POLI 433/533
Pluralism and Political Authority

Instructor:
Dr. Avigail Eisenberg (Fall 2020)

Course description:
This seminar surveys debates about political authority and pluralism. Usually, political authority is cast in terms of the legitimate power of the state and assessed on the basis of whether state authority extends too far (authoritarianism and fascism) or not far enough (libertarianism and anarchism). We will consider new directions in thinking about political authority that focus on non-state groups such as corporations, religious groups and Indigenous communities. The seminar begins by considering some recent legal cases in which churches, corporations and communities claim authority to follow rules that depart from state law and public values. It then turns to classical treatments of political authority by Bodin, Hobbes, Weber, Arendt, amongst others. We examine pluralist arguments about state authority, including early 20th century political pluralists such as Follett, Dewey and Laski, and critics of pluralism such as Schmitt. The final part of the course considers contemporary theories about plural authority found in recent scholarship. In these different contexts, we will discuss the ways in which political authority today is plural, contested, relational, and enacted through practice.

Prerequisites: None

Course outcomes/objectives:
• Mastery of concepts, problems, and questions in theories and cases that focus on political authority
• Enhance critical thinking skills
• Enhance skills of oral expression in analytically rigorous discussions and presentations
• Enhance skills of written expression in a thesis-driven, research-based essay format
• Sharpen research skills and cultivate a capacity to draw connections between theoretical debates and political and legal practice

Topics may include:
Authority in political theory
Plural authority
The state and sovereignty

Course delivery: In the Fall 2020 term, this course will be delivered synchronously.