

History of Political / Social Theory 3: 17th and 18th Century Western Political Thought

POLI 433 Fall 2024	Professor Yves Winter yves.winter@mcgill.ca Office: 418 Ferrier Office hours: Make an appointment
BURN 1B39 W/F 13:05 - 14:25	

This course has a strict no-screen classroom policy, and students are required to take notes manually. The use or display of any mobile computing or communications devices (including computers, recording devices, phones, tablets, etc.) is not permitted during class, except with explicit instructor permission. See "Learning Objectives" and "Other Policies" below.

Description

This course introduces students to early modern European political philosophy and political thought from the 17th to the 18th century. Early modern political thought develops in some of the most turbulent and contentious epochs of European history, in a period shaped by religious warfare, by the rise of the individual as a political subject and as an object of governance, by the emergence of the modern state and of capitalism, by the rise and fall of absolutism, and by the expansion of European power through the colonization of the new world and the explosion of maritime commerce. The debates in this period shaped many of our contemporary political concepts. We will discuss the crises and transformation of political authority as well as the emergence of new political forms and orders and technologies of power. We will examine theories of political justification, including social contract theory, limited government, and popular consent. And we will be able to trace concepts of individual rights, property, resistance, and revolution to the debates during this period. Among the authors we will read are Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau.

Prerequisites

This is a 400-level course, and as per departmental regulations a **minimum prerequisite** is that students must have taken Introduction to Political Theory (POLI 231) or equivalent / instructor's permission. In addition, having taken a 300-level political theory course is also recommended.

Learning Outcomes

The pedagogical objective is that by the end of this course students will have improved their ability to:

- define, identify, and discuss the themes, preoccupations, and limitations of early modern political theory
- interpret and explain challenging theoretical and philosophical texts
- recognize, distinguish, analyze, and evaluate theoretical arguments
- think critically and construct analytically rigorous arguments about philosophical questions

- listen to and focus on lectures and effectively take hand-written notes that synthesize (rather than transcribe) orally-presented material

Required Texts

The following print books are available for purchase from [Le James](#). These editions are chosen, because they are reliable, accessible, affordable, and provide useful notes and context.

- Thomas Hobbes, Leviathan, (ed. Martinich & Battiste). Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2011. ISBN 9781554810031
- John Locke, A Letter Concerning Toleration (ed. Tully). Hackett, ISBN 9780915145607
- John Locke, Second Treatise of Government, (ed. Bailey). Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2015. ISBN 9781554811564
- Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Fundamental Political Writings (ed. Maguire/Williams). Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2018. ISBN 9781554812974

Students must also purchase a **required printed course pack** available in print format only from [Le James](#).

Students are encouraged to read French texts in the original.

Assignments and Grades

Written assignments for this course will consist of **four quizzes, two papers** (1500 words each), and a **final exam**.

Final grades are calculated according to the following schedule.

Four Quizzes (5% each)	20%
Two Papers (10% each)	20%
Final Exam	45%
Class Participation	15%

Quizzes will take place on the dates indicated in the syllabus at the beginning of class. Students who miss a quiz due to absence or lateness will receive a failing grade. Make-up quizzes will only be available for serious, documented, and unforeseeable reasons (e.g. illness, accident, bereavement). Transportation delays or scheduling conflicts do not count as such reasons.

Papers are due on the dates indicated in the syllabus. They are to be submitted in **PDF** format on my-Courses. **Late papers** will be docked one third of a letter grade for every day late, including weekends, with the first day beginning immediately after a paper is due. Papers that are more than 7 days late will not be accepted and will result in a failing grade. Extensions are available only for serious and documented reasons, and they must be requested ahead of time. No extensions will be granted on (or after) an assignment's due date, except for documented illnesses or emergencies. Do not send assignments by email unless otherwise instructed.

Formatting: All of your written work should be spell-checked and proof-read for syntax, grammar, spelling, and punctuation. It should be double-spaced with 1-inch margins and 12pt font and use proper reference citation. I do not care which of the established reference citation system you use, as long as you are consistent and complete. Number your pages and indicate to which prompt you are responding.

Your written work will be graded on originality, reasoning and argument, organization, clarity of exposition, and style. Papers will be marked according to the following rubric:

Paper Grading Rubric				
	A	B	C	D
Use of Course Material (Evidence and Analysis)	Applies course material in an especially thoughtful, skillful, or original manner. Fresh and cogent analysis. Demonstrates genuine depth of engagement with ideas from the course going beyond lectures & conferences.	Good, solid application of concepts from course. Demonstrates solid understanding of texts, ideas, and problems. Claims backed up by appropriate textual evidence.	Uses course material but inappropriately or in a cursory fashion. May have some factual, interpretive, or conceptual problems.	Paper shows inadequate engagement with course material, and/or demonstrates major errors in use of concepts.
Quality of Thesis	Strong argument. Original, clear, plausible, substantive, and contestable thesis.	Substantive and clear thesis.	Weak or vague/unclear thesis.	Thesis difficult to identify.
Quality of Reasoning (Execution)	Thorough, and insightful analysis. Skillful development of the argument.	Satisfactory and consistent analysis. Fulfills the assignment and deals with major issues in assignment.	Analysis and reasoning unclear; ideas undeveloped or underdeveloped. Addresses assignment, but not fully or not in an appropriate manner.	Doesn't address the assignment or otherwise fails to respond to the requirements of the analysis. Ideas undeveloped. Frequent recourse to narrative.
Writing Quality (Presentation, Organization, Style, Mechanics)	Eloquently written, in clear and concise prose. Fun to read. Well-organized. Free from errors in grammar, punctuation, spelling, and usage	Readable, concise, coherent, organized, and clear, but could be improved with a few minor changes.	Problems with presentation, coherence, organization, clarity, word choice, grammar or proofreading.	Not appropriate for college level writing; major problems with presentation, organization, clarity.

The Department has a regrade policy. If at any point you feel like your written work has not been graded fairly, you can ask for a regrade. When you request a regrade, your paper will be evaluated afresh. This means that your grade may stay the same, may increase, or may decrease. If you are not satisfied with the regrade, you may contact the Department's Undergraduate Program Coordinator for a grade review.

Attendance and active class participation are required.

Participation Grading Rubric			
A	B	C	D
Student is always prepared for class and advances the discussion by sharing thoughtful ideas or asking questions more than once per class	Student is always prepared for class and contributes proactively at least once per class	Student offers occasional contributions	Student offers little to no contributions

Grading Scale

All work in this course will be graded on the standard letter grade scale (A to F), equivalent to the 4-point GPA scale. An A on a course component is worth 4 points, an A- is worth 3.7 points, etc. To calculate your final grade, the grade points you earn on each course component will be multiplied by the relative weight of that component, and then the scores will be added to get your final grade-point average. That average will determine your final letter grade for the course. The table below sets out the official scheme used by McGill to convert letter grades to grade points. For example, if your overall grade-point average is a 3.4, you would earn a B+ in the course. Do not rely on the calculator in MyCourses for computing your final grade, as that calculator by default aggregates grades according to the 0-100% scale and will not display the accurate final grade you have earned in this course.

Grade	Grade Points	Grade Range
A	4.0	3.85-4.00
A-	3.7	3.50-3.84
B+	3.3	3.15-3.49
B	3.0	2.85-3.14
B-	2.7	2.50-2.84
C+	2.3	2.15-2.49
C	2.0	1.85-2.14
D	1.0	1.0-1.86
F	0.0	0.00-0.99

Other Policies

Mobile computing and communications devices: To facilitate the realization of learning objectives, this course is organized as a manual note-taking lecture course. Mobile computing or communications devices (including computers, recording devices, phones, tablets, etc.) are not permitted to be used or displayed in class, unless a student has received explicit permission from the instructor. If you bring such devices to class, they must be off and out of view.

There are three basic reasons for why this course is structured as a manual noted-taking course¹:

1. There is increasing evidence that mobile computing devices pose a significant distraction for both users and fellow students during class, inhibiting their ability to focus on classroom material.

1. For evidence of the first two points, see, for example, C.B. Fried, "[In-class Laptop Use and Its Effects on Student Learning](#)," *Computers & Education* 50.3 (2008): 906-914; F. Sana, T. Weston, and N. J. Cepeda, "[Laptop Multitasking Hinders Classroom Learning for Both Users and Nearby Peers](#)," *Computers & Education* 62 (2013): 24-31. For further discussion, see also Josh Fischman, "[Students Stop Surfing After Being Shown How In-Class Laptop Use Lowers Test Scores](#)," *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (March 16, 2009). For a more general discussion of the issue of computers in the classroom, see the article by Laura Mortkowitz, "[More colleges, professors shutting down laptops and other digital distractions](#)," *The Washington Post* (April 25, 2010).

2. There is increasing evidence linking the use of such devices in class to poorer overall course performance.
3. Taking notes by hand is generally slower than typing. While it may be possible to transcribe a lecture almost verbatim when typing, this is impossible by hand. To take effective manual notes, students must simultaneously digest and synthesize the main points of a lecture. Not only is digesting and synthesizing on the spot an important skill, the process itself can play a significant role in learning the material.

Exceptions: Explicit permission for the use of a computer may be granted by the instructor for justifiable reasons. Speak to me directly about this.

Inclusive classroom. As the instructor of this course I endeavor to provide an inclusive learning environment. This involves maintaining teaching spaces that are respectful and inclusive for all involved. To this end, offensive, violent, or harmful language on discussion boards, in chat rooms, but also in user names or visual backgrounds may be cause for disciplinary action.

If you experience barriers to learning in this course, do not hesitate to discuss them with me and [Student Accessibility & Achievement](#)

Accommodations are possible for students who experience barriers (including disabilities, medical conditions, as well as other obstacles). Accommodation requests will not be considered for assignments that are past due. Students who need accommodations should contact me at the beginning of the semester or as soon as possible after the barrier arises.

Please let me and your fellow students know your preferred pronoun. Your preferred name should appear on the class list if you have entered it in [Minerva](#).

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). Please note that I take plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty seriously. Work submitted for evaluation as part of this course will be reviewed for potential plagiarism issues and may be checked with text matching software.

AI. ChatGPT and other generative AI platforms offer sophisticated technological tools for which there are both legitimate and illegitimate uses in this course. It is plagiarism to copy & paste, even rephrased AI responses to your queries into your papers and claim those as your own writing. It is plagiarism to pass off arguments and ideas derived from AI as your own. In my own experience, papers generated by AI models are weak and typically receive grades in the D/F range. Note also that current AI models are not reliable substitutes for bibliographic searches (use the library website!) or as general search engines. Current AI models have known issues with "hallucinations," i.e. inventing stuff and pretending that it is fact. You should therefore not trust any information that AI models provide you. That said AI models, such as ChatGPT are viable tools to copy-edit and proofread your writing, and you may legitimately use it for these purposes. For more information, I recommend [this post](#) by Prof. Arash Abizadeh on how to use AI for undergraduate political theory courses.

Conformément à la Charte des droits de l'étudiant de l'Université McGill, chaque étudiant-e a le droit de soumettre **en français ou en anglais** tout travail écrit devant être noté.

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

All slides, video recordings, lecture notes, and handouts are to be used strictly for your own learning. You are not permitted to share these materials or place them into the public domain; doing so may violate both University regulations and Canadian law and could be cause for disciplinary action.

Class Schedule

- Aug 28 **Course Introduction. Christianity and the problem of the two kingdoms**
Martin Luther, On Secular Authority [selections see below]
Jean Calvin, On Civil Government [Institutes, bk IV.xx, chs. 1-3, 8, 22-32]
in Harro Höpfl (ed.) Luther and Calvin on Secular Authority (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 6-15, 24-27 [Luther] and 47-51, 56-58, 74-84 [Calvin]
*NOTE: Students are expected to have completed the reading before class
- Aug 30 **Nature and Artifice, Reason, Passion, and Science**
Thomas Hobbes, Leviathan, [1651] Hobbes's Introduction, chs. 1-6
- Sep 4 **Reason, Passions, Science**
Thomas Hobbes, Leviathan, chs. 7-13
- Sep 6 **Class cancelled (American Political Science Association's Annual Meeting)**
- Laws of Nature**
Read Thomas Hobbes, Leviathan, chs. 14-17
Listen to audio lecture on myCourses
- Sep 11 **The State of Nature & the Commonwealth**
Thomas Hobbes, Leviathan, chs. 18-23
- Sep 13 **The Sovereign**
Thomas Hobbes, Leviathan, chs. 24-31
- Sep 18 **First Quiz**
- The Kingdom of God & the Christian Commonwealth**
Thomas Hobbes, Leviathan, chs. 33 (¶1, ¶21-25), 35 (¶1-4, 13), 36 (¶19), 38(¶1), 39 (¶5), 40 (¶1-6), 42 (¶42-43, 71-72, 80), 43 (¶1-8), A Review and Conclusion
- Discussion**
- Sep 20 **Class cancelled (Instructor travel)**
- Sep 25 **Egalitarianism: Levellers and Diggers**
John Lilburne, "Postscript to the Freeman's Freedom Vindicated" [1649]
Members of the New Model Army and civilian Levellers, "Extract from the debates at the General Council of the Army, Putney, 29 October 1647"
John Lilburne, William Walwyn, Thomas Prince, and Richard Overton, "An Agreement of the Free People of England" [1649]
in Andrew Sharp (ed.) The English Levellers (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 31-32, 102-130, 168-178
- Gerrard Winstanley et. al., "The True Levellers Standard Advanced" [1649]
Gerrard Winstanley et. al., "A Declaration from the Poor Oppressed People of England"

[1649]

in Thomas N. Corns, Ann Hughes, David Loewenstein (eds.) The Complete Works of Gerrard Winstanley. Volume 2 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 1-42

Sep 27

Religious Toleration

John Locke, Letter on Toleration [1689]

Oct 2

The State of Nature & Property

John Locke, Second Treatise on Government [1689], chs. 1-6

Oct 4

Political Society

John Locke, Second Treatise on Government, chs. 7-14

Oct 9

Second Quiz

The Limits of Power

John Locke, Second Treatise on Government, chs. 15-19

Discussion

Oct 11

Colonialism

Louis Armand Lahontan, "A Conference or Dialogue Between the Author and Adario, a Noted Man Among the Savages, Containing a Circumstantial View of the Customs and Humours of That People." In New Voyages to North America, Vol. 2 (Chicago: A.C. McClurg, 1905 [1703]), pp. 517-618

Discussion

Oct 16

Fall break (no class)

Oct 18

Fall break (no class)

Oct 21

First paper due at 6:00 pm

Oct 23

The State of Nature Reexamined

Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Discourse on Inequality, [1755] Letter to the Republic of Geneva, Preface

Oct 25

A Critique of Modernity

Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Discourse on Inequality, Part I (including Rousseau's notes, except notes 3, 5, 7, 8, 10)

Oct 30

Third Quiz

A Critique of Modernity

Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Discourse on Inequality, Part II (including Rousseau's notes)

Discussion

Nov 1

The General Will

Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Social Contract [1762], book I

Nov 6

Sovereignty and the People

Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Social Contract, book II

- Nov 8 **Democratic Institutions & Civil Religion**
Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Social Contract, books III - IV
Discussion
- Nov 13 **The Division of Labour,**
Bernard Mandeville, The Fable of the Bees, "The Grumbling Hive," [1714] E.J. Hundert (ed.) (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997), pp. 23-35
Adam Smith, Wealth of Nations, Liberty Fund ed., [1776] Book 1 ch. 1-3; Book 2 introduction; Book 4 ch., 4.vii.c, Book V ch.1.f.50-61; pp. 13-36, 276-8, 591-96, 616-27, 632-41, 781-788
Discussion
- Nov 15 **Fourth Quiz**

American Revolution: Separation of Powers & Checks and Balances
Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and John Jay ["Publius"], The Federalist [1787-1788] J.R. Pole ed., (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2005), nos. 9-10, 39, 47, 48, 51, 57, 70, 78, 84; pp. 41-54, 206-211, 261-272, 280-284, 309-313, 374-381, 411-418, 452-460
Thomas Jefferson, Declaration of Independence [as amended and adopted in Congress, July 4, 1777] in Jefferson: Political Writings, Joyce Appleby and Terence Ball (eds.) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp.102-105
- Nov 18 **Second Paper due at 6:00pm**
- Nov 20 **French Revolution: Third Estate to the Rights of Man**
Abbé Sieyès, What is the Third Estate? [1789], in Political Writings, Sonnenscher (ed.), (Indianapolis: Hackett), pp. 93-116, 130-3
"Decrees of the National Assembly,"
"Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen," in Keith Michael Baker, ed., The Old Regime and the French Revolution (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), pp. 226-31, 237-239
Marie-Olympe de Gouges, "The Rights of Woman" in Darline Gay Levy, Harriet Bronson Applewhite and Mary Durham Johnson (eds.) Women in Revolutionary Paris. 1789-1795, (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1979), pp. 89-96.
- Nov 22 **Haitian Revolution: Slavery & Emancipation**
Légér Félicité Sonthonax, "Decree of General Liberty" [1793]
The National Convention, "The Abolition of Slavery" [1794]
Toussaint Louverture, Constitution of the French Colony of Saint-Domingue [1801]
The Haitian Declaration of Independence [1804]
The Haitian Constitution [1805], in Laurent Dubois and John D. Garrigus (eds.) Slave Revolution in the Caribbean, 1789-1804: A Brief History With Documents, 2nd ed. (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's), 2017, pp. 110-114, 122-125, 158-161, 178-186
C.L.R. James, The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution Second ed. (New York: Vintage, 1963), Preface to the first edition, chs. 4-5, 11, pp. ix-xi, 85-144, 241-268
- Nov 27 **Early feminism**
Mary Wollstonecraft, A Vindication of the Rights of Woman, Sylvana Tomaselli (ed.)

(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), chs. 1-3, 8-9; pp. 79-125, 219-241
Discussion

TBC

Final exam (scheduled by Exam Office)