

PSCI 4316/PSCI5915
Contemporary Political Theory I
Mondays, 11:35 am – 2:25 pm
This course will be held remotely

Instructor: Sophie Marcotte Chenard

Office Hours: Mondays 9:30am-11:30am (link on Brightspace) or by appointment

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Course Description

This course is an enquiry into a specific moment in the history of 20th-century European thought: the interwar period (1918-1939). This period could be described as a period of *crisis*, or rather, of *crises*: political, social, economic, philosophical, and even existential. In Germany, the end of the First World War is met with the resentment of the defeat. But it is also a moment of great change: the beginning of the Weimar Republic, the attempt to create a new liberal regime in rupture with the old world, unprecedented innovation and creation in philosophy, literature, cinema, architecture, music and so on. In politics, the Weimar period represents a “laboratory of modernity”, where all alternatives from far-left to radical far-right politics are represented as potentialities to be realized.

Our task in this course is to understand the diagnoses that political thinkers in Germany and in France pose with regard to the political and social situation in the 1920s and 1930s in Europe. How to make sense of this new social and political world that offers no markers of certainty? How can we understand, in this context, the rise of Nazism and the growth of Anti-Semitism? Is there any meaning to the human tragedy that was the Second World War and the Holocaust? How is a belief in the solidity or legitimacy of democracy as a regime possible after totalitarianism?

This course is designed to provide a substantive overview of the major themes in continental thought in the first half of the twentieth century and an introduction to the works of the most

important thinkers of that period, including Max Weber, Carl Schmitt, Hannah Arendt, Leo Strauss, Simone Weil, Raymond Aron, Merleau-Ponty and Simone de Beauvoir.

Learning Objectives:

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

- Provide an elaborate account of historical context of the interwar period;
- Assess the strengths and weaknesses of the political theories and conceptions of totalitarianism, nihilism, liberalism, liberty and democracy studied in the course;
- Draw parallels with our present-day use of these concepts;
- Develop analytical reading and writing skills and master interpretive tools in approaching past texts;
- Formulate a clear and rigorous interpretation of the ideas seen in class through the assignments and 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 online office hours or stay online after the seminar discussion. 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 and include your student number.

Course Format

This course is delivered remotely online using a blended approach of synchronous meetings (seminar discussions, office hours) and asynchronous activities (posting in discussion forum, completing the readings).

Use of Brightspace: Course announcements, deadline reminders and course materials will be posted on the course page. The required readings will also be available on the course page for each week, along with other materials related to the theme of the course. Please ensure that you have access to the course on Brightspace and consult it regularly.

Required Texts (available for purchase in bookstores or online)

- Max Weber, *The Vocation Lectures*, Hackett
- Simone Weil, *On The Abolition of All Political Parties* (New York: NYRB, 2013)
- All other readings will be available directly on Brightspace at no cost to you

* Any edition of the two books (new or used) can be used, provided that they are unabridged. The books are available for purchase at the University bookstore.

Course Assignments

Assignment	Due Date	Percentage of Final Grade
Attendance/Participation	Marked weekly	25%
Discussion Questions	Once/Term	10%
Research Essay Question/Argument	October 18 th	10%
Research Essay Proposal/ Bibliography	November 8 th	15%
Research Essay	December 13 th	40%
Create a Meme	Anytime before December 10 th	1% (bonus point)

Course Assignments Overview

1. Attendance and Participation (25%) – Marked weekly

Attendance and participation in the weekly discussions is an **essential component** of this seminar, which is normally (i.e. when there is no global pandemic) based on in-class conversations, debates and exchange of ideas. Through synchronous weekly discussions, you will be given the opportunity to raise questions about the readings, exchange and learn from your peers and the instructor and further deepen your understanding of the texts.

Participation 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 virtual seminar on a regular basis, demonstrate that you have read the texts in advance and contribute actively, positively and respectfully to the discussion.

2. Discussion Questions (10%)

Once during the term, students will be required to post **two (2) discussion questions** about the texts under study on the dedicated Discussion Questions forum on Brightspace at least 24hr before class starts. These can be questions of understanding, historical context, broader implications of the author's thesis and so on. Other students should read the posts in advance and be prepared to discuss the submitted questions during the discussion. A sign-up sheet will be made available at the beginning of the term.

3. Research Question/Argument (10%) – Due Monday October 18th

You should submit a brief overview (approx. 500 words) of the topic and question you are planning to address. This assignment should take the form of an article “abstract” that presents the general problem you will be addressing, how you intend to address it, which thinker(s) and texts you will focus on, and what your (tentative or provisional) argument of thesis will be. It is the first step in preparing for writing your final research essay. There will be examples available on the course page.

You can submit your Research Question/Argument in Word or PDF format. Please name your submitted assignment as follows: Lastname.Firstname.Assignment1

3. Research Essay Proposal/Annotated Bibliography (15%) – Due November 8th

In light of the feedback you receive on your first assignment, you should elaborate a more precise outline of your research essay. Your proposal (max.1500 words) should include your research question, a tentative thesis, a “roadmap” or outline of the organization of your essay, a justification of the main sources you will be using and an explanation of your method (how you will approach and treat your topic). Your research proposal should be accompanied by an annotated bibliography of 4-6 sources. Specific guidelines and examples for both the proposal and the bibliography will be posted on the course page under Assignments and Guidelines.

You can submit your outline in Word or PDF format. Please name your submitted assignment as follows: Lastname.Firstname.Assignment2.

4. Research Essay (40%) – Due December 13th

You will be required to write one research essay (max. 4000 words including footnotes for 4th-year students, max. 4500 words including footnotes for graduate students) that should be submitted electronically on Brightspace.

A document with detailed guidelines for the final paper will be available on Brightspace at the beginning of the term. Students will be given complete freedom with regard to the topic and authors studied, as long as it is related to the course theme. The bibliography should include at least 7 sources, two of which should be books and four of which should be peer-reviewed. You are encouraged to use the Further Readings document posted on Brightspace in preparation for writing your essay.

You can submit your outline in Word or PDF format. Please name your submitted assignment as follows: Lastname.Firstname.FinalPaper

5. Create a Meme (1% bonus points) – Anytime before December 10th

Being able to use humour to express philosophical ideas and problems is a proof that you have understood those ideas and can mobilize them in various, creative ways. Anytime during the term, you can post a meme on the “Create a Meme Forum” and share your creation with the rest of the class to earn a 1% bonus. The memes have to be related in some way to the topics/concepts/thinkers covered in the course. We will collectively vote on a Top 5 at the end of the term. The authors of the winning memes will win absolutely nothing, except the public recognition of their exceptional sense of humour.

Course Schedule and Required Readings

Week 1 : Thinking in Uncertain Times: Political Philosophy in the Interwar Period (Sept 13)

Required readings:

- ◆ Syllabus
- ◆ Gordon and McCormick, "Introduction: Weimar Thought: Continuity and Crisis", in *Weimar Thought. A Contested Legacy* (Princeton: 2013), pp. 1- 11.
- ◆ Koselleck, "Crisis", *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Volume 67, Number 2, April 2006, pp. 357-400.

Week 2: The Crisis of the Weimar Republic (I) (Sept 20)

Required readings:

- ◆ Max Weber, *The Vocation Lectures*

Week 3: The Crisis of the Weimar Republic (II) (Sept 27)

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*

Week 4: The German Émigrés (I): Leo Strauss (Oct 4)

Required readings:

- ◆ Strauss, "German Nihilism" (1941)
- ◆ Strauss, "The Living Issues of German Postwar Philosophy" (1940)

Optional:

- ◆ Strauss, "An Introduction to Heideggerian Existentialism" (1956)

Week 5: No class – Thanksgiving (Oct 11)

Week 6: The German Émigrés (II): Hannah Arendt
(Oct 18)

Required readings:

- ◆ Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Chap. 10: Section I, Chap. 11: Section I, Chap. 13.
- ◆ Arendt, "Organized Guilt and Universal Responsibility" (1945) in *Essays in Understanding*
- ◆ Arendt, "Postscript" to *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, pp. 375-388.

Optional:

- ◆ Arendt, "Approaches to the 'German Problem'" (1945)
- ◆ *Hannah Arendt* (the movie)

Week 7 - Fall Break (Oct. 25)

Week 8: The German Émigrés (IV): Karl Löwith
(Nov 1)

Required readings:

- ◆ Löwith, "Nature, History and Existentialism"
- ◆ Löwith, "Curriculum Vitae", in *My Life in Germany Before and After 1933*
- ◆ Löwith, "European Nihilism" in *Martin Heidegger and European Nihilism*, pp. 192-208.

Optional:

- ◆ Löwith and Strauss, "Correspondence Concerning Modernity"

Week 9: Writing Workshop/Research Essay Group Discussions
(Nov 8)

Required readings:

- ◆ Orwell, *Politics and the English Language* (1946)

Week 10: The French Intellectuals (I): Raymond Aron
(Nov 15)

Required readings:

- ◆ Aron, "History and Politics" in *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale* (1949)
- ◆ Aron, *The Opium of the Intellectuals*, Chap. 5: "The Meaning of History"
- ◆ Aron, "Max Weber and Power-Politics" in *In Defense of Political Reason. Essays by Raymond Aron*

Optional:

- ◆ Aron, "The Discovery of Germany" In *Memoirs. Fifty Years of Political Reflection*.
- ◆ Aron, "For Progress – After the Fall of the Idols" (1978), in *In Defense of Political Reason*

Week 11: The French Intellectuals (II): Simone Weil
(Nov 22)

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: The French Intellectuals (III): Simone de Beauvoir
(Nov 29)

Required readings:

- ◆ Beauvoir, "Moral Idealism and Political Realism" (1945)
- ◆ Beauvoir, "Existentialism and Popular Wisdom" (1945)

Optional:

- ◆ Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, Introduction and Chap. 1.
- ◆ Beauvoir, *The Prime of Life*, Chap. 6.

Week 13: The French Intellectuals (IV): Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Claude Lefort
(Dec 6)

Required readings:

- ◆ Merleau-Ponty, "The War Has Taken Place" (1948) in *Sense and Nonsense*
- ◆ Merleau-Ponty, "Man, The Hero" (1949) in *Sense and Nonsense*
- ◆ Lefort, "The Question of Democracy", in *Democracy and Political Theory*
- ◆ Lefort, "The Image of the Body and Totalitarianism" in *The Political Forms of Modern Society*

Optional:

- ◆ Lefort, "Hannah Arendt and the Question of the Political", in *Democracy and Political Theory*

Week 14: Concluding Remarks: (What) Can We Learn from the Past?
(Dec 10)

- ◆ Required readings: see articles posted on Brightspace under Week 14

Key Dates: Summary

Date	Topic	Assignment
Monday, September 13	Introduction	Attendance/Participation marked weekly
Monday, September 20	Max Weber	
Monday, September 27	Carl Schmitt	
Monday, October 4	Leo Strauss	
Monday, October 11	No class - Thanksgiving	
Monday, October 18	Hannah Arendt	Research Question due
Monday, October 25	Fall Break	
Monday, November 1 st	Karl Löwith	
Monday, November 8	Writing Workshop	Research Outline/Bibliography due
Monday, November 15	Raymond Aron	
Monday, November 22	Simone Weil	
Monday, November 29	Simone de Beauvoir	
Monday, December 6	Merleau-Ponty and Lefort	
Friday, December 10	Conclusion	Create A Meme – Last day for submission
Monday December 13		Research Paper due

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 during the pandemic, 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/>

Grade Appeal

Any suspicion of error on the part of the instructor should be brought up immediately to be corrected. You are more than welcome to drop by during online office hours to discuss your assignment. If you are concerned that your assignment was not assessed fairly, you can request a review by submitting a **one-page justification** explaining the reasons why the assignment should be reviewed. You should send the justification along with the original essay by email **no later than one (1) week** after receiving your grade. A request for review can involve the raising or lowering of a grade upon further examination.

Appendix

Covid-19 Information

All members of the Carleton community are required to follow COVID-19 prevention measures and all mandatory public health requirements (e.g. wearing a mask, physical distancing, hand hygiene, respiratory and cough etiquette) and [mandatory self-screening](#) prior to coming to campus daily.

If you feel ill or exhibit COVID-19 symptoms while on campus or in class, please leave campus immediately, self-isolate, and complete the mandatory [symptom reporting tool](#). For purposes of contact tracing, attendance will be recorded in all classes and labs. Participants can check in using posted QR codes through the cuScreen platform where provided. Students who do not have a smartphone will be required to complete a paper process as indicated on the [COVID-19 website](#).

All members of the Carleton community are required to follow guidelines regarding safe movement and seating on campus (e.g. directional arrows, designated entrances and exits, designated seats that maintain physical distancing). In order to avoid congestion, allow all previous occupants to fully vacate a classroom before entering. No food or drinks are permitted in any classrooms or labs.

For the most recent information about Carleton's COVID-19 response and required measures, please see the [University's COVID-19 webpage](#) and review the [Frequently Asked Questions \(FAQs\)](#). Should you have additional questions after reviewing, please contact covidinfo@carleton.ca

Please note that failure to comply with University policies and mandatory public health requirements, and endangering the safety of others are considered misconduct under the [Student Rights and Responsibilities Policy](#). Failure to comply with Carleton's COVID-19 procedures may lead to supplementary action involving Campus Safety and/or Student Affairs.

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:

Pregnancy accommodation: Please 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, visit the Equity Services website: carleton.ca/equity/wp-content/uploads/Student-Guide-to-Academic-Accommodation.pdf.

Religious accommodation: Please 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, visit the Equity Services website: carleton.ca/equity/wp-content/uploads/Student-Guide-to-Academic-Accommodation.pdf.

Accommodations for students with disabilities: If you have a documented disability requiring academic accommodations in this course, please contact the Paul Menton Centre for Students with Disabilities (PMC) at 613-520-6608 or pmc@carleton.ca for a formal evaluation or contact your PMC coordinator to send your instructor your Letter of Accommodation at the beginning of the term. You must also contact the PMC no later than two weeks before the first in-class scheduled test or exam requiring accommodation (if applicable). After requesting accommodation from PMC, reach out to your instructor as soon as possible to ensure accommodation arrangements are made. For more information, please visit carleton.ca/pmc.

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 must be provided to students who engage in student activities at the national or international level. Please 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. <https://carleton.ca/senate/wp-content/uploads/Accommodation-for-Student-Activities-1.pdf>.

For more information on academic accommodation, please contact the departmental administrator or visit: students.carleton.ca/course-outline.

Sexual Violence Policy

As a community, Carleton University is committed to maintaining a positive learning, working and living environment where sexual violence will not be tolerated. 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: carleton.ca/sexual-violence-support.

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 includes reproducing or paraphrasing portions of someone else’s published or unpublished material, regardless of the source, and presenting these as one’s own without proper citation or reference to the original source. Examples of sources from which the ideas, expressions of ideas or works of others may be drawn from include but are not limited to: books, articles, papers, literary compositions and phrases, performance compositions, chemical compounds, art works, laboratory reports, research results, calculations and the results of calculations, diagrams, constructions, computer reports, computer code/software, material on the internet and/or conversations.

Examples of plagiarism include, but are not limited to:

- any submission prepared in whole or in part, by someone else;
- using ideas or direct, verbatim quotations, paraphrased material, algorithms, formulae, scientific or mathematical concepts, or ideas without appropriate acknowledgment in any academic assignment;
- using another's data or research findings without appropriate acknowledgement;
- submitting a computer program developed in whole or in part by someone else, with or without modifications, as one's own; and
- failing to acknowledge sources through the use of proper citations when using another's work and/or failing to use quotations marks.

Plagiarism is a serious offence which cannot be resolved directly with the course's instructor. The Associate Deans of the Faculty conduct 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 may include a mark of zero for the plagiarized work or a final grade of "F" for the course.

More information on the University's Academic Integrity Policy can be found at:
<https://carleton.ca/registrar/academic-integrity/>.

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).

Submission and Return of Term Work

Papers must be submitted directly to the instructor according to the instructions in the course outline. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the departmental office will not accept assignments submitted in hard copy.

Grading

Standing in a course is determined by the course instructor, subject to the approval of the faculty Dean. Final standing in courses will be shown by alphabetical grades. The system of grades used, with corresponding grade points is:

Percentage	Letter grade	12-point scale	Percentage	Letter grade	12-point scale
90-100	A+	12	67-69	C+	6
85-89	A	11	63-66	C	5
80-84	A-	10	60-62	C-	4
77-79	B+	9	57-59	D+	3
73-76	B	8	53-56	D	2
70-72	B-	7	50-52	D-	1

Standing in a course is determined by the course instructor subject to the approval of the Faculty Dean. This means that grades submitted by an instructor may be subject to revision. No grades are final until they have been approved by the Dean.

Carleton E-mail Accounts

All email communication to students from the Department of Political Science will be via official Carleton University e-mail accounts and/or Brightspace. As important course and university information is distributed this way, it is the student's responsibility to monitor their Carleton University email accounts and Brightspace.

Carleton Political Science Society

The Carleton Political Science Society (CPSS) has made its mission to provide a social environment for politically inclined students and faculty. By hosting social events, including Model Parliament, debates, professional development sessions and more, CPSS aims to involve all political science students at Carleton University. Our mandate is to arrange social and academic activities in order to instill a sense of belonging within the Department and the larger University community. Members can benefit through our networking opportunities, academic engagement initiatives and numerous events which aim to complement both academic and social life at Carleton University. To find out more, visit us on Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/CarletonPoliticalScienceSociety/>.

Official Course Outline

The course outline posted to the Political Science website is the official course outline.