

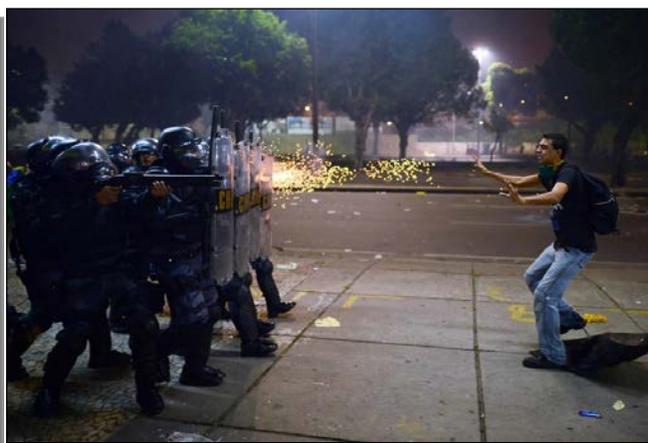
Fall and Winter Term 2017-2018 (24/08/17)

**Arts & Science Program
McMaster University**

**Arts & Science 2A06
“Social and Political Thought”**



Francisco de Goya, *The Third of May 1808*



Police fire rubber bullets at protesters in Rio de Janeiro, 20 June 2013

Instructor: Dr. David L. Clark

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T.A. Danielle Martak

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Office Hours: CNH 429, Thursday, 12:30 pm--2:00 pm.

Class time: Thursday, 2:30-5:20 pm

Classroom: BSB 137

Course Description and Objectives:

This course explores the history of critical thinking about the difficulties and possibilities that attend the formation, evolution, revolution, and governance of ethical communities. Throughout the course, emphasis will be given to a cluster of closely related questions:

- What is justice, and what does it mean to strive to create a just society?
- What responsibilities and obligations attend social and political life?
- What is the role that education, teaching, and learning play in sustaining an equitable society?
- How is social and political life imagined differently by different thinkers . . . and why?
- In what ways is social and political life formed and deformed by violence, including war violence?
- To what extent does social and political thought address the question of suffering?
- In what ways is social and political thought an affirmation of the irrepressible *interdependence* of life on Earth?
- In what ways is social and political thought *complicit* with forms of violence, exclusion, and domination?

What are the roles of the university in social and political life? What is the social and political life of the university?

The objective of this course is to provide students with a good working knowledge of a broad range of social and political thinkers and theories. Attention is also given to writing effective essays, i.e., essays that i) have a discernible thesis, ii) make a detailed case for that thesis and iii) are written with elegance, economy, and correct grammar.

Through a special arrangement with the university, this course has been scheduled to meet in one place, once a week, to help students consolidate their knowledge of social and political thought and to help foster helpful discussion during its third hour. Classes are a mixture of lectures and robust classroom discussion. The first two hours are taken up with lectures, while the last hour is mostly open to discussion and questions. In the third hour, students are invited to query and debate the materials and questions at hand. Students are warmly encouraged to liberate this course from the confines of the formal classroom, and to form independent study groups to discuss and debate the course materials and questions.

Some students may be unaccustomed to using the third hour for the purposes of discussion so that's certainly a skill for you to grow in the opening weeks of the course. Danielle Martak (the course T.A.) and I warmly encourage everyone to contribute to that discussion, which can go in many different directions. For example, some students use it primarily for the purposes of clarification, i.e., to review certain terms or questions explored in lecture. Others may wish to connect what was discussed in lecture to other, related matters—current events, for example, or your own experiences or frustrations with social and political life. It is up to you, the students of the course, to develop the third hour in ways that help enrich and complicate your understanding of the course materials. Don't forget though to speak to each other during the third hour, and to question each other, in addition to directing remarks to Danielle and me.

Because of the unique subject of the course, there may be moments when we go “off script,” i.e., pause the course to address questions and problems in current events that become too pressing to be ignored. For example, last year the class took time to discuss the election of Donald Trump and, later, the murder of Muslim men at a mosque in Quebec City. The class also took time to discuss student activism surrounding the visit of Professor Jordan Peterson. The point is that although we have a schedule to which to adhere, and a certain body of work to cover, the course calls for a certain flexibility when necessary.

Supplemental readings and study notes designed to help you consolidate the course material will be provided on Avenue as the course unfolds. That reading material will include helpful hints on how to write an effective essay, as well as how to prepare for and write an effective midterm examination.

It is very important to take good notes during class. Of course, many of you already know how to take good notes and the importance of having notes. Good notes help you prepare for your midterms examinations and essays. The final examination for the course tests your knowledge of the assigned materials in both terms, so having detailed notes from the start of the course will help you as you study for that examination.

Keeping on top of the readings (and there are a lot of readings in this course) is essential both for your comprehension of the course materials and your understanding of the lectures. Knowing the materials will also contribute significantly to the quality of your remarks during the third hour of the course. Part of what the midterm examinations and the final examination for the course test is whether you have read the materials with care. Try your level best not to rely on on-line summaries of the assigned materials and instead have the courage to wrestle with their actual difficulties, insights, and challenges.

Our course falls into two large movements:

In Term 1 we establish a broad historical context for social and political thought, beginning with the writings of Plato and concluding with Karl Marx. Although we attend to the specific historical contexts informing the assigned readings, the focus will consistently be on the *contemporaneity* of the work of these thinkers—i.e., how their writings provide an evocative critical language with which to parse the difficulties of social and political life *today*. In other words, the work we will be considering in Term 1 will not be treated as remote historical artefacts but as living and breathing things that speak to our *own* worries and hopes for political and social existence. Among the texts that we consider in Term 1 are: Immanuel Kant's essay, *Toward Perpetual Peace* (1795), the precursor for the United Nations Charter; and Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), the founding text of Anglo-American feminist political

thought. We also examine Karl Marx's *Communist Manifesto* (1848), his revolutionary denunciation of the wounding powers of capital, John Locke's *Second Treatise of Civil Government* (1689), which supplies many of the basic principles for modern liberal democracies, for better and for worse, and Sir Philip Sidney's *A Defense of Poetry* (1595), his eloquent plea for humanistic tolerance and learning during a time—the age of Elizabeth I—of intensifying intolerance and dogma.

In Term II we explore the work of several contemporary thinkers who address some of the most pressing problems for 21st-century social and political life. We begin this labour through a particular lens: Astra Taylor's filmed extemporaneous interviews with eight contemporary theorists, which she conducts in different city streetscapes. In *Examined Life: Philosophy is in the Streets*, Taylor emphasizes a crucially important feature of social and political thought, namely the different ways in which it speaks to “the search for meaning and our responsibilities towards others in a world rife with iniquity, persecution, and suffering” (xi). We will consider both her documentary and the book of interviews that accompanies her documentary, *Examined Life: Excursions with Contemporary Thinkers*. We then explore the definitional problems quickening some of the work of five of the most significant contemporary social theorists (Giorgio Agamben, Emmanuel Levinas, Michel Foucault, Judith Butler, and Jacques Derrida), focussing on the transgressive questions that contemporary theory raises about knowledge, power, justice and community. Writing in the wake of the Holocaust, Emmanuel Levinas explores the ways in which the suffering of others folds us into webs of responsibility. In preparation for our reading of Levinas, we look at *The Drowned and the Saved*, Primo Levi's wrenching testamentary account of his experience in the Nazi death-camps. Giorgio Agamben considers how it is that social and political life is founded in exclusion. Judith Butler focuses on the politics and the vulnerabilities of what she calls “precarious life.” In influential lectures delivered at the *Collège de France*, Michel Foucault discusses the history and pervasiveness of what he calls “biopower” in modern life. We also look at seminars given by Jacques Derrida, who negotiates the particular question of “hospitality”—i.e., the politics and ethics of the encounter with the imperilled stranger. The course concludes by considering two remarkable recent interventions in the field: Audra Simpson explores how the Mohawks of Kahnawake create a sovereign identity through acts of refusal, while Ta-Nehisi Coates reflects upon the formative and deformative powers of race in contemporary America.

Required Texts:

Much of the required reading material for this course is available on the course page on Avenue.

Assigned materials not on Avenue include:

Derrida, Jacques. *Of Hospitality*. Trans. Rachel Bowlby. Stanford: Stanford UP, 2000.
 Taylor, Astra. *Examined Life: Excursions with Contemporary Thinkers*. New York: The New Press, 2009.
 Coates, Ta-Nehesi. *Between the World and Me*. New York and London: Penguin, 2015.
 Simpson, Audra. *Mohawk Interruptus: Political Life Across the Borders of Settler States*. Durham: Duke UP, 2014.
 Levi, Primo. *The Drowned and the Saved*. New York: Vintage, 1989.

Documentaries

Examined Life: Philosophy is in the Streets. Dir. Astra Taylor. Sphinx Productions and the National Film Board of Canada, 2008. [88 minutes]
Marx Reloaded. Dir. Jason Barker. Films Noirs/Medea Films, 2011. <http://www.dailymotion.com/video/x1u4yzp>

Course Assignments and Weighting:

Midterm examination Term 1:	10%
Midterm examination Term 2:	10%
Essay Term 1 (2500 words):	20%
Essay Term 2 (2500 words):	25%
Final Examination:	35%

Essay Due Date and Late Submission Policy:

There are two essays in this course, one in each term. There are two due dates for each essay.

Essay 1 is due in class, at start of class, 9 November 2017 or in class, at start of class, 30 November 2017.

Essay 2 is due in class, at start of class, 22 March 2018 or in class, at start of class, 5 April 2018.

Essays submitted by the first due date will receive a full marking commentary. Essays handed in by the second due date will be graded exactly the same but without comment. No essays will be accepted after the last class of each term. A grade of zero/F will therefore be assigned to essays not submitted by the 30 November 2017 and 5 April 2018 due dates, respectively.

Since the essay is weighted heavily in this course, students are encouraged not to leave working on this assignment until late in the term. Suggested essay topics will be posted on Avenue. You are strongly encouraged to discuss and develop your essay topic with either Dr. Clark or the course T.A., Danielle Martak. Extra office hours will be added to regular office hours at those points in the term when students need to be discussing their essays.

If you are a smoker, please ensure that you print your essay in a smoke-free environment.

Provisional Lecture Schedule

Sept	7	Prefatory Remarks
	14	Plato, <i>The Republic</i> [selections]
	21	Plato, <i>The Republic</i> [selections]
	28	Sir Philip Sidney, <i>Defense of Poetry</i>
Oct	5	John Locke, <i>Second Treatise of Civil Government</i> [selections]
	12	Mid-term recess
	19	Midterm Examination (no class after examination) [BSB/B 103]
	26	Immanuel Kant, <i>Toward Perpetual Peace + Perpetual Peace Project</i> (http://perpetualpeaceproject.org/)
Nov	2	Immanuel Kant, <i>Toward Perpetual Peace + Perpetual Peace Project</i> (http://perpetualpeaceproject.org/)
	9	Mary Wollstonecraft, <i>A Vindication of the Rights of Woman</i> [selections] [First due date for Essay 1]
	16	Karl Marx, <i>The Communist Manifesto + Capital</i> [selections]
	23	Karl Marx, <i>The Communist Manifesto + Capital</i> [selections] + <i>Marx Reloaded</i> [documentary screening]
	30	Recapitulation [Last day to submit Essay 1]
Jan	4	<i>Examined Life: Philosophy is in the Streets</i> (documentary screening + discussion)
	11	<i>Examined Life: Excursions with Contemporary Thinkers</i>
	18	<i>Examined Life: Excursions with Contemporary Thinkers</i>
	25	Michel Foucault, <i>Society Must Be Defended</i> [selections]
Feb	1	Michel Foucault, <i>Society Must Be Defended</i> [selections] + Giorgio Agamben, <i>State of Exception</i> [selections]
	8	Primo Levi, <i>The Drowned and the Saved</i>
	15	Emmanuel Levinas [selections]
	22	Mid-term recess
March	1	Mid-term examination [UH/213]
	8	Jacques Derrida, <i>Of Hospitality</i>
	15	Judith Butler, <i>Precarious Life</i> [selections]
	22	Ta-Nehisi Coates, <i>Between the World and Me</i> [First due date for Essay 2]
	29	Audra Simpson, <i>Mohawk Interruptus: Political Life Across the Borders of Settler States</i>

April 5 Recapitulation [Last day to submit Essay 2]

Final Examination Review Session: TBA

Eleven Important Notes About the Course

1. Class cancellations:

In the unlikely event of a class cancellation, students will be notified via email through Avenue.

2. E-mail policy and protocols:

McMaster University policy requires email communication between students, instructors and T.A.'s to be conducted using McMaster email accounts. This policy protects confidentiality and confirms the identity of the student.

Since we are in a professional working environment, all e-mails to your instructor or T.A. must be written in full sentences (i.e. no point form, no text-messaging short form), and must contain a subject line that includes the course designation, "2A06." All e-mails must contain some form of salutation and valediction (i.e., "Dear Dr. Clark," "Dear Danielle *and* "Yours sincerely," respectively, or equivalents). Receipt of all e-mails from your instructor or your TA *must* be acknowledged. For example, a simple "Thank you for getting back to me" will suffice. Be professional, courteous, and respectful in all communications.

Be assured that your instructor or T.A. will respond to your e-mail in a timely manner. Do not assume that you will hear back immediately.

3. Contacting the course Teaching Assistant:

Students are free and encouraged to contact Dr. Clark with all questions regarding the course. But questions should *first* be directed towards Danielle Martak, the course Teaching Assistant, who will happy to assist you. (See Danielle's contact information and office hours on the first page of this course outline.)

4. McMaster Policy on Academic Integrity: 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. 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. It is your responsibility to understand what constitutes academic dishonesty. For information on the various types of academic dishonesty, please refer to the Academic Integrity Policy, located at: http://www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity_

The following illustrates only three forms of academic dishonesty: 1) Plagiarism—e.g., the submission of work that is not one's own or for which other credit has been obtained. 2) Improper collaboration in group work. 3) Copying or using unauthorized aids in tests and examinations.

5. MSAF Statement

McMaster Student Absence Form (MSAF):

In the event of an absence, students should review and follow the Academic Regulations in the Undergraduate Calendar "Requests for Relief for Missed Academic Term Work." Please consult the MSAF statement on our website (<https://artsci.mcmaster.ca/forms-requests/>) and direct any questions or concerns to Shelley Anderson or Rebecca Bishop in the Arts & Science Program Office as appropriate.

6. Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities Statement

Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities:

Students who require academic accommodation must contact Student Accessibility Services (SAS) to make arrangements with a Program Coordinator. Academic accommodations must be arranged for each term of study. Student Accessibility Services can be contacted by phone 905-525-9140 ext. 28652 or email sas@mcmaster.ca. For further information, consult McMaster University's Policy for Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities.

7. Email Contact and Student Responsibility Statement

Please Note:

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 students to check **their McMaster email** and course websites weekly during the term and to note any changes. Announcements will be made in class and by using the course email distribution list.

8. Copies of Essays:

Keep a copy of the essays that you submit for the course.

9. Course evaluation:

Students will be invited to evaluate the course towards the conclusion of the Term 2.

10. Cell phones, sending and receiving texts, and internet connections:

All cell phone and mobile device notifications (ringers, etc.) must be turned off during class. With the exception of accessing course materials on Avenue, no surfing is permitted while class is in session. As a sign of your commitment to creating a professional and courteous teaching and learning environment, you are required to refrain from texting, emailing, and surfing in class.

11. McMaster University Grading Scale:

Grade	Equivalent Grade Point	Equivalent Percentages
A+	12	90-100
A	11	85-89
A-	10	80-84
B+	9	77-79
B	8	73-76
B-	7	70-72
C+	6	67-69
C	5	63-66
C-	4	60-62
D+	3	57-59
D	2	53-56
D-	1	50-52
F	0	0-49 -- Failure