

Book Review

Applied Political Theory and Canadian Politics

David McGrane and Neil Hibbert, editors

Toronto, Canada: University of Toronto Press, 2019.

Reviewed by Eleanor D. Glor

This book uses the concept of applied political theory. John Gray, in his description of *The New Leviathans: Thoughts after Liberalism*, defines applied political theory as follows:

Political theory is to policy and diplomacy what math and physics are to engineering, and biology and chemistry are to medicine. It provides the fundamental concepts and language to understand events and craft practical solutions. In this manner, it is applied political theory (<https://www.appliedpoliticaltheory.com/>).

In their Introduction to *Applied Political Theory and Canadian Politics*, editors David McGrane and Neil Hibbert describe their sense of how bringing together the study of political theory and Canadian politics can deepen understanding of the policy, ideological and legal issues that define Canada today. They say:

... the relationship between political theory and political practice is symbiotic....the conceptual tools of political theory can be used to make our political practices more comprehensible, salient, and meaningful....using political theory to understand political experience can ... (make) our theorizing more concrete and hedging against tendencies towards excessive abstraction....Canadian politics traditionally has been fertile ground for the application of political theorizing to concrete practice (page 3).

Most of the authors included in this excellent edited volume acknowledge the benefit they experienced using this approach. Noticeably, though, the theories explored or referenced are not typically traditional western political theory from ancient Greek to European Enlightenment philosophers. Rather, the authors tend to reference the theoreticians in the areas about which they are writing. As opposed to the highest level theoreticians, they employ the second rung theoreticians, thus linking theory to the topics directly.

This edited volume contains many interesting and excellent chapters under the following subsections: Introduction, Ideology, Equality and Justice, Democracy and Citizenship, Ethnic Diversity and Minority Rights, Nationalism and Canada in the World. The book therefore addresses a wide range of political science topics and subjects of current interest.

The introductory chapter is excellent, interesting, effectively outlines the topics and draws together the chapters in the book. It is everything an introductory chapter should be. The

ideology papers address conservatism, liberalism, social democracy and reform liberalism, and ideology in the age of emotion. The equality and justice papers consider the changed normativity of the Canadian welfare state; legal pluralism's impact on women's citizenship in federations¹; autonomy, rights and euthanasia policy, and what's wrong with private schools. The democracy and citizenship section discusses deliberative democracy, democracy and constitutional change and whether Canada had a founding moment. The ethnic diversity and minority rights section considers self-determination theory; indigenous normativity and a legitimate constitution; and equality rights, multiculturalism and public reason. The nationalism section examines Canadian identity; culture and national identity in Quebec, Canada's French-speaking province; and Canada as an empire-state. The final section, Canada in the world, contemplates the legitimacy of judicial review, international responsibilities to protect and prosecute in cases of mass atrocity, and immigration and borders in Canada.

Each chapter is a good and well-informed examination of its chosen issue. Neil Hibbert's examination of the changing normativity of the Canadian Welfare State, from egalitarian to public economic normative approaches, producing fewer redistributive effects, is particularly interesting. I especially liked the term "ideology in the age of emotion": The book was published while Donald Trump was president of the United States of America.

I would have wished, however, that the authors had outlined in greater detail the theories they used and why they used the ones they identified. Chapter 11, *Does Canada Have a Founding Moment*, by Catherine Frost, for example, examines the concept of founding moments in countries' histories. Hannah Arendt claims that most countries have one but does not think Canada does. Frost examines this question for Canada but does not explain why this is an important theoretical or political science question nor why Arendt is worth studying on this topic. The description Frost offers of Arendt's thinking on the subject does not seem entirely coherent nor does a founding moment emerge as clearly necessary for countries. Professor Frost continues to research political founding and constitutionalism.

Some of the chapters assume the reader already has some understanding of the topic. Chapter 16, *Culture and National Identity in Quebec*, for example, implies some preexisting understanding of the long and complex relationship between the Province of Quebec and Canada.

This 2019 book is still topical, looking at many current political issues in Canada and abroad, with one exception: It does not examine technology issues, such as big data, artificial intelligence and taxation of internet-based businesses, which have come onto the public agenda even more since 2019.

¹ Readers should remember that women in Upper Canada lost the right to vote with the reforms of the 1850s when the basis of the vote was changed from ownership of land to entitlement. The male vote was expanded substantially at the same time.

References:

Arendt, Hannah. 1963. *On Revolution*. New York, NY: Penguin Books.

Gray, John. 2023. *The New Leviathans: Thoughts after Liberalism*. New York, NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

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