin of Government,” “Of Civil Liberty,” and “Of the Original Contract”
- Feb 11/12 (M/T): *Conference #2 – about Montesquieu / Hume*
- Feb 13 (W): Jeremy Bentham, *Principles of Morals and Legislation*, Ch. 1-3, 13-14 (CP 137-157)
- Feb 15 (F): John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*, Ch. 1-2
- Feb 18/19 (M/T): *Conference #3 – about Bentham / Mill*
- Feb 20 (W): Isaiah Berlin, “Two Concepts of Liberty” (CP 159-184)
- Feb 22 (F): Judith Shklar, “The Liberalism of Fear” (CP 186-194)
Andy Sabl, “Realist Liberalism: An Agenda” (CP 195-211)
- Feb 25 (M): *Second Paper Due (5pm) – no conferences this week*

Part III: Liberalism as Revolution

- Feb 27 (W): *Declaration of Independence (United States)* (CP 214-217)
Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen (France) (CP 219 / online in French)
Thomas Paine, *The Rights of Man*, Part the Second: Intro, Ch. 1, 2, 4 (CP 221-239)
- Mar 1 (F): Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (selections TBA)
- Mar 6,8: *No Class (Study Break)*
- Mar 11/12 (M/T): *Conference #4 – about Paine / Wollstonecraft*
- Mar 13 (W): Frederick Douglass, “What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?” (CP 241-253)
Frederick Douglass, “Significance of Emancipation in the West Indies” (CP 254-264)
- Mar 15 (F): Vaclav Havel, “The Power of the Powerless” (CP 267-320)
- Mar 18/19 (M/T): *Conference #5 – about Douglass / Havel*

Part IV: Liberalism as Moderation

- Mar 20 (W): Publius (Madison / Hamilton), *Federalist Papers* # 1, 10, 15, 48, 51, 70, 78 (CP 322-344)
- Mar 22 (F): Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, Vol. 1, Pt. 2, Ch. 3-4; Vol. 2, Pt. 2, Ch. 2-5; Vol. 2, Pt. 4, Ch. 6-8 (CP 346-370 / online in French)
- Mar 25/26 (M/T): *Conference #6 – about Publius / Tocqueville*
- Mar 27 (W): Friedrich von Hayek, “Principles and Expediency” (CP 372-381)
Friedrich von Hayek, “The Origins and Effects of Our Morals” (CP 382-388)
Friedrich von Hayek, “The Principles of a Liberal Social Order” (CP 389-406)

Part V: Liberalism as Reaction

- Mar 29 (F): Karl Marx, “On the Jewish Question,” §1 (CP 408-418)
Karl Marx & Friedrich Engels, “Manifesto of the Communist Party,” §1-2 (CP 418-427)
Emma Goldman, “Anarchism: What it Really Stands For” (CP 428-438)
- Apr 1/2 (M/T): *Conference #7 – about Hayek / Marx / Goldman*
- Apr 3: Michel Foucault, selections from *Discipline and Punish* (CP 440-452)
Theodor Adorno, “The Culture Industry Reconsidered” (CP 453-460)
Sarah Brouillette, “Literature is Liberalism” (CP 461-463)
- Apr 5: Derrick Bell, “Racial Realism” (CP 464-472)
Malcolm X, “The Ballot or the Bullet” (CP 473-484)
Stokely Carmichael, “Power and Racism: What we Want” (CP 485-490)
- Apr 8/9 (M/T): *Conference #8 – about Foucault / Adorno / Brouillette / Bell / X / Carmichael*
- Apr 10: Saba Mahmood, “Religious Reason and Secular Affect” (CP 491-504)
- Apr 12: Glen Sean Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks*, Ch. 1 (CP 506-518)
- Apr 15: *Final paper due (5pm) – no conferences this week*