University of Victoria | Graduate Studies

Notice of the Final Oral Examination
for the Degree of Master of Arts

of

CRAIG MUNCASTER

BA (University of Ottawa, 2016)

"Habitual Politics and the Politics of Habit: Bergson, Modern Advance, and the Need to Depart"

Department of Political Science

Monday, August 19, 2019
1:00 P.M.
David Turpin Building
Room A357

Supervisory Committee:
Dr. Simon Glezos, Department of Political Science, University of Victoria (Supervisor)
Dr. Rob Walker, Department of Political Science, UVic (Member)

External Examiner:
Dr. Emile Fromet de Rosnay, Department of French, UVic

Chair of Oral Examination:
Dr. Susan Tasker, Department of Educational Psychology and Leadership Studies, UVic

Dr. David Capson, Dean, Faculty of Graduate Studies

Abstract

This project addresses the problem of monovalent interpretations of habit's role in a creative means of living within the literature. Analyses tend to opt for an either/or logic, in which the majority of research conducted reflects a detrimental, constraining role for habit as regards creativity while responses to this dominant position still operate under a singularly-positive understanding of habit. Introducing a multivalent conception of habit is a component within the broader purpose of challenging dominant conceptions of political improvement or "progress" (acknowledging how historically- and contemporarily-loaded such a term remains), while leaving open the much-needed potential for change. The research demonstrates the dangerous, immobilizing interaction between individual habit formation and the modern, linear teleological focus on political prediction and destination. Concurrently, it points to the benefits to creativity habit can provide when individual habituation is immersed in a different sense of political engagement. This bipartite argument is made through a Bergsonian method, built up from the intuitive primacy of flow and becoming and their decomposition into apparently stable forms and relations. Inspiration is drawn not only from the works of Bergson, but also Deleuze, Heidegger, and successors. By examining the multiple lines internal to habit, the research prescribes the importance of a balanced approach to the direction of political effort between a sense of improvement which advances to livable destinations and a sense which departs from unlivable locations. This is not a balance of the middle way, but of the constant passage between polar extremes (a both/and logic of habit) and individual negotiation amongst free and constrained political actions. By opening up the complexities of habit, subsequent work can interrogate further social and political elements which enable the persistence of teleological ideology and develop new political mechanisms to promote meaningfully diverse engagement and openness to the radically unpredictable.