

POLSCI 3PB3: POLITICS FROM BELOW

Winter 2021

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Lecture: Mon, 11:30-2:20 (for live lectures), otherwise posted weekly on A2L

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Course Description

The idea of democracy perhaps best captures the late modern dream, aspiration, and normative benchmark for political life, its implicit egalitarianism, non-domination and promise of autonomy commonly invoked and celebrated by actors of virtually all ideological persuasions. In light of our broadly shared view of governments as conduits enabling us to live lives of our own choosing, democracy appears to be the only form that we really could consider viable at all.

And yet, the mass democracies that we've come to inhabit are beset by profound and seemingly intractable problems: from the tyranny of the majority, to public apathy, to unresponsive governments, to demagoguery, to civic alienation, to neoliberal corruption, large-scale democracies are accompanied by a wide range of social and political pathologies.

This course examines the turn to the local – to communities, grassroots movements, institutional innovations, radical insurgencies, smaller-scale forms of civic association – as responding to some of the challenges generated by mass democracies. We will consider both the nature of democratic pathologies and a broad spectrum of political thinkers, activists and movements reacting to them by turning to politics from below, variously understood. We will consider both theoretical approaches and more applied forms of political activism, within the state and beyond it.

Course Objectives

By the end of the course students should:

- become familiarized with a wide range of texts relating to the course's theme
- develop critical reading, writing, and analytical skills
- enhance their knowledge of political theory

Required Materials and Texts

- Uri Gordon, *Anarchy Alive! Anti-Authoritarian Politics from Practice to Theory* (Pluto Press, 2008)
- Robert Nichols, *Theft is Property! Dispossession and Critical Theory* (Duke University Press, 2020)
- Online Course Pack (OCP) – Material posted to the course's website, accessible via Avenue to Learn.
- Online resources (OL)

Wherever possible, I have tried to find online sources to keep costs at a minimum. This means that you will be responsible for acquiring articles for some classes (you will, of course, be provided with bibliographic information when that's the case). I will provide direct links to online sources when they're available.

Class Format

This course will use a combination of asynchronous and synchronous learning. Every week will include:

- my lecture, posted as an audio file to Avenue on Friday, 4 pm;
- a student-led discussion period on Monday, 11:30 am – 1:20 pm (approximately)

Please note that **three lectures will be live/synchronous, over Zoom. These are: our first lecture/introduction (Jan. 11); our guest lecture with MASS LBP (Mar. 15); and our last lecture/concluding review (Apr. 5).** The remaining lectures will be posted as audio files weekly. Please note, also, that we will have a one-week break – creatively named “Break Week” – to mitigate Zoom fatigue, so there will be no class on Mar. 22.

Course Evaluation – Overview

1. Attendance and participation: 15%
2. Research paper proposal and annotated bibliography (due Mar. 12, 5 pm): 15%
3. Research paper (due Apr. 1, 5 pm): 30%
4. Final examination: 40%

Course Evaluation – Details

Attendance and participation (15%)

Each week, I will post my lecture as an audio file on Friday, 4 pm, along with a set of discussion questions addressing the material in question. On Monday, from 11:30 am - 1:20 pm (approximately), we will meet via Zoom, where the class will be divided in 3 or 4 breakout rooms, depending on our numbers. Each discussion group will be led by a student (or possibly 2, again, depending on our numbers), and I will move between breakout rooms. We will then reconvene the whole class and each group will report back, and then conclude with a larger class discussion.

Your attendance and participation grade will be based on two components: (1) your weekly participation in small-group and larger class discussions, and (2) your performance as a discussion group leader for one week.

As regards the first, your grade will be gauged by consistent attendance, and by active and informed participation. You will be expected to have completed the readings and be ready to discuss them. The aim of the discussion group is to provide you with an opportunity to address the material in greater depth, clarify points of confusion, and explore ideas from the texts. All of these things require not only your attendance, but your active engagement; you will be expected to participate in both the smaller and larger group discussions.

As regards the second, students will be divided and randomly assigned a week to serve as discussion group leader. Your responsibility will be to lead the discussion and keep track of its central points, in order to report back to the class. I will provide you with discussion questions weekly that will form the basis of the small-group exchange. You are free to draw on additional ideas/arguments/materials to help your group work through the discussion questions. You're also not obligated to cover all of the discussion questions: if you find that your group has a lot to say about one of them, you can focus on that alone. If you opt to cover several/all of them, that's also fine. As group leader, it's up to you to decide how best to lead the discussion and work through those ideas that you see as most important for your group to address.

Research paper proposal and annotated bibliography (15%), due Mar. 12

You are required to submit

- a) a one-page paper proposal, along with
- b) an annotated bibliography with a minimum of 8 sources

by 5 pm on Mar. 5 (uploaded to dropbox). This aims to provide you with an opportunity to work out your topic, do some research, and get some constructive feedback ahead of writing the fuller paper.

Research Paper (30%), due Apr. 1

The research paper will be 3000 words, and will be on a topic of your choosing. It can be based on the themes/ideas/readings from the class, or on a different subject altogether (within the constraints of the course's subject). The paper is due by 5 pm on Mar. 26, uploaded to dropbox.

Final Examination (40%), April 2021

The final examination will cover all of the course's materials, and will be largely essay-based (although I might also include a few shorter-answer questions – this will all be discussed in class ahead of time). It will be run online during the final examination period.

Weekly Course Schedule and Required Readings

Week 1 (Jan. 11)

Introduction – LIVE/SYNCHRONOUS

No reading.

Week 2 (Jan. 18)

Rousseau, Republicanism and Problems of Scale

Reading:

- Jean-Jacques Rousseau, [*The Social Contract*](#), Book I, Introductory Note, chs. 1, 6-9; Book II, chs. 1, 3, 4, 6-12; Book III, chs. 1, 4, 15; Book IV, ch. 1.

Week 3 (Jan. 25)

Anarchism 1: Foundations

Reading:

- Peter Kropotkin, "[Anarchism: Its Philosophy and Ideal](#)," trans. Harry Lyman Coopman (San Francisco, Free Society, 1898).
- Emma Goldman, "[Anarchism: What it Really Stands For](#)," in *Anarchism and Other Essays* (New York, Mother Earth Publishing Association, 1917).
- Michael Taylor, selections from *Community, Anarchy and Liberty* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), pp. 1-10, 25-38. **OCP**.

Week 4 (Feb. 1)

Anarchism 2: Contemporary Movements

Reading:

- Uri Gordon, *Anarchy Alive! Anti-Authoritarian Politics from Practice to Theory* (London, Pluto Press, 2008), Introduction p. 1-6, chs. 1, 2, 4.

Week 5 (Feb. 8)

Strikes

Reading:

- Rosa Luxemburg, [*The Mass Strike, the Political Party and the Trade Unions*](#).
- Alex Gourevitch, "The Right to Strike: A Radical View," *American Political Science Review* 112 (2018): 905-917. **OL**.

Week 6 (Feb. 15) – READING WEEK – NO CLASS

Week 7 (Feb. 22)

Indigeneity and Politics 1: Zapatismo

Reading:

- [Global Social Theory primer](#)
- [Sixth Declaration of the Selva Lacandona](#)
- Thomas Nail, "Constructivism and the Future Anterior of Radical Politics," *Anarchist Developments in Cultural Studies*, 2010 (1): 73-94. **OL**

- Massimiliano Tomba, “1994: Zapatistas and the Dispossessed of History,” in *Insurgent Universality: An Alternative Legacy of Modernity* (OUP, 2019). **OCP**

Week 8 (Mar. 1)

Indigeneity and Politics 2: Dispossession

Reading:

- Nichols, *Theft is Property*, pages TBD.

Week 9 (Mar. 8)

Deliberative Democracy 1: Theory

Reading:

- Amy Gutmann and Dennis Thompson, “What Deliberative Democracy Means,” in *Why Deliberative Democracy?* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2004), ch. 1. **OCP**.
- Dennis F. Thompson, “Who should govern who governs? The role of citizens in reforming the electoral system”, in *Designing Deliberative Democracy: The British Columbia Citizens’ Assembly* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2008). **OCP**.

Week 10 (Mar. 15)

Deliberative Democracy 2: Practice – LIVE/SYNCHRONOUS

No reading.

*Guest lecture: Laurie Drake, MASS LBP.

Week 11 (Mar. 22) – BREAK WEEK – RELAX AND AVOID ZOOM!

Week 12 (Mar. 29)

Civil Rights 1: King

Reading:

- Martin Luther King Jr., “Pilgrimage to Nonviolence,” in *Stride Toward Freedom: The Montgomery Story* (Beacon Press, 2010), 77-221. **OCP**.
- Martin Luther King Jr., “Letter from Birmingham Jail,” in *Why We Can’t Wait* (Beacon Press, 2011), 85-109. **OCP**.
- Martin Luther King Jr., “Black Power,” in *Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community?* (Beacon Press, 2010), 23-69. **OCP**.

Week 13 (Apr. 5)

Civil Rights 2: Black Lives Matter

Reading:

- ["Black Lives Matter: What We Believe"](#)
- Alicia Garza, "[A Herstory of the #BlackLivesMatter Movement by Alicia Garza](#)", *The Feminist Wire*.
- "[#BlackLivesMatter: the birth of a new civil rights movement](#)", *The Guardian*.
- Derrick Bell, "[Racial Realism](#)", *Connecticut Law Review* 24 (2) 1992.
- Juliet Hooker, "Black Lives Matter and the Paradoxes of U.S. Black Politics: From Democratic Sacrifice to Democratic Repair", *Political Theory* 44 (4) 2016. **OL**.

Week 14 (Apr. 12)

Concluding review – LIVE/SYNCHRONOUS

Course Policies

Submission of Assignments

Essay assignments must be submitted electronically by uploading them to the relevant Dropbox folder on the course's Avenue website.

Grades

Grades will be based on the McMaster University grading scale:

MARK	GRADE
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

Late Assignments

Assignments submitted after the due date without an extension granted by the instructor prior to the due date will be penalized 3% per day (including Saturdays and Sundays).

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”.

Avenue to Learn, Zoom, and Perusal

This course uses on-line elements. Students should be aware that, when they access the electronic components of this course, 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 this course will be deemed consent to this disclosure. If you have any questions or concerns about such disclosure please discuss this with the course instructor.

Turnitin.com

In this course we will be using a web-based service (Turnitin.com) to reveal authenticity and ownership of student submitted work. Students will be expected to submit their work electronically either directly to Turnitin.com or via Avenue to Learn (A2L) plagiarism detection (a service supported by Turnitin.com) so it can be checked for academic dishonesty. Students who do not wish to submit their work through A2L and/or Turnitin.com must still submit an electronic and/or hardcopy to the instructor. No penalty will be assigned to a student who does not submit work to Turnitin.com or A2L. **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 information please refer to the [Turnitin.com Policy](#).

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](https://secretariat.mcmaster.ca/university-policies-procedures-guidelines/), 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 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.