

Fall and Winter Term 2016-2017 (21/08/16)

**Arts & Science Program
McMaster University**

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



Holland House Library, London (September, 1940)

Instructor: **Dr. David L. Clark**

E-mail: dclark@mcmaster.ca

Office Hours: CNH 210, Monday, 12:30 pm-1:30 pm; 5:30 pm-6:30 pm.

T.A. **Clorinde Peters**

E-mail: peterscc@mcmaster.ca

Office Hours: CNH 212, Monday 1:00-2:00 pm

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

Classroom: BSB 108

Course Description and Objectives:

This course explores the history of critical thinking about the difficulties and possibilities that attend the formation, unfurling 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?

The objective of this course is to provide students with a good working knowledge of a broad range of social and political thinkers. Classes are a mixture of lectures and robust classroom discussion. Each week, students will be invited to query and debate the materials and questions at hand. Through a special arrangement with the university, this course has been scheduled to meet in one place, once a week, precisely to encourage discussion. 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.

Supplemental reading material designed to help you consolidate the course topic will be provided on Avenue as the course unfolds.

Our course falls into two large movements, one for each term:

In Term I we establish a broad historical context for social and political thought, beginning with the writings of Plato and Aristotle and concluding with the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche. 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 I 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 I is a selection from Immanuel Kant's essay, *Toward Perpetual Peace* (1795), sometimes said to be the precursor for the United Nations Charter. In conjunction with Kant's essay, we will discuss materials offered by the Slought Foundation's *Perpetual Peace Project*, including a documentary in which fifteen important social theorists discuss the continuing significance of Kant's work.

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. Giorgio Agamben returns us to the Holocaust, and to the ways in which the Nazi extermination camp exemplifies the limits of social and political thought. 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.

Required Texts:

The Broadview Anthology of Social and Political Thought: From Plato to Nietzsche, Vol. One. Eds. Andrew Bailey, et al. Broadview Press, 2008.

Butler, Judith. *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence.* New York: Verso, 2006.

Agamben, Giorgio. *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive.* Trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen. New York: Zone Books, 2002.

Derrida, Jacques. *Of Hospitality*. Trans. Rachel Bowlby. Stanford: Stanford UP, 2000.
 Derrida, Jacques. *Learning To Live, Finally*. New York: Melville House, 2007.
 Taylor, Astra. *Examined Life: Excursions with Contemporary Thinkers*. New York: The New Press, 2009.

Documentaries

Examined Life: Philosophy is in the Streets. Dir. Astra Taylor. Sphinx Productions and the National Film Board of Canada, 2008. [88 minutes]
Perpetual Peace Project. Dir. Laura Hanna (Hidden Driver Productions), Alexandra Lerman (ScribeMedia Arts Culture), and Aaron Levy (the Slought Foundation), 2009. [55 minutes]

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, due in class, at start of class, 21 November 2016 and 20 March 2017 respectively. Essays submitted by their respective due dates will receive a full marking commentary. Essays handed in after the due dates will be graded the same but without comment. Essays may be handed in up to start of the last class of the respective terms. 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 5 December and 3 April 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., Clorinde Peters.

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

Provisional Lecture Schedule*

*Unless otherwise indicated, all Term 1 readings are from *The Broadview Anthology of Social and Political Thought*.

Sept	12	Prefatory Remarks
	19	Plato
	26	Plato
Oct	3	Aristotle
	10	Mid-term recess
	17	Midterm Examination (no class after examination)
	24	Sidney ("Defence of Poesy" posted on Avenue)
	31	Locke
Nov	7	Kant + <i>Perpetual Peace Project</i> (http://perpetualpeaceproject.org/)
	14	Kant + <i>Perpetual Peace Project</i> (http://perpetualpeaceproject.org/)
	21	Astell + Wollstonecraft [Essay 1 due]
	28	Marx
Dec	5	Nietzsche [Last day to submit essay]
Jan	9	Prefatory Remarks

	16	<i>Examined Life: Philosophy is in the Streets</i> (documentary screening + discussion)
	23	<i>Examined Life: Excursions with Contemporary Thinkers</i> .
	30	Michel Foucault (materials from “Society Must Be Defended” posted on Avenue)
Feb	6	Giorgio Agamben, <i>Remnants of Auschwitz</i>
	13	Emmanuel Levinas (posted on Avenue)
	20	Mid-term recess
	27	Mid-term Examination (no class after examination)
March	6	Jacques Derrida, <i>Of Hospitality</i>
	13	Jacques Derrida, <i>Of Hospitality + Learning to Live, Finally</i> .
	20	Judith Butler, <i>Precarious Life</i> [Essay 2 due]
	27	Judith Butler, <i>Precarious Life</i>
April	3	Recapitulation [Last day to submit essay]

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 and the course EDL <d-as2A06>.

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 Clorinde *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 Clorinde Peters, the course Teaching Assistant, who will happy to assist you. (See Clorinde’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 on-line 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. No surfing or texting is permitted while class is in session.

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