

Political Theory, Violence, and the State

POLI 459 Winter 2014	Professor Yves Winter
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	Office hours: T 4:30-5:30 pm
	TH 2:00-3:00 pm

Description

Violence is at the heart of the modern state's capacity to guarantee order and maintain the rule of law. Effective control over the means of violence affords modern states the power to preserve peace and guarantee rights within their territories. On the other hand, the state's overwhelming capacity to inflict violence has the effect of turning military, penal, and security apparatuses into threats to the population (both domestic and foreign), to democracy, and to political and biological life in general.

In the first part of this course, we will examine some of the key conceptual schemas through which violence has been rationalized in political discourse. We will investigate claims that violence is a response to necessity; that the modern state exercises (or ought to exercise) a monopoly of physical violence; that violence results from enmity as the fundamental structure of political life; that violence is inextricably entangled with law; and that violence is introduced into politics by the logic of sovereignty.

In the second part of the course, we will take up the question of the relation between violence and what Michel Foucault called biopolitics. According to Foucault, the distinguishing feature of modern state power is that it is directed at organizing, managing, and sustaining individual and collective life. Once the promotion of life is seen as the overarching political and moral value, violence and cruelty become the political names for evil. We will consider two implications of this epistemic shift: the development of non-violence as a political strategy, and the emergence of humanitarianism and human rights discourse as a contemporary politics of anti-violence.

Prerequisites

This is a 400-level course, and as per departmental regulations, this means that students must have taken at least one (preferably more) political theory courses.

Learning Outcomes

The objective is that by the end of this course students will be able to (or will have improved their ability to):

- define, identify, and discuss various approaches to violence in political theory
- think conceptually and construct conceptual arguments about politics
- interpret and explain challenging theoretical and philosophical texts
- recognize, distinguish, analyze, and evaluate theoretical arguments
- communicate effectively about philosophical questions

Required Texts

The texts below are available for purchase at the McGill bookstore. All other readings (starred *) will be available on myCourses.

Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, trans. Peter Bondanella (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage, 1995).

Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, trans. George Schwab (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: Volume One. An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage, 1990).

Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998).

Mahatma Gandhi, *Selected Political Writings* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1996).

Mahmood Mamdani, *Saviors and Survivors: Darfur, Politics, and the War on Terror* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2009).

Robert Meister, *After Evil: A Politics of Human Rights* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012).

Assignments and Grades

Assignments for this course will consist of **FIVE** short (1-2 page) **reflection papers** and **TWO** (5-6 page) **essays**. (All written work should be double-spaced and formatted in 12pt font with 1-inch margins).

Reflection papers are short interpretive-analytical pieces of writing about the assigned readings. They are neither summaries of the readings nor opportunities for rambling narratives based on free association. As the name suggests, reflection papers demand that you demonstrate your understanding of the material and your ability to analyze it. Analysis may involve identifying: (1) the main problems/questions an author raises; (2) the central claims and arguments; (3) explicit and implicit assumptions; and (4) the evidence presented. It may also include (5) assessing the strengths and weaknesses of an argument; (6) examining possible counterarguments; and (7) evaluating the reasons why the problems/arguments of a text are interesting, relevant, and/or important. Please note that reflection papers are not primarily concerned with your reading experi-

ence, your feelings about the readings, or with whether you agree or disagree with the arguments and analyses.

Each student will write reflection papers about the reading (or part thereof) for five of the thirteen class meetings. Students have the option to write a sixth reflection paper, in which case the lowest grade of their reflection papers will be dropped.

Reflection papers are due without exception at the beginning of class on the date of the assigned reading covered in the paper. **No late reflection papers will be accepted under any circumstances.**

Essays are due on the dates indicated in the syllabus. Late essays will be docked one third of a letter grade (5 percentage points) for every day late, including weekends. 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. Do not send assignments via email unless otherwise instructed.

Your written work will be graded on originality, reasoning and argument, organization, clarity of exposition, and style. Essays will be graded out of 100; a detailed grading rubric will be posted on myCourses. Reflection papers and class participation will be graded on the letter scale (A-F) where A=85; B=70; C=55; D=50; and F=40.

Final grades are calculated according to the following schedule. Please note that you must receive a passing grade (D) in each of the following four grade categories in order to receive a passing grade for the course.

Reflection Papers	25%
First Essay	25%
Second Essay	25%
Class Participation	25%

Classroom Policies

This course will be taught seminar-style with a substantial discussion component. **Attendance and participation** are therefore essential and mandatory. Students are expected to attend all class meetings and be in class on time.

This course has a strict attendance policy: (1) there are no excused absences; (2) every student gets one absence without penalty, no questions asked; (3) starting with the second absence, you will be required to write one 1500 word make-up essay, due at the beginning of next class, on the material from the missed class. Each time that you fail to hand in the make-up essay at the next class, or each time your make-up essay is of below B level quality, your participation grade will be lowered by a full letter grade (15 percentage points) for every absence; (4) more than three absences will lead to automatic failure in this course. Exceptions to this policy will only be made for serious and documented medical conditions or disabilities. Make-up essays are not punishments for missing class; they are pedagogical measures to ensure that you have digested the missed material and are therefore prepared to resume the sequence of the course.

Research shows that people learn more when they actively engage the material and the learning process, rather than passively listen to the instructor. Class meetings will involve various forms of active learning, including writing exercises. You are responsible for having read the assigned texts prior to the class meeting. Prepare for class by taking notes and by thinking about questions, ideas, or problems that arise in your reading. Be sure to bring books and hard copy print-outs of readings to class.

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, and your work may be reviewed for potential plagiarism issues by means of text-matching software.

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.

Mobile computing devices (but not cell phones) are permitted in class for note-taking only and only insofar as their use does not disrupt the teaching and learning process. Any other use of electronic equipment (including e-mail, web surfing, games, chat, messaging, and so on) is distracting and disruptive to fellow students and is not permitted during class time.

As the instructor of this course I endeavor to provide an inclusive learning environment. However, if you experience barriers to learning in this course, do not hesitate to discuss them with me and the [Office for Students with Disabilities](#) (514)398-6009.

Class Schedule

Jan 8	Introduction
Jan 15	The Necessity of Violence in Politics Machiavelli, <i>The Prince</i> Hobbes, <i>Leviathan</i> , chs. XIII & XVII*
Jan 22	The Modern State as Monopolist of Violence: Max Weber, "Politics as a Vocation," in <i>The Vocation Lectures</i> , pp. 32-94* Charles Tilly, <i>Coercion, Capital, and European States, AD 990-1992</i> , pp. 67-126*
Jan 29	From the Scaffold to the Prison Michel Foucault, <i>Discipline and Punish</i> , 3-24; 32-69; 73-82; 135-143; 149-155; 170-194; 200-216; 231-237; 264-280; 298-306
Feb 5	Enmity Carl Schmitt, <i>The Concept of the Political</i> Carlo Galli "On War and on the Enemy," <i>The New Centennial Review</i> 9 (2) (2009): 195-219*

- Feb 12 **Violence and Law**
Walter Benjamin, "Critique of Violence." In *Reflections*, pp. 277-300*
- Feb 19 **Sovereignty and the Structure of the Exception**
Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, pp. 1-38; 63-74; 81-90; 104-111; 126-135; 154-188
- Feb 26 **Biopolitics**
Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: Volume One*
- FIRST ESSAY DUE**
- Mar 3-7 **Reading Week**
- Mar 12 **Politics of Non-Violence:**
Gandhi, *Selected Political Writings*, pp. 29-91; 97-151
- Mar 19 **Politics of Anti-Violence I: The Liberalism of Fear**
Judith N. Shklar, "Putting Cruelty First" and "Bad Characters for Good Liberals," in *Ordinary Vices*, pp. 7-45; 226-249*
Judith N. Shklar, "The Liberalism of Fear" in *Political Thought and Political Thinkers*, pp. 3-21*
George Kateb, "On Political Evil," in *The Inner Ocean: Individualism and Democratic Culture*, pp. 199-221*
- Mar 26 **Politics of Anti-Violence II: Save Darfur**
Mahmood Mamdani, *Saviors and Survivors*, 19-108; 166-170; 231-300
- Apr 2 **Politics of Anti-Violence III: Human Rights and Transitional Justice**
Robert Meister, *After Evil: A Politics of Human Rights*, pp. 1-82; 113-143
- Apr 9 **Politics of Anti-Violence IV: Human Rights and Transitional Justice**
Robert Meister, *After Evil: A Politics of Human Rights*, pp. 175-212; 232-316
- Apr 11 **SECOND ESSAY DUE** by 2:00 pm in 418 Ferrier