

## **POLITICAL THEORY**

### **2021 Spring/Summer**

**Instructor:** Lev Marder

**Email:** marderl@mcmaster.ca

**Office Hours:** on zoom

**Lecture:** Tue+Thu 6:30pm-9:30pm

**Room:** <https://mcmaster.zoom.us/j/93334895966>

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## **Course Description**

The course is designed to provide a background for the various Level III and Level IV courses in political theory; it is also a required course for all honours Political Science students. It will survey the development of Western political thought starting with fourth century BCE. We will pay close attention to concepts of human nature, justice, the good life, and equality and their implications for the distribution of power in society.

What is the relation between morality and politics? How must or should institutions be designed to create the optimal conditions for living together? What are the differences between those included and those excluded from political participation? Who should rule and what are the possible sources of legitimacy to rule? Are there limits to how government can legitimately treat its citizens, what is the extent of government's authority, and what should be the limits of liberties, rights, and duties? How should government formulate policy and who should be involved in the process?

In one way or another we have all thought about some of these questions in the past and no prior exposure to the works of political thinkers is necessary to address them. In this course, our goal is to become better acquainted with the historical responses to these questions, the key concepts, the underlying assumptions and contemporary relevance of the examined arguments. In historical sequence we will engage with a selection of works of Western political thinkers including Plato, Aristotle, Niccolo Machiavelli, Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Karl Marx and John Stuart Mill. Along with the canonical texts, we will also draw upon the writings of contemporary theorists to consider race, gender, and other issues inseparable from central themes of political thought.

## **Course Objectives**

Knowledge:

- Students will become familiar with the specific texts and arguments studied during the course.
- Students will be able to interpret and discuss the implication of influential political ideas and concepts including justice, social contract, liberty, authority and sovereignty.
- More broadly, students will gain understanding of major themes and issues in political theory, the stakes of the arguments and their contemporary relevance beyond the specific texts under consideration.
- These outcomes will be tested through class participation and the writing exercises.

Transferable Cognitive Skills:

- Students will be able to summarize ideas clearly and concisely.

- Improve argumentative skills in writing by learning to recognize cogent arguments, formulating theses, and supporting their arguments with textual evidence.
- Students will be able to read texts written by political thinkers, and critically analyze the structure and content of their arguments.
- Students will be able to compare and contrast the ideas of different thinkers, recognize their underlying assumptions, and comparatively evaluate them.
- These skills will be developed and tested through all of the assignments in the course, and in particular the sequence of writing exercises is intended to address these skills.

### **Required Materials and Texts**

Texts are all available through courselink or for purchase through Perusall

### **Class Format**

This is an online course that combines Zoom lectures/discussions with interactive learning on A2L. Zoom classes will be held every Tuesday and Thursday 6:30pm-9:30pm. These classes, except for small class group discussions, will be recorded and posted on A2L. These live sessions are a chance to develop and test your understanding of the material. Students not able to participate in live zoom sessions will have the option to both review the recordings and not lose participation marks by properly completing two page single-spaced weekly reflections (please email instructor for details).

### **Course Evaluation – Overview**

1. Weekly Reflections/Questions (10%)
2. Two advise-a world-leader projects (2 x 20%)
3. Online class participation (20%)
4. Final Exam (30%)

### **Course Evaluation – Details**

#### **Weekly Reflections/Questions**

On a weekly basis, starting with week 2, students post their reading question on the forum. Students with last names A-L post on Tuesdays, and students with last names M-Z post on Thursdays. The question must be prefaced with an introduction explaining the textual context within which the question is asked, and following the formulation of the question, its relevance to the ideas of the text and one or more possible responses should be discussed (total 7-10 sentences). Due at noon before the class where that text will be discussed and no late submissions are accepted. Each weekly “question” is worth 1%.

**Two advise-a-world-leader projects (2 x 20%) (1<sup>st</sup>: June 7<sup>th</sup> and June 14<sup>th</sup>; 2<sup>nd</sup>: July 14<sup>th</sup> and July 21<sup>st</sup>)**

Twice this semester you will be asked to work in groups to use the ideas of the thinkers you learn about to advise a world leader. In groups of 4-5, you will formulate a textually defensible position that you will advance in your paper (5-6 pages). This portion is worth 15% of the mark. After the due date, you will exchange your paper with another group, and using the theories, concepts, and arguments of the thinkers we studied, you will critique the other group's position using marginal notes. This portion is worth 5% (around 2 pages).

**Online Class Participation (20%)**

Excellent participation involves consistently coming to class online, demonstrably having read the material, staying for the entire class, paying full attention to what others in the class are contributing, and making valuable contributions to the discussion. Further details will be available on A2L. 10% of the participation grade will be assigned after week 7 and the other 10% after week 14.

**Final Exam (30%) (August 5<sup>th</sup>)**

The final exam in this course will be held on the last day of our class schedule. It will cover all the material (concepts, theories, arguments) studied during this semester and will be in multiple-choice format, testing both accuracy of knowledge and ability to apply your understanding.

**Weekly Course Schedule and Required Readings**

**Week 1**

**May 4 – Introduction**

Bring an open mind

**May 6 – Plato: What is justice?**

Readings: *Republic*, Books I-II.

**Week 2**

**May 11 – Plato: Political myths, education, and who should rule?**

Readings: *Republic*, Books III-IV.

**May 13 – Plato: How is knowledge related to politics?**

Readings: *Republic*, Books V-VI.

**Week 3**

**May 18 – Plato: What type of political regime is the best?**

Readings: *Republic*, Books VII-IX.

**May 20 – Aristotle: Are we political animals?**

Readings: *Politics*, Book I, chs. 1-7, 12-13

**Week 4**

**May 25 – Aristotle: Are we political animals? Continued**

Readings: *Politics*, Book II, chs. 1-5.

**May 27 – Aristotle: Who is a virtuous citizen and what is a good constitution?**

Readings: *Politics*, Book III, chs. 1-13, 16; Book IV, chs. 1, 11.

**Week 5 –June 1-June 3 Reading Week**

**Week 6**

**June 8 – Machiavelli: What does history teach us about real politics and power?**

Readings: *The Prince*, Letter, Intro., chs. 1-13.

**June 10 – Machiavelli: How should the Prince treat people and how should they treat each other?**

Readings: *The Prince*, chs. 14-23; *Discourses on Livy*, Book I, Letter, chs. 2-5.

**Week 7**

**June 15 – Hobbes: Materialism, or what is the driving force of human nature?**

Readings: *Leviathan*, Introduction-ch. 12.

Notes: First advise a world leader critique portion due June 14<sup>th</sup> (5%)

**June 17 – Hobbes: If we have natural law, why is a social contract necessary?**

Readings: *Leviathan*, chs. 13-20.

**Week 8**

**June 22 – Hobbes: Are there any limits to the power of sovereigns?**

Readings: *Leviathan*, chs. 21, 26, 29.

**June 24 – Locke: What are humans like without a social contract?**

Readings: *Second Treatise*, Ch. 1-4.

**Week 9**

**June 29 – Locke: Why would social contracts protect liberty and property?**

Readings: *Second Treatise*, Ch. 5-9.

**July 1 – Happy Canada Day!**

**Week 10**

**July 6 – Locke: What is the best form of government?**

Readings: *Second Treatise*, Ch. 10-19.

**July 8 – Rousseau: Would a dynamic view of human nature change how we understand social contracts?**

Readings: *Discourse on Inequality*

**Week 11**

**July 13 – Rousseau: Should individuals be trusted with protecting liberty?**

Readings: *Social Contract*, Books 1, 2.

**July 15 – Rousseau: Is democratic citizenship possible or d?**

Readings: *Social Contract*, Books 3, 4.

Notes: Second “advise a world leader project” position portion due July 14<sup>th</sup> (15%)

**Week 12**

**July 20 – Marx: What role to economic conditions play in the political arrangements?**

Readings: Marx, *Preface to A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (p. 209-213), *Society and Economy in History (Marx to P. V. Annenkov)* (PDF), *Theses on Feuerbach* (p. 98-101), *The German Ideology: Part I* (p. 102-132).

**July 22 – Marx: What if alienated labour is the source of societal problems?**

Readings: Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* (p. 58-68), *Alienation and Social Classes* (PDF), *On the Jewish Question* (p. 1-21).

Notes: Second advise a world leader critique portion due July 21<sup>st</sup> (5%)

**Week 13**

**July 27 – Marx: What is the force of politics in history?**

Readings: Marx, *Speech at the Anniversary of the People's Paper* (PDF), *German Ideology* (continued, p. 142-155), *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (p. 157-186).

**July 29 – Mills: Why should political regimes amplify individual freedom?**

Readings: Mill, *On Liberty*, Chs. 1-3.

**Week 14**

**August 3 – Mills: How would a liberal state behave?**

Readings: Mill, [On Liberty](#), Chs. 4-5, "A few words on non-intervention".

**August 5 – Exam (30%)**

**Course Policies**

**Submission of Assignments and Late Policy:**

Written assignments aside from reading responses are due at 11:59pm in the dropbox online on the day indicated in the syllabus.

Late assignments, without proper documentation and prior agreement with your instructor when possible, will receive a 10% daily deduction including weekends. Online forum contributions cannot and will not be accepted late, because they are time-sensitive.

If you know that you will have a few assignments due in several classes on the same day, come talk to your instructor about it early (at least two weeks before the deadline) and a short extension may be granted. Extensions are official only in written form, when confirmed through email.

### **Reading, Email, Office Hour and Other Rules:**

Every student is responsible for all required readings. Some of the texts are more difficult than others. Students are expected to come to every class online having read the reading assigned for that class.

I will be happy to meet with you through zoom, please reach out, let me know what times work for you, and I'll be happy to chat. Come, sit, relax in the virtual office and if you want to talk about the university in general or the course in particular, I'll be glad to see you. My rule for both email communication and office hours is that you meet me half way. (For example, just asking what does Plato think of equality doesn't give me anything to work with in order to help you out). Be prepared to tell me what you know and what you understand so that we can build on that basis to enrich your understanding and experience.

I will reply to emails within 24 hours (and usually much much much much quicker) between Monday-Friday, so if you do not get a reply from me within 24 hours, the wires must have crossed somewhere and you should email me again to make sure your email gets through. Please don't hesitate to resend emails in those cases, as quick communication under these circumstances is paramount and I'd love to help.

Please refrain from emailing on Saturday and Sunday out of respect, to give me some downtime from email. Emails sent on the weekend will not be answered, expect perhaps with a reminder to not email on weekends.

### **Grades**

Grades will be based on the McMaster University grading scale:

<b>MARK</b>	<b>GRADE</b>
90-100	A+
85-90	A
80-84	A-
77-79	B+
73-76	B
70-72	B-
67-69	C+
63-66	C
60-62	C-
57-59	D+
53-56	D
50-52	D-
0-49	F

### **Absences, Missed Work, Illness**

McMaster Student Absence Form (MSAF): In the event of an absence for medical or other reasons, students should review and follow the Academic Regulation in the Undergraduate Calendar “Requests for Relief for Missed Academic Term Work”.

### **Courses with an On-Line Element**

Some courses may use on-line elements (e.g. e-mail, Avenue to Learn (A2L), LearnLink, web pages, capa, Moodle, ThinkingCap, etc.). Students should be aware that, when they access the electronic components of a course using these elements, private information such as first and last names, user names for the McMaster e-mail accounts, and program affiliation may become apparent to all other students in the same course. The available information is dependent on the technology used. Continuation in a course that uses on-line elements will be deemed consent to this disclosure. If you have any questions or concerns about such disclosure please discuss this with the course instructor.

### **Online Proctoring**

Some courses may use online proctoring software for tests and exams. This software may require students to turn on their video camera, present identification, monitor and record their computer activities, and/or lock/restrict their browser or other applications/software during tests or exams. This software may be required to be installed before the test/exam begins.

### **Authenticity / Plagiarism Detection**

Some courses may use a web-based service (Turnitin.com) to reveal authenticity and ownership of student submitted work. For courses using such software, students will be expected to submit their work electronically either directly to Turnitin.com or via an online learning platform (e.g. A2L, etc.) using plagiarism detection (a service supported by Turnitin.com) so it can be checked for academic dishonesty.

Students who do not wish their work to be submitted through the plagiarism detection software must inform the Instructor before the assignment is due. No penalty will be assigned to a student who does not submit work to the plagiarism detection software.

**All submitted work is subject to normal verification that standards of academic integrity have been upheld** (e.g., on-line search, other software, etc.). For more details about McMaster’s use of Turnitin.com please go to [www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity](http://www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity).

### **Copyright and Recording**

Students are advised that lectures, demonstrations, performances, and any other course material provided by an instructor include copyright protected works. The Copyright Act and copyright law protect every original literary, dramatic, musical and artistic work, **including lectures** by University instructors

The recording of lectures, tutorials, or other methods of instruction may occur during a course. Recording may be done by either the instructor for the purpose of authorized distribution, or by a student for the purpose of personal study. Students should be aware that their voice and/or image may be recorded by others during the class. Please speak with the instructor if this is a concern for you.

### **Academic Accommodation for Religious, Indigenous or Spiritual Observances (RISO)**

Students requiring academic accommodation based on religious, indigenous or spiritual observances should follow the procedures set out in the [RISO](#) policy. Students should submit their request to their Faculty Office **normally within 10 working days** of the beginning of term in which they anticipate a need for accommodation or to the Registrar's Office prior to their examinations. Students should also contact their instructors as soon as possible to make alternative arrangements for classes, assignments, and tests.

### **Academic Integrity Statement**

You are expected to exhibit honesty and use ethical behaviour in all aspects of the learning process. Academic credentials you earn are rooted in principles of honesty and academic integrity. **It is your responsibility to understand what constitutes academic dishonesty.**

Academic dishonesty is to knowingly act or fail to act in a way that results or could result in unearned academic credit or advantage. This behaviour can result in serious consequences, e.g. the grade of zero on an assignment, loss of credit with a notation on the transcript (notation reads: "Grade of F assigned for academic dishonesty"), and/or suspension or expulsion from the university. For information on the various types of academic dishonesty please refer to the [Academic Integrity Policy](#), located at <https://secretariat.mcmaster.ca/university-policies-procedures-guidelines/>

The following illustrates only three forms of academic dishonesty:

- plagiarism, e.g. the submission of work that is not one's own or for which other credit has been obtained.
- improper collaboration in group work.
- copying or using unauthorized aids in tests and examinations.

### **Conduct Expectations**

As a McMaster student, you have the right to experience, and the responsibility to demonstrate, respectful and dignified interactions within all of our living, learning and working communities. These expectations are described in the [Code of Student Rights & Responsibilities](#) (the "Code"). All students share the responsibility of maintaining a positive environment for the academic and personal growth of all McMaster community members, **whether in person or online.**

It is essential that students be mindful of their interactions online, as the Code remains in effect in virtual learning environments. The Code applies to any interactions that adversely affect, disrupt, or interfere with reasonable participation in University activities. Student disruptions or behaviours that interfere with university functions on online platforms (e.g. use of Avenue 2 Learn, WebEx or Zoom for delivery), will be taken very seriously and will be investigated. Outcomes may include restriction or removal of the involved students' access to these platforms

### **Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities**

Students with disabilities who require academic accommodation must contact [Student Accessibility Services](#) (SAS) at 905-525-9140 ext. 28652 or [sas@mcmaster.ca](mailto:sas@mcmaster.ca) to make arrangements with a Program Coordinator. For further information, consult McMaster University's [Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities](#) policy.

### **Faculty of Social Sciences E-mail Communication Policy**

Effective September 1, 2010, it is the policy of the Faculty of Social Sciences that all e-mail communication sent from students to instructors (including TAs), and from students to staff, must originate from the student's own McMaster University e-mail account. This policy protects confidentiality and confirms the identity of the student. It is the student's responsibility to ensure that communication is sent to the university from a McMaster account. If an instructor becomes aware that a communication has come from an alternate address, the instructor may not reply at his or her discretion.

### **Course Modification**

The instructor and university reserve the right to modify elements of the course during the term. The university may change the dates and deadlines for any or all courses in extreme circumstances. If either type of modification becomes necessary, reasonable notice and communication with the students will be given with explanation and the opportunity to comment on changes. It is the responsibility of the student to check his/her McMaster email and course websites weekly during the term and to note any changes.

### **Extreme Circumstances**

The University reserves the right to change the dates and deadlines for any or all courses in extreme circumstances (e.g., severe weather, labour disruptions, etc.). Changes will be communicated through regular McMaster communication channels, such as McMaster Daily News, A2L and/or McMaster email.