

Introduction to Political Theory

Instructor: Alec Crisman

POLI 231

Summer 2024

10.05AM -12.25 PM, Mon-Thurs, Jul. 8th-August 1st, 2024

Location: SADB 1/12

Contact: aleccrismanteaching@gmail.com

Office Hours: Monday and Wednesday, 1:30PM – 2:30PM, Friday 5:00PM – 7:00PM, all on Zoom.

NOTE THAT THIS VERSION OF THE SYLLABUS IS A DRAFT, AND IS SUBJECT TO MINOR EMENDATIONS. PLEASE REFER TO THE VERSION ON THE COURSE WEBSITE FOR READINGS AND ASSIGNMENTS, AS THAT VERSION WILL TAKE PRIORITY OVER THIS ONE.

1. Aims and Learning Objectives

This course offers an introduction to the discipline Political Theory and its tools. It examines both the normative grounds of political life, as well as the conceptual foundations of political science. The course will examine questions such as the legitimacy of political authority, limits to political obedience, responses to the potentially-conflicting demands of politics and ethics, and the content and normative foundations of major political ideologies. This will be done via a thematic exploration of major thinkers in the political theory canon throughout history, as well as engaging with contemporary responses to them.

Course objectives will also include learning how to analyze and critically evaluate political and philosophical arguments, as well as interpreting political theory texts.

This course fulfills the prerequisite/ corequisite for 300-level courses in political theory. In particular it prepares students to pursue the four-semester sequence in the history of political thought (POLI 333/ 334/ 433/ 434) and/or thematic courses such as POLI 361, 364, 365, 366, and 376 (with themes including global and international justice and liberal, democratic, radical, and feminist political thought.)

2. Prerequisites

NONE

3. Texts

All texts have been provided as PDFs and uploaded onto the MyCourses website. There is no course packet and no books are required for purchase.

4. Class Format and Grading

Lectures will feature dedicated time each day near the end of class for students to ask general questions about the day's reading or the course in general. Time permitting, the last ten minutes of class will be dedicated to the next day's readings, so students can know what to look for and what themes to focus on.

Assessments:

20% Critical Argument Evaluation (500-600w or 550-650 if submitted in French) Due Friday, July 19th at 11:59 PM

40% Essay (1000-1200w, or 1100-1300 if submitted in French) Due Saturday, August 3rd at 11:59 PM

40% Final Exam (90 minutes, open book, to be held on MyCourses following the end of the course on August 6th).

Assignments will be submitted in PDF format in MyCourses. You must receive a passing grade on each component in order to pass the course. Essays will be graded on ability to make a clearly-written and substantiated argument, *not* the substantive position you take.

Assignments that are late will be penalized 1/3 letter grade per day. This means that a B will become a B-, a B- a C+, and so on. Extensions will be granted in case of documented illness or family emergency. You will have **one automatic extension of up to 24 hours** that you may use as needed without an excuse; you must e-mail me that you are using this by the time the paper is due.

If you believe an error has been made in grading and you wish to challenge your grade, you must send me an email containing a 150-200 word explanation of the error in grading, as well as both a clean and marked version of your paper, all in separate Word documents or PDFs. Challenging your grade does not guarantee your grade will improve; I will completely re-mark the paper, meaning that it is also possible that your grade will be lowered.

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

The final exam will be posted on MyCourses for the designated exam period. From the time you open it, you will have 90 minutes to complete it. The exam will be designed to be completed in an hour – the extra half-hour will serve as a built-in accommodation for students who need it. You should not discuss its contents with others during the 24-hour window and must complete the exam on your own. The exam contents will involve a combination of short answers and one longer essay answer.

5. 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>)).

We use a variety of techniques to monitor academic dishonesty and plagiarism. Your assignments may be submitted to text-matching or other appropriate software (e.g., formula-, equation-, and graph-matching). Obviously, downloading or purchasing whole papers is plagiarism, but you can be guilty of plagiarism for much less than that. *Any time you copy someone else's words (including those written by an AI chatbot/LLM) and paste them into your paper without quotation marks, a full citation, and due credit, you have committed academic dishonesty; one sentence from Wikipedia is enough to count.*

Other people's ideas usually warrant a footnote, other people's words *always demand* quotation marks and a full citation. Suspected cases of plagiarism will be vigorously pursued.

6. 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).

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

Accessibility:

My aim as instructor of this course is to provide an inclusive and accessible learning environment. However, if you experience barriers to learning in this course, or anticipate experiencing barriers, do not hesitate to discuss them with me or the Office for Students with Disabilities, at (514) 398-6009.

Copyright and Dissemination of Class Materials: Instructor-generated course materials (e.g., handouts, notes, summaries, exam questions) are protected by law and may not be copied or distributed in any form or in any medium without explicit permission of the instructor. All slides, video recordings, lecture notes, etc. remain the instructor's intellectual property. As such, you may use these only for your own learning (and research, with proper referencing/citation) ends. You are not permitted to disseminate or share these materials; doing so may violate the instructor's intellectual property rights. Note that infringements of copyright can be subject to follow up by the University under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures.

8. Reading and Lecture Schedule:

Note that this course is **readings-heavy**; it is expected that you **do the readings *before* the lecture**.

If you do not keep up with the readings you will not be able to pass the course or complete the assignments. This is especially important given that this is an intensive course, and work piles up extremely quickly. Below, you will see the number of pages due each week and each day, to help you better plan times to get ahead on the readings, something you will at certain points need to do.

Week 1: Rulership and Obligation (140 pages)

Monday, July 8th: Syllabus Day and Weber (30 pages)

Weber – Politics as a Vocation.

Tuesday, July 9th: Rulership and Obligation (52 pages)

Sophocles – Antigone

Wednesday, July 10th: Rulership and Obligation (34 pages)

Plato – Apology + Crito

Thursday, July 11th: Rulership and Obligation (24 pages)

King – Letter from Birmingham Jail

Malcolm X – Ballot or the Bullet (Audio version: <https://youtu.be/3uKbrtVwKeE>)

Critical Argument Evaluation Topics Distributed – Q&A on paper writing

Week 2: The Social Contract (133 pages)

Monday, July 15th: Social Contract (32 hard pages)
Hobbes – Leviathan

Tuesday, July 16th: Social Contract (30 pages)
Locke – Second Treatise

Wednesday, July 17th: Social Contract (35 pages)
Rousseau – On the Social Contract

Thursday, July 18th: “Right-wing” Criticism of the Contract (36 pages)
Hume – On the Original Contract
Burke – Reflections on the Revolution in France

Friday, July 19th: Critical Argument Evaluation due at 11:59 PM

Week 3: The Topics Left Over (164 pages)

Monday, July 22nd: “Left-wing” Criticism of the Contract (51 pages)
Okin – Women in Western Political Thought
Mills – The Racial Contract

Tuesday, July 23rd: Ethics of Political Action (47 pages)
Machiavelli – The Prince
Walzer – Dirty Hands

Wednesday, July 24th: Bureaucracy and its critics (55 pages)
Re-read Weber.
Hayek – Use of Knowledge in Society
Oakeshott – Rationalism in Politics

Thursday, July 25th: Conservatism (11 pages)
Re-read Oakeshott + Burke
Oakeshott – On Being Conservative

Critical argument evaluation feedback.

Paper Topics Distributed

Week 4: Party Ideologies Continued (117 pages)

Monday, July 29th: Left-Liberalism (30 hard pages)
Rawls – Justice as Fairness: A Restatement (skip sections 9 and 10)
Mills - Liberalism and Racial Justice (lecture: https://youtu.be/KfYrXSP_rZc)

Tuesday, July 30th: Right-Liberalism (58 pages)

Hayek – Constitution of Liberty

Hayek – Why I Am Not A Conservative

Optional: Nozick – Anarchy, State, and Utopia

(Unless you're interested, skip the footnotes on these; they're much shorter than they look.)

Wednesday, July 31st: Socialism (29 pages)

Marx & Engels – Manifesto of the Communist Party

Walzer – Which Socialism?

Thursday, August 1st: Wrap-up and review

Paper Due: Saturday, August 3rd, 11:59 PM

Final Exam: Tuesday, August 6th, on MyCourses.

Acknowledgements: This syllabus and class format is based on the courses given by Prof. Jacob Levy and Mx. Aberdeen Berry, to whom I am indebted and very grateful, not just for this.