

PSCI 4316A/PSCI 5915A
Contemporary Political Theory I
Wednesdays 11:35 am — 2:25 pm
Please confirm location on Carleton Central

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Office Hours: Tuesdays 10-11am (online) and Thursdays 10-11am (in person)

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Course Description

The interwar period in Europe (1918–1939) was marked by profound and overlapping crises—political, social, economic, philosophical, and existential. It was also a time of intense transformation and innovation across multiple spheres, including politics, philosophy, literature, cinema, architecture, and music. Nowhere were these dynamics more vividly expressed than in Germany during the Weimar Republic, often described as a “laboratory of modernity,” where competing political ideologies—from the far left to the radical right—contended for dominance. At the same time, this period witnessed the emergence of an unprecedented form of government that would later be identified as totalitarianism.

This course explores how political thinkers of the interwar and postwar periods diagnosed the crises of their time. What does the concept of totalitarianism mean, and why did this new concept become necessary? How can we understand the moral and political implications of the Second World War and the Holocaust? In the wake of such catastrophes, how does one reimagine social and political life in a world seemingly stripped of certainty? What grounds remain for a belief in the solidity or legitimacy of democracy after the experience of total domination?

Designed as both an introduction to major themes in continental thought in the first half of the twentieth century and a focused study of key thinkers, this course will engage with the works of Max Weber, Carl Schmitt, Hannah Arendt, Max Horkheimer, Simone Weil, Albert Camus, and Simone de Beauvoir among others.

Learning Objectives:

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

- Understand the historical context of the interwar and postwar periods in Germany and France with nuance and detail;
- Critically evaluate the strengths and limitations of political theories and conceptions of totalitarianism and democracy examined in the course;
- Draw meaningful connections between historical political concepts and their usage in contemporary discourse;
- Strengthen analytical reading and writing skills through the interpretation of diverse textual forms;
- Construct clear, well-supported interpretations of key ideas through written assignments and in-class discussions.

Contact Policy:

The best way to contact me outside of scheduled office hours is via email. You can expect a reply within 48 hours (weekends excluded). If your question cannot be answered by a short email, please drop by during office hours or come and speak to me before or after class. If your question is of general interest to the whole class, please post in the “Peer Help Forum.”

When emailing:

- Include the course code in the subject line of the email
- Use your Carleton email account
- Sign off with your first and last name

Course Format

The structure of the course will be as follows:

- 1) Welcome and updates about the course (5 minutes)
- 2) Instructor’s presentation of the weekly topic and readings (30-35 minutes)
- 3) Class discussion on the first text or excerpts
- 4) 15-minute break
- 5) Class discussion on the remaining texts or excerpts

Use of Brightspace: Course announcements, deadline reminders and course materials will be posted on the course page. Please ensure that you have access to the course on Brightspace and consult it regularly.

Required Texts

- Simone Weil, *On The Abolition of All Political Parties* (New York: NYRB, 2013), Price: 19.95 CAD (available at the University Bookstore).
- All other readings will be available directly on Brightspace at no cost to you.

* Any edition of the book can be used, provided that it is unabridged. Used copies can be found online or in bookstores (such as Black Squirrel).

Course Assignments

Assignment	Due Date	Percentage of Final Grade
Engagement	Marked weekly	30 %
Perusall Annotations	Marked weekly	25 %
After-Class Reflection Paper	Three times/term	45 %

Course Assignments Overview

1) Engagement (30%) — Marked weekly

Course engagement is based on two elements: attendance and participation in the weekly discussions. Both are **essential components** of this seminar, which is based on in-class conversations, debates and exchange of ideas.

Participation in class will **be evaluated according to the following criteria**: preparation ahead of the seminar; quality of interventions; ability to engage critically with the text and to make connections with other concepts/ideas covered in the course. To earn the full points, you are required to attend the seminar on a regular basis, demonstrate that you have read the texts in advance and contribute meaningfully and respectfully to the discussion. This is a seminar, not a lecture course: it is based on your own contributions. In short, this course is what you make of it as active learners.

Note about attendance: Excused absences include medical reasons, family emergencies and observance of religious holiday. Please make sure to notify me in advance.

Three or more unexcused absences will result in a change of one third of a letter grade (e.g. from B+ to B). Five or more unexcused absences will result in losing one full letter grade (from B to C).

2) Annotations of Texts (Perusall) (25%) — Marked weekly

A percentage of your grade goes to your weekly contribution to a collaborative annotation of the readings. To earn the full points, you are required to **annotate and comment on a selection of readings on Perusall**. Your annotation of the text should be completed before midnight the day before class. You should contribute a minimum of **two comments** (which can also take the form of questions about specific sentences, passages or sections of the text) and **one response to another student's comment** (which can take the form of an agreement, disagreement, expanding on a point, asking a question, and so on). There is no maximum, but it is preferable to avoid going on an endless rant at every page of the text. Further explanations and examples will be given during the first week.

3) After-Class Reflection Paper (45%) — Three times/term

Students will be asked to write and submit an after-class reflection paper **three times** during the term. The reflection paper (max. 2500 words for graduate students, max. 1500 words for undergraduate students) allows students to critically analyze their learning experience and to connect specific concepts discussed in class to the weekly readings and the broader themes of the course. The reflection paper should include a brief summary of the materials covered during class, focusing on the main concepts discussed. It should also include a critical analysis of divergent perspectives brought up by students (questions that were asked, problems that were tackled, conclusions that were reached, etc.). The reflection paper should end with a discussion of challenges encountered in examining and understanding the authors and concepts discussed in class, and a reflection on the insights gained during the seminar (if any).

You are free to choose which weeks you decide to reflect on. Your assignments must be submitted during the following week (before the next class).

You can submit your reflection papers in Word or PDF format.

Summary

Students are required to:

- 1) Complete the readings before class;
- 2) Attend the seminars regularly and participate in class discussions (30%);
- 3) Participate in annotations on Perusall (25%);
- 4) Write and submit three reflection papers during the term (45%);

Course Schedule and Required Readings

Week 1 (Sept 3): Thinking in Uncertain Times, Then and Now

Required readings:

- ♦ Syllabus
- ♦ Peter E. Gordon, "Why Historical Analogy Matters," in D. Steinmetz-Jenkins, *Did it Happen Here? Perspectives on Fascism and America* (2024)

Week 2 (Sept 10): The Crisis of the Weimar Republic (I)

Required readings:

- ♦ Max Weber, *The Vocation Lectures*: "Science as a Vocation" (read pp. 11-31) and "Politics as a Vocation" (read pp. 76-94).

Optional:

- ♦ Rudiger Graf and Moritz Föllmer, "The culture of 'crisis' in the Weimar Republic," *Thesis Eleven*, 111(1), 2012, 36–47.
- ♦ Koselleck, "Crisis," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Volume 67, Number 2, April 2006, pp. 357-400.
- ♦ Detlev Peukert, *The Weimar Republic: The Crisis of Classical Modernity* (Chap. 5)

Week 3 (Sept 17): The Crisis of the Weimar Republic (II)

Required readings:

- ♦ Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political* (1932)
- ♦ Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology. Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*, Chap. 1: "Definition of Sovereignty," pp. 5-15.

Optional:

- ♦ Schmitt, *The Crisis of Parliamentary Democracy*
- ♦ Leo Strauss, "German Nihilism" (1941)

Week 4 (Sept 24): The Rise of Totalitarianism (I): A New Concept

Required readings:

- ♦ Carlton J. H. Hayes, "The Novelty of Totalitarianism in the History of Western Civilization" (1940)
- ♦ Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Chap. 11: Section I

Optional:

- ♦ Hans Kohn, "The Totalitarian Philosophy of War" (1940)
- ♦ Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Chap. 10: Section I

Week 5 (Oct 1): The Rise of Totalitarianism (II): Ideology and Terror

Required readings:

- ♦ Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Chap. 13: "Ideology and Terror"
- ♦ Hannah Arendt, "Mankind and Terror" (1953) in *Essays in Understanding*

Optional:

- ♦ Arendt, "Approaches to the 'German Problem'" (1945)
- ♦ Jeffrey Andrew Barash, "The Question of Race in Heidegger's Thought," in *Shadows of Being* (2022)
- ♦ *Hannah Arendt* (the movie)

Week 6 (Oct 8): The Rise of Totalitarianism (III): Dreams and Terror

Required readings:

- ♦ Charlotte Beradt, *The Third Reich of Dreams* (Chap. 1-5)

Optional:

- ♦ Reinhart Koselleck, "Terror and Dream: Methodological Remarks on the Experience of Time during the Third Reich"
- ♦ George Orwell, "Literature and Totalitarianism" (1941)

Week 7 (Oct 15): The Rise of Totalitarianism (IV): Architecture and Domination

Required readings:

- ♦ Albert Speer, *Inside the Third Reich: Memoirs* (Chap 5, 11)
- ♦ Miguel Abensour, "On Compactness: Architecture and Totalitarian Regimes"

Optional:

- ♦ Claude Lefort, "The Image of the Body and Totalitarianism" in *The Political Forms of Modern Society* (starting at p. 297)
- ♦ Gitta Sereny, *Albert Speer: His Battle with Truth*
- ♦ Duncan Bell, Bernardo Zacka (eds.), *Political Theory and Architecture* (Bloomsbury, 2020)

Week 8—Fall Break (Oct. 20-24)

Week 9 (Oct 29): The Aftermath of Totalitarianism: The Capacity to Judge

Required readings:

- ♦ Arendt, "Epilogue" and "Postscript" to *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, pp. 372-388.
- ♦ Arendt, "Personal Responsibility Under Dictatorship" (1964) in *Responsibility and Judgment* (pp. 17-48)

Optional:

- ♦ Arendt, "Organized Guilt and Universal Responsibility" (1945) in *Essays in Understanding*
- ♦ Arendt, "Truth and Politics" in *Between Past and Future*
- ♦ Arendt, "Understanding and Politics (The Difficulties of Understanding)" (1954)
- ♦ Ronald Beiner, "Hannah Arendt on Judging" in Arendt, *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*
- ♦ Linda Zerilli, "Fact-Checking and Truth-telling in an Age of Alternative facts" (in *A Democratic Theory of Truth*, 2025)

Week 10 (Nov 5): Mass Culture and Alienation: Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno

***Guest Speaker:** Kyla Bruff (Department of Philosophy, Carleton University)

Required readings:

- ♦ *Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of the Enlightenment. Philosophical Fragments*, Preface (1944 and 1947) and "The Culture Industry"

Optional:

- ♦ Horkheimer, "The Revolt of Nature" in *The Eclipse of Reason* (1947), pp. 63-86.

Week 11 (Nov 12): The French Intellectuals (I): Simone Weil

Required readings:

- ♦ Simone Weil, *The Need for Roots. Prelude to a Declaration of Duties Toward Mankind*, Part I: The Needs of the Soul
- ♦ Simone Weil, *On The Abolition of All Political Parties* (1943)

Optional:

- ♦ Weil, "Meditation on Obedience and Liberty" in *Fragments* (1933-1938)

Week 12 (Nov 19): The French Intellectuals (II): Albert Camus

Required readings:

- ♦ Camus, "The Human Crisis" (1946)
- ♦ Camus, *The Rebel*, pp. 19-28, 269-273

Week 13 (Nov 26): The French Intellectuals (III): Simone de Beauvoir

Required readings:

- ♦ *Beauvoir, "Moral Idealism and Political Realism" (1945)
- ♦ Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, Chap. 1: "Ambiguity and Freedom" (1947)

Optional:

- ♦ Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, Introduction
- ♦ Beauvoir, "Existentialism and Popular Wisdom"
- Beauvoir, *The Prime of Life*, Chap. 6.
- Beauvoir, *All Men are Mortal*

Week 14 (Dec 3): Conclusion

Key Dates: Summary

Date	Topic
September 3	Introduction
September 10	Weber
September 17	Schmitt
September 24	Hayes + Arendt
October 1 st	Arendt
October 8	Beradt
October 15	Speer + Abensour
October 22	Fall Break
October 29	Arendt
November 5	Adorno + Horkheimer
November 12	Weil
November 19	Camus
November 26	Beauvoir
December 3	Conclusion

Policy on the use of AI

The broad term of “AI” encompasses a great variety of technologies, tools and systems. This policy refers more specifically to the use of generative AI in research and writing. Large language models (LLMs) — such as ChatGPT, Claude, Llama, DeepSeek, Gemini, and so on — have become more accessible in recent years. Universities are still grappling with the wide-ranging effects of their omnipresence and various uses in higher education.

LLMs are not going away anytime soon. We cannot just stick our heads in the sand and pretend they do not exist. However, this does not mean that we should adopt them and integrate them into our daily tasks without a critical examination of their limitations and risks. Beyond the environmental cost of generative AI and the ethical issues their use raises (such as copyright infringements, data exploitation, ghost labour), we also have to assess whether they are beneficial as tools, and if so, to what extent.

One of the aims of this course is to foster critical thinking. LLMs are known for their occasional “hallucinations,” which can include factually incorrect statements, nonsensical responses and fabricated sources among other things. They can also introduce biases they replicate from the data sets on which they have been trained. Because of this lack of reliability, predictability and accuracy, their use must therefore require a great deal of caution.

My policy in this course is one of transparency. While I do not encourage the use of generative AI, I do not strictly prohibit it in my course. I require all students who decide to employ it as a tool to disclose the degree to which they have relied on it (in percentage), the way it has been used (for brainstorming, books and articles summaries, writing, editing, etc.) and to indicate with footnotes any section, paragraph or sentence that has been produced with the support of an AI tool (the footnote should include the prompt used). In a separate appendix, I require screenshots of all AI prompts used in the process, as well as a detailed written justification as to how AI was used in the assignment. Assignments will be evaluated in light of those disclosed elements.

Ultimately, I am interested in reading what you have to say about the topic you decide to work on. If I want to know the answers ChatGPT or Claude can generate based on a prompt, I'll ask those large language models directly. I do not believe it is my role to train you on how to use those LLMs, and I have little interest in becoming the “AI police” who scrutinizes assignments to detect potential violations to Carleton’s academic integrity policy.

Assignments in this class do not necessarily lend themselves well to the integration of generative AI. The course is based on in-class discussions, collaborative reading and original reflections on seminar discussions.

Course Policies

Citations and Bibliography

All written assignments should include a full list of sources used and avoid plagiarism or other violations of academic integrity. For examples of what constitutes plagiarism and what could be the possible sanctions, consult this page on academic integrity:
<https://carleton.ca/registrar/academic-integrity/>

You must indicate all references to the texts in footnotes or with in-text references. You are free to choose the style of citation with which you are most comfortable, as long as it is consistent throughout your assignment. For more details on how to cite properly, please consult the MacOdrum Library website: <https://library.carleton.ca/help/citing-your-sources>.

All assignments submitted should be **double-spaced**, formatted in **12-point font** and should include **page numbers**.

Copyright

Lectures and course materials (including all PowerPoint presentations, handouts, videos, and similar materials) are protected by copyright. You may take notes and make copies of course materials for your own educational use. You may not allow others to reproduce or distribute lecture notes and course materials publicly for commercial purposes without my express written consent.

Late Essays & Extensions

If you are ill or have any other legitimate reason for not being able to complete coursework or submit your assignments on time, **please advise me as soon as possible (preferably before the deadline)**. If an extenuating circumstance prevents a student from submitting an assignment on time, they should be prepared to provide proper documentation concerning the situation. Accommodations can be discussed on a case-by-case basis.

Please note that assignments in other courses **are not sufficient grounds** for an extension. As you dispose of several weeks to complete the assignments, it is your responsibility to start early in the term.

Late assignments will be penalized at the **rate of 4% of the student's assignment grade** per day. An assignment is considered one day late if it is submitted to Brightspace any time up to 23:59 hours after the deadline. Assignments that have **not been submitted seven (7) days** after the deadline will not be accepted.

There is an increased risk of depression and anxiety among students, so please make sure to seek help if you are experiencing mental health-related problems. Carleton offers a broad range of resources: <https://carleton.ca/wellness/>

Political Science Course Outline Appendix

REQUESTS FOR ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATION

You may need special arrangements to meet your academic obligations during the term. For an accommodation request the processes are as follows:

Student Mental Health

As a university student, you may experience a range of mental health challenges that significantly impact your academic success and overall well-being. If you need help, please speak to someone. There are numerous resources available both on- and off-campus to support you. Here is a list that may be helpful:

Emergency Resources (on and off campus):

<https://carleton.ca/health/emergencies-and-crisis/emergency-numbers/>

Carleton Resources:

Mental Health and Wellbeing:

<https://carleton.ca/wellness/>

Health & Counselling Services: <https://carleton.ca/health/>

Paul Menton Centre: <https://carleton.ca/pmc/>

Academic Advising Centre (AAC):

<https://carleton.ca/academicadvising/>

Centre for Student Academic Support (CSAS):

<https://carleton.ca/csas/>

Equity & Inclusivity Communities:

<https://carleton.ca/equity/>

Off Campus Resources:

Distress Centre of Ottawa and Region: (613) 238-3311 or TEXT: 343-306-5550, <https://www.dcottawa.on.ca/>

Mental Health Crisis Service: (613) 722-6914, 1-866-996-0991, <http://www.crisisline.ca/>

Empower Me: 1-844-741-6389,

<https://students.carleton.ca/services/empower-me-counselling-services/>

ood2Talk: 1-866-925-5454, <https://good2talk.ca/>

The Walk-In Counselling Clinic:

<https://walkincounselling.com>

Academic consideration for medical or other

extenuating circumstances: Students must contact the instructor(s) of their absence or inability to complete the academic deliverable within the predetermined timeframe due to medical or other extenuating circumstances. For a range of medical or other extenuating circumstances, students may use the online self-declaration form and where appropriate, the use of medical documentation. This policy regards the accommodation of extenuating circumstances for both short-term and long-term periods and extends to all students enrolled at Carleton University.

Students should also consult the [Course Outline Information on Academic Accommodations](#) for more

information. Detailed information about the procedure for requesting academic consideration can be found [here](#).

Pregnancy: Contact your Instructor with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist. For accommodation regarding a formally-scheduled final exam, please contact Equity and Inclusive Communities (EIC) at equity@carleton.ca or by calling (613) 520-5622 to speak to an Equity Advisor.

Religious obligation: Contact your Instructor with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist. For more details [click here](#).

Academic Accommodations for Students with

Disabilities: The Paul Menton Centre for Students with Disabilities (PMC) provides services to students with Learning Disabilities (LD), psychiatric/mental health disabilities, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD), chronic medical conditions, and impairments in mobility, hearing, and vision. If you have a disability requiring academic accommodations in this course, please contact PMC at 613-520-6608 or pmc@carleton.ca for a formal evaluation. If you are already registered with the PMC, please request your accommodations for this course through the [Ventus Student Portal](#) at the beginning of the term, and no later than two weeks before the first in-class scheduled test or exam requiring accommodation (*if applicable*). Requests made within two weeks will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis. For final exams, the deadlines to request accommodations are published in the [University Academic Calendars](#). After requesting accommodation from PMC, meet with me to ensure accommodation arrangements are made. Please consult the PMC website for the deadline to request accommodations for the formally scheduled exam (*if applicable*).

Survivors of Sexual Violence: As a community, Carleton University is committed to maintaining a positive learning, working, and living environment where sexual violence will not be tolerated, and its survivors are supported through academic accommodations as per Carleton's Sexual Violence Policy. For more information about the services available at the university and to obtain information about sexual violence and/or support, visit: <https://carleton.ca/equity/sexual-assault-support-services>.

Accommodation for Student Activities: Carleton University recognizes the substantial benefits, both to the individual student and for the university, that result from a student participating in activities beyond the classroom experience. Reasonable accommodation will be provided to students who compete or perform at the national or international level. Write to me with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist.

PETITIONS TO DEFER

Students unable to write a final examination because of illness or other circumstances beyond their control may apply within **three working days** to the Registrar's Office for permission to write a deferred examination. The request must be fully supported by the appropriate documentation. Only deferral petitions submitted to the Registrar's Office will be considered. [See Undergraduate Calendar, Article 4.3](#)

INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY

Student or professor materials created for this course (including presentations and posted notes, labs, case studies, assignments and exams) remain the intellectual property of the author(s). They are intended for personal use and may not be reproduced or redistributed without prior written consent of the author(s). Permissibility of submitting substantially the same piece of work more than once for academic credit. If group or collaborative work is expected or allowed, provide a clear and specific description of how and to what extent you consider collaboration to be acceptable or appropriate, especially in the completion of written assignments.

WITHDRAWAL WITHOUT ACADEMIC PENALTY

Please reference the [Academic Calendar](#) for each term's official withdrawal dates

OFFICIAL FINAL EXAMINATION PERIOD

Please reference the [Academic Calendar](#) for each term's Official Exam Period (may include evenings & Saturdays or Sundays)

For more information on the important dates and deadlines of the academic year, consult the [Carleton Calendar](#).

GRADING SYSTEM

The grading system is described in the Undergraduate Calendar section [5.4](#). Standing in a course is determined by the course instructor subject to the approval of the Faculty Dean. This means that grades submitted by the instructor may be subject to revision. No grades are final until they have been approved by the Dean.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Academic integrity is an essential element of a productive and successful career as a student. Students are required to familiarize themselves with the university's [Academic Integrity Policy](#).

PLAGIARISM

The University Senate defines plagiarism as "*presenting, whether intentional or not, the ideas, expression of ideas or work of others as one's own.*" This can include:

- any submission prepared in whole or in part, by someone else, including the unauthorized use of generative AI tools (e.g., ChatGPT);
- reproducing or paraphrasing portions of someone else's published or unpublished material, and presenting these as one's own without proper citation or reference to the original source;
- submitting a take-home examination, essay, laboratory report or other assignment written, in whole or in part, by someone else;
- using ideas or direct, verbatim quotations, or paraphrased material, concepts, or ideas without appropriate acknowledgment in any academic assignment;
- using another's data or research findings;
- failing to acknowledge sources through the use of proper citations when using another's works and/or failing to use quotation marks;
- handing in "*substantially the same piece of work for academic credit more than once without prior written permission of the course instructor in which the submission occurs.*"

Plagiarism is a serious offence that cannot be resolved directly by the course's instructor. The Associate Dean of the Faculty conducts a rigorous investigation, including an interview with the student, when an instructor suspects a piece of work has been plagiarized. Penalties are not trivial. They can include a final grade of "F" for the course.

RESOURCES (613-520-2600, phone ext.)

Department of Political Science (2777)	B640 Loeb
Registrar's Office (3500)	300 Tory
Centre for Student Academic Success (3822)	4 th floor
Library	
Academic Advising Centre (7850)	302 Tory
Paul Menton Centre (6608)	501
Nideyinàn	
Career Services (6611)	401 Tory