

School of Public Policy and Administration  
Faculty of Liberal and Professional Studies

AP/PPAS/POLS 4115 6.00  
THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF THE STATE AND FINANCE

2019-2020  
WEDNESDAY 2:30-5:30 PM, BC 214

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1. Seminar Overview: Free market economics, not

In our 2019-20 seminar, we will explore the role of the government in civil society starting by examining one important if not the most important force that drives a wedge between the state and the market – the free market orthodoxy promulgated by Econ 101. Using what we will learn in debunking the free market delusions in the Fall term, we will explore the financing of our civil society in the Winter term not from the views of selfishness but via the lens of solidarity. Some say through design we elevate our way of life. We would say through redistribution we elevate our vision of life. That's the most important point to be made in our seminar, and we will get there by the end of our time together.

2. Learning Outcomes: False necessity, what?

The election of Trump in 2016. The election of Ford in 2018. The election of Johnson in 2019. The possible election of Scheer in 2019. Echoing the ascent of Reagan, Thatcher and Mulroney in the early 1980s, the tide that runs through these disparate waves of the current sweep of conservatism is the idea of the triumph of the free market. The state is the problem. The market is the savior.

In our seminar, we will embark on our quest to delve into the conflicts of different perspectives on how we as a people should organize ourselves in order to determine what we could aspire to be a civil society. Making good use of our understanding of who we are and who we could be, we will tackle false necessity – does it have to be this way?

The learning outcomes of our seminar could be transformative if students want them to be. At the end of the seminar, students should be able to make arguments for and against positions on important issues in civil society. Like university studies in general, the seminar is designed to develop your capabilities in critical thinking, information literacy, effective communication as well as your sense of responsibility.

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### 3. Seminar Materials: Two kinds of fairness

Fairness crosscuts most if not all discussions about the state and the market. In the context of taxation, some think it's fair that they only pay for what they appear to get, but others think it's fair that they pay for what civil society needs. The former is a narrower sense of fairness that refers to the nominal value or the value on the surface, like they pay for a pair of jeans and they get the pair of jeans they pay for. The latter is a broader sense of fairness that refers to the substantive value or the value deep down, like they pay for a pair of jeans and what they would like to get is not only the look and feel of the pair of jeans but also the associated goodies like shopping experience or the resulted self-image. Many of these folks in the former group probably aren't bother much by the rise in economic inequality – arguably the most pressing issue of our times. Many in the latter group probably are deeply troubled by the rise in economic inequality. Two kinds of fairness. Which is the kind we should espouse?

To take a stab at that, we will work through four books in the Fall:

- [Economics: The User's Guide](#);
- [23 Things They Don't Tell You about Capitalism](#);
- [Licence to be Bad: How Economics Corrupted Us](#); and
- [Economism: Bad Economics and the Rise of Inequality](#).

The tentative book list for the Winter term is below:

- [Plunder of the Commons: A Manifesto for Sharing Public Wealth](#);
- [People, Power, and Profits: Progressive Capitalism for an Age of Discontent](#);
- [The Triumph of Injustice: How the Rich Dodge Taxes and How to Make Them Pay](#); and
- [The Sport and Prey of Capitalists: How the Rich Are Stealing Canada's Public Wealth](#).

The finalized Winter book list will be announced in class late in the Fall term, and an updated course outline will be posted on Moodle. In addition to the books, students will be directed to additional reading materials online each week on Moodle.

### 4. Teaching Approach: Like a book club

In the seminar, we will build on the sage of wisdom of those who came before us to see whether we can make sense of the world. The intuition behind the design of our seminar is a book club. Each week when we meet in person (and I cannot overly stress the importance of our meetings), we would discuss what we have read in the past week. Through discussions, commentaries and feedbacks, we will try to figure this out.

We will read at least eight books plus tons of other materials in our time together. The urls to the Kindle edition of some books are embedded above. I use the Kindle edition, and I have read all the books from front to back on the small screen of an Iphone SE. Students are free to buy any electronic or print versions of the books from any vendor.

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## 5. Evaluation: Less is more

The evaluation focuses on basic academic skills that students are expected to learn in university studies – information literacy, critical thinking and effective communication as well as responsibility. All students will be graded and ranked in comparison to their peers. A final grade for the seminar will be given to each student at the end of the academic year based on the following components.

*Reading diary [20%].* Each student is required to use MS Excel to “write” a “diary” on what she or he reads each day. The diary will be submitted each week.

*Presentations [40%].* Each student is required to present twice each term, with each presentation on a different chapter of a different book. A one-pager in a specific format in PDF will need to be submitted before the presentation. A one-pager on lessons learnt in class in PDF will need to be submitted after the presentation. Both one-pagers will be posted on Moodle for all students.

*Cap-stone essay [40%].* Students are required to write a 1,000-word email on an assigned topic to be submitted after the end of Winter 2020.

Very specific submission and presentation protocols of work done for the seminar including formats and deadlines will only be explained in class as students will be involved in parts of the design of the protocols. For example, all submissions must be sent to [taxlaw@yorku.ca](mailto:taxlaw@yorku.ca), and no late submissions will be graded. All the submissions must follow the very specific submission protocols. Failure to follow the protocols could lead to failures in the seminar.

Feedbacks will be embedded weekly in class so students can learn from each other. Tentative marks will be posted on Moodle by the drop date.

## 6. Tentative Schedule: What say you on the topics?

The following is a list of dates for classes. Each class will cover about four to eight book chapters plus other materials. Book chapters to be covered will be assigned to all students early in each term. One-pagers on the chapters from students along with urls to additional materials will be provided before each class for students to prepare for in-class discussions.

### Fall

1 & 2    Sept. 4 & 11  
3 & 4    Sept. 18 & 25  
5 & 6    Oct. 2 & 9  
7 & 8    Oct. 23 & 30  
9 & 10    Nov. 6 & 13  
11 & 12    Nov. 20 & 27

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## Winter

13 & 14 Jan. 8 & 15

15 & 16 Jan. 22 & 29

17 & 18 Feb. 5 & 12

19 & 20 Feb. 26 & Mar. 4

21 & 22 March 11 & 18

23 & 24 March 25 & Apr. 1

### 7. Selected standard university policies provided by the administration

- Please note that in-class discussions cannot be reappraised as they are not tangible work. See <http://myacademicrecord.students.yorku.ca/grade-reappraisal-policy>.
  - Academic dishonesty will be prosecuted. Students might wish to review <http://researchguides.library.yorku.ca/c.php?g=679678&p=4791863>.
  - For Academic Accommodation for Students with Disabilities, see <http://www.yorku.ca/secretariat/policies/document.php?document=68>.
  - On religious observance, see <https://w2prod.sis.yorku.ca/Apps/WebObjects/cdm.woa/wa/regobs>.
  - For students with special needs, see <https://accessibility.students.yorku.ca>.
  - For mature students, see <http://www.yorku.ca/acmaps/>.
  - On withdrawal, see <http://secretariat-policies.info.yorku.ca/policies/withdrawn-from-course-w-policy-and-guidelines/>.
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