POLI 367: Liberal Political Theory (Winter 2019) – DRAFT

Location: Currie 305/6
Schedule: Wed-Fri 11:35am-12:55pm
Instructor: Dr. Samuel Bagg
Office Hours (Ferrier 498): Wed 4:00-6:00

NB: This is a DRAFT version of the syllabus, and it is subject to change. Please consult MyCourses or email me at samuel.bagg@gmail.com for the final version.

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 preparation, please feel free to contact me.

Requirements

The course meets twice a week for 80-minute lectures, with some discussion interspersed throughout. (If we are granted a TA, there will also be conferences). Attendance is required, though you may have two unexcused absences without penalty. Reading assignments are limited to a maximum of 40 pages per class session—meaning that you can and will be expected to do them, thoroughly, before each class. There will be opportunities for questions and discussion, and there will also be 4-6 reading quizzes randomly distributed throughout the semester. You will also write three papers, weighted as follows:

- 15%: Reading quizzes
- 25%: First paper
- 25%: Second paper
- 35%: Final paper

Attendance is not a percentage of the grade per se, but I will deduct two points from your final grade for each unexcused absence after the first two (which you may miss for free). More details about the other assignments can be found below.
**Reading Quizzes**

There will be 4-6 reading quizzes distributed randomly throughout the semester, which will be graded on a four-point scale. They will test basic knowledge of the reading, and should be very easy if you have done the reading carefully. They also serve as a mechanism to incentivize attendance and timeliness, and cannot be made up under any circumstances. This means that if you are absent or too late to class on a day when there is a quiz, you will receive a zero for that quiz, unless you have a note from your academic dean, in which case you may submit an extra reading response for the week as a replacement. I will, however, drop your lowest quiz score.

**Papers**

You will write three papers, two each of 1500-1800 words, and one of 1700-2000 words. The paper topics will be posted on MyCourses about two weeks before the due dates, but you can expect that topics for the first two papers will ask you to demonstrate your proficiency in the first two course objectives: i.e., understanding the characteristic ideals and institutions of liberalism, and comparing the foundational arguments motivating different strands within the liberal tradition. In addition, the third paper will require you to demonstrate your proficiency in the third course objective: i.e., critically evaluating the political implications of liberal theory, building on the final three parts of the course.

**Course Policies**

1. 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.

2. 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.

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/](http://www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/) for more information).

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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.
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/] 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.

**Texts**

Readings in this course fall into two categories:

A) The books listed below have been ordered for you at the McGill textbook store (*Le James*), and are often available much more cheaply in used editions. It is strongly recommended that you get them at the bookstore, because having a hard copy will help you read and remember them, and they will all be worthwhile to have in your library in the future. Nevertheless, all these books may also be found online through the library or another online archive, and those less able to purchase books may prefer to read them that way. I will advise you of the right edition to use when reading online.

- John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government* (Hackett)  
  ISBN: 978-0-915144-86-0 (~ $10 used)
- Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Basic Political Writings*, trans: Cress (Hackett, 1st or 2nd edn ok)  
  ISBN: 978-0-87220-047-7 or 978-1-60384-673-8 (~ $10 used)
- Immanuel Kant, *Political Writings*, trans: Reiss (Cambridge, 1st or 2nd edn ok)  
  ISBN: 978-0-52139-837-4 (~ $10 used)
- John Rawls, *Justice as Fairness* (Belknap)  
  ISBN: 978-0-674-00511-2 (~ $20 used)
  ISBN: 978-0-199-67080-2 (~ $10 used)
- Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (Oxford World’s Classics)  
  ISBN: 978-0-199-55546-8 (~ $10 used)
  ISBN: 978-0-521-80650-3 (~ $20 used)

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 also be found online, but the editions or translations may be different, and many others cannot be found online at all. Thus, all students are required to purchase the course pack.
Course Schedule

Jan 9:    Constant, “Liberty of the Ancients as Compared to That of the Moderns” (CP)

Part I: The Social Contract

Jan 11:  Locke, Second Treatise of Government, Ch. I-VIII (§4-51, 87-122)


Jan 25:  Kant, Political Writings (selections TBA)

Jan 30:  Rawls, Justice as Fairness, p. 1-38

Feb 1:   Rawls, Justice as Fairness, p. 39-50, 72-94

Feb 4:   First Paper Due (5pm)

Part II: Pluralist Traditions

Feb 6:   Montesquieu, The Spirit of the Laws (selections TBA) (CP)

Feb 8:   Hume, “Of the Original Contract,” other essays (CP)

Feb 13:  Bentham, Principles of Morals and Legislation (selections TBA) (CP)

Feb 15:  Mill, On Liberty (selections TBA)

Feb 20:  Isaiah Berlin, “Two Concepts of Liberty” (CP)

Feb 22:  Judith Shklar, “The Liberalism of Fear” (CP)

Feb 25:  Second Paper Due (5pm)

Part III: Liberalism as Revolution

Feb 27:  Declaration of Independence (United States) (CP)

Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen (France) (CP)

Thomas Paine, Rights of Man (selections TBA) (CP)

Mar 1:   Mary Wollstonecraft, A Vindication of the Rights of Woman

Mar 6,8: No Class (Study Break)
Mar 13: Frederick Douglass, “Fourth of July Oration” (CP)

Mar 15: Adam Michnik, *Letters from Prison and Other Essays* (selections TBA) (CP)
Vaclav Havel, “The Power of the Powerless” (CP)

**Part IV: Liberalism as Moderation**

Mar 20: Publius (Madison, Hamilton, Jay), *Federalist Papers*, # 1, 10, 15, 48, 51, 70, 78

Mar 22: Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (selections TBA) (CP)


**Part V: Liberalism as Reaction**

Mar 29: Karl Marx, “Communist Manifesto” and “On the Jewish Question” (CP)

Apr 3: Michel Foucault, “Power, Right, Truth” (CP)
Theodor Adorno, “The Culture Industry Reconsidered” (CP)
Sarah Brouillette, “Literature as Liberalism” (CP)

Apr 5: Charles Mills, “Justice, Deviance, and the Ghetto” (CP)

Apr 10: Saba Mahmood, “Religious Reason and Secular Affect: An Incommensurable Divide?” (CP)

Apr 12: Glen Sean Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks* (selections TBA) (CP)

Apr 15: *Final paper due (5pm)*