

POLI 470: Philosophy, Economy, and Society (Winter 2018)

Location: **688 Sherbrooke, Room 495**
Schedule: **Tues-Thurs 4:05-5:25**

Instructor: **Dr. Samuel Bagg**
Office Hours (Ferrier 498): **Wed 4:00-6:00**

Objectives

This course is taught each year, but its syllabus and themes vary substantially from year to year. This year, the overarching objective of the course is to examine the **relationship between capitalism and democracy**. In light of recent and ongoing challenges to the predominant political-economic system of democratic capitalism, students will read both classical and contemporary perspectives on these two fundamental pillars of modernity—including the work of historical figures such as Adam Smith, Karl Marx, and Joseph Schumpeter, as well as contemporary scholars like Thomas Piketty, Wendy Brown, and Wolfgang Streeck.

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

- compare and evaluate historical and contemporary conceptions of capitalism and democracy
- discuss the relationship between capitalism and democracy as world-historical forces
- assess diverse, cross-cutting challenges facing contemporary capitalist democracies
- critically evaluate practical and theoretical responses to the crises of capitalist democracy

Prerequisites

This is an advanced course in political theory. You should normally have taken two to three prior courses in political theory, but students with less experience may be eligible if you have extensive experience in related areas (i.e. social theory, philosophy, law, political science, economics). If you have questions about your preparedness for the course, please feel free to contact me.

Requirements

The course meets twice a week for 80-minute sessions, to be divided between lecture and discussion. Attendance is required, though you may have two unexcused absences without penalty. Reading assignments are limited to a maximum of 50 pages per class session, and are often shorter—meaning that you can and will be expected to do them, thoroughly, before each class. You will be expected to participate regularly in discussions, though quality of contribution is more important than quantity. Additionally, you will write reading responses each week, which may be incorporated into discussion. The other components of your grade will be an in-class mid-term, a final exam, and a final paper / project.

- 10%: Attendance and participation
- 15%: Reading responses
- 20%: In-class midterm
- 30%: Final exam
- 25%: Final paper / project

Unless otherwise noted, you will submit all written assignments as word documents (.docx) using the following dropbox link: <http://tinyurl.com/poli470upload>. Assignments submitted in the wrong format may be counted as late.

Reading Responses

You will submit written **reading responses** of **400-600 words** on either **Tuesday** or **Thursday** of **each week** (one per week, you may choose which day), focusing on the readings for that day. These will be graded on a four-point scale, and in order to be considered for full credit, they must be uploaded by **9am** on the day of class. Late responses uploaded before 10am will be given a maximum score of three; responses received any time after that (i.e., *any* time until the day of the final exam) will be given a maximum score of two. You will not write a reading response the first week, leaving 12 weeks with reading responses. Of these, I will drop your two lowest scores.

Rather than summarizing the assigned reading, **successful reading responses** assume familiarity with the text under discussion, using the opportunity to make a single clear and concise argument about the text. They are not meant to be polished, however, and I will evaluate them on the basis of depth and originality of analysis, rather than form or style. In addition to constituting 15% of your final grade, reading responses are also your best opportunity to practice the skills you will need on the exams and paper, and to receive feedback from me about your work.

Midterm and Final Exam

The in-class midterm (**February 27**) will consist of three essay questions regarding the material from the first half of the course, and the cumulative final exam (**Date TBD**) will consist of four essay questions regarding material from the entire course. In both cases, you will have some choice about which questions to answer, but all questions will ask you to demonstrate your proficiency in the first three course objectives: i.e., comparing and evaluating different conceptions of capitalism and democracy; discussing the relationship between the two; and (for the final exam only), assessing the diverse challenges facing contemporary capitalist democracies.

Final Paper

For your **final paper**, you may choose one of the following formats:

- A dialogue between a supporter and a critic of capitalism
- An essay speculating about the future of capitalist democracy, on the model of Keynes' "Economic Possibilities for our Grandchildren"
- A manifesto for a political platform, on the model of Marx and Engels' "Communist Manifesto"
- A policy brief about a concrete proposal such as universal basic income, capital taxes, or citizens' assemblies (among others to be discussed in class)
- An argument for including a particular text or perspective that has been left off the syllabus
- Something else (a [rap battle](#)? a [musical](#)?) treating the course material in an original way

Appropriate length will vary depending on format, but should normally be in the range of 2500 words. Whatever format you choose to pursue, final papers (or projects) must engage multiple course texts and demonstrate your proficiency in the fourth course objective: critically evaluating responses to contemporary crises of capitalist democracy. To help ensure that you are meeting this requirement, you will submit a one-page proposal and outline to me by **5pm** on **Friday, March 30**. I will give everyone feedback at this stage, but you are also encouraged to come to my office hours beforehand, and throughout the semester, to discuss the possibilities for your final paper. The final draft must be submitted by **5pm** on **Monday, April 16**. The maximum grade will be lowered by a third of a letter grade (i.e., A to an A-) for each 24-hour period it is late (no exceptions without an official note from the University).

Course Policies

Use of cell phones and **laptops** in class is **prohibited**, unless I give you special permission. Tablets 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.

By the way, here's how you can contact me: I prefer to use email (samuel.bagg@gmail.com), and you can usually expect a response from me within 24 hours. If you have an absolutely urgent last-minute request (between the hours of 7am and 11pm), you may text me at +1 (919) 630-3645.

University-wide Policies

1. You must receive a passing grade for each major component of the course (midterm, final exam, and final paper / project) to pass the course as a whole. This means that an F on any one of these components will automatically result in a final course grade of F.

2. 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).

3. 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).

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

5. 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/>) to receive information on accommodating your needs before meeting with the course instructor. 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 also Elster, Jon (1984), *Ulysses and the Sirens*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Texts

The readings fall into three categories. First, some are available only through the **course pack**, which you are **required to purchase**. These are listed with a **(CP)** in the schedule. Second, some are available in the public domain, and are listed with a link. Third, I have asked you to purchase the five texts listed below under “Strongly Recommended.” All of these texts may also be read online through the McGill library (or found elsewhere online), and I have chosen not to make purchase mandatory, so as not to place undue financial burden on students with limited means. However, I expect you to have a copy of all readings in class to facilitate discussion (hard copy or tablet—no laptops). Rather than using the cumbersome online system and/or printing the texts for each class session, I strongly encourage anyone who is able to purchase the books to do so. In addition to making your readings in this class much more enjoyable, they will serve you well on your bookshelf for the rest of your life! They will be available through the McGill bookstore (Le James), but will likely be cheaper if you can find them used through an online retailer or used bookstore. I have also asked the bookstore to order the three “Suggested” texts. The selections we will read are in the public domain or in the course pack, but if you are able to purchase a physical copy of these books, they will also be useful!

Strongly Recommended:

- Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 2nd ed. (Norton), ed. Tucker
ISBN: 978-0-393-09040-6 (~ \$35 used; or read online through text [archive](#))
- Joseph Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy* (Harper Perennial)
ISBN: 978-0-06-156161-0 (~ \$15 used; or read online through [library](#))
- Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation* (Beacon)
ISBN: 978-0-8070-5643-1 (~ \$25 used; or read online through [library](#))
- Thomas Piketty, *Capital in the 21st Century* (Belknap)
ISBN: 978-0-674-43000-6 (~ \$25 new or used; or read online through [library](#))
- Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos* (Zone)
ISBN: 978-1-935408-53-6 (~ \$25 new or used; or read online through [library](#))

Suggested:

- Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations* (Liberty Fund), 2 volumes
- Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (Liberty Fund), trans. James Schleifer
- W.E.B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America* (Oxford)

Course Schedule

January 9: Introduction

- John Maynard Keynes, “Economic Prospects for our Grandchildren” ([link](#))
- Peter Frase, “Four Futures” ([link](#))

Part I: Classical Theories

January 11: The logic of commercial society

- Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations* ([link](#))
 - Introduction and Plan of Work
 - Book I, chapters 1-3, 7

January 16: Commercial society and the state

- Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations* ([link](#))
 - Book IV, chapter 9, §50-52
 - Book V, 1b §1-11, 1c, 1d, 1f §46-61, 1g §1-15
 - Pages in pdf: 184-185, 202-206, (214-222), 266-281

January 18: Commercial society and democracy

- Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* ([link](#))
 - Volume II, Part 2, chapters 1-8, 13, 17-20
 - Volume II, Part 4, chapters 6-8

January 23: Capitalism as bourgeois revolution

- Karl Marx, “The Communist Manifesto” in *Marx-Engels Reader* (p. 473-500)

January 25: Bourgeois liberal democracy

- Karl Marx, “On the Jewish Question” in *Marx-Engels Reader* (p. 26-52)
- “Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844” in *Marx-Engels Reader* (p. 70-81)

January 30: Capitalism as the logic of history

- Karl Marx, selections from *Capital* in *Marx-Engels Reader* (p. 319-343, p. 419-438)

February 1: The logic of creative destruction

- Joseph Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy*
 - Required: Chapters 5, 6, and 7 (p. 61-86 in Harper edition)
 - Optional: Chapters 10 and 11 (p. 111-130 in Harper edition)
 - *NB: Begin reading for February 6!*

February 6: Democracy as a market

- Joseph Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy*
 - Chapters 20, 21, 22, and 23 (p. 235-302 in Harper edition)

February 8: The specter of central planning

- Friedrich Hayek, Chapters 5-6 and 10-11 from *The Road to Serfdom* (**CP**)

February 13: Origins of market liberalism

- Karl Polanyi, Chapters 3-6 from *The Great Transformation* (p. 35-80)

February 15: Origins of social democracy

- Karl Polanyi, Chapters 10-13 and 21 from *The Great Transformation* (p. 116-170, 257-268)

February 20: Capitalism and the color line

- W. E. B. Du Bois, Chapters 1, 2, and part of 14, from *Black Reconstruction in America* (**CP**)
- Karl Marx, “Letter to Abraham Lincoln” ([link](#))

February 22: Capitalism, slavery, imperialism

- Sven Beckert, Introduction and Chapters 4-5 from *Empire of Cotton* (**CP**)

February 27: *Midterm Examination (in class)*

Part II: Capitalism and Democracy in the 21st Century

March 1: Are capitalism and democracy compatible?

- Gabriel Almond, "Capitalism and Democracy" (CP)
- Nancy Fraser, "A Triple Movement?" (CP)

~ Study Break ~

March 13: The historical logic of capital revisited (I)

- Thomas Piketty, *Capital in the 21st Century* (p. 1-35, 39-55)

March 15: The historical logic of capital revisited (II)

- Thomas Piketty, *Capital in the 21st Century* (p. 113-120, 158-162, 237-270)

March 20: The historical logic of capital revisited (III)

- Thomas Piketty, *Capital in the 21st Century* (p. 336-376, 410-429)

March 22: Political economy of neoliberalism

- Wolfgang Streeck, "Crises of democratic capitalism" (CP)
- Wolfgang Streeck, "How will capitalism end?" (CP)

March 27: Cultural politics of neoliberalism (I)

- Wendy Brown, Chapters 1 and 2 from *Undoing the Demos* (p. 17-78)

March 29: Cultural politics of neoliberalism (II)

- Wendy Brown, Chapters 4 and 6 from *Undoing the Demos* (p. 115-150, 175-200)

March 30: Final paper / project proposal due (5pm)

April 3: Capitalism and ecology

- Naomi Klein, Introduction and Chapter 2 from *Capitalism vs. the Climate* (CP)

April 5: RGCS Debate: Henry Farrell vs. Steven Teles

- Social Democracy and Market Liberalism: How Big is the Gap? (no reading)

April 10: Democratic pessimism revisited

- Daniel Bell, Chapter 1 from *The China Model* (CP)

April 12: Hope?

- Open (TBD by class interest)

April 16: Final paper due (5pm)

April 18: Final examination (9am)