

Pol 193 Politics and the Arts

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Office Hour: by appointment
Wednesday 2:10-4:00 / Birge Carnegie #24 or by Zoom.
Class Location EM 119

Office hours are an opportunity for you to ask questions, discuss interesting course concepts, or to ask for academic advice.

Accessibility Needs (www.accessibility.utoronto.ca)

If you require accommodations for a disability, or have any accessibility concerns about the course, the classroom or course materials, please contact [Accessibility Services](#) as soon as possible.

It is not uncommon for university students to experience a range of health and mental health issues that may result in barriers to achieving their academic goals. The University of Toronto offers a wide range of services that may be of assistance. You are encouraged to seek out these resources early and often.

On Campus: Your college Registrar's Office, and / or Dean of Students' Office
Student Life - <http://www.studentlife.utoronto.ca>

Health and Wellness Centre - <http://www.studentlife.utoronto.ca/hwc>

Off-Campus: Good2Talk - a post-secondary (24/7) helpline (1-866-925-5454).

Course Modality

This is an "in-person" class.

However, there is a chance that the first few meetings may take place over Zoom as I recover from surgery. You may expect more information prior to the start of class.

What to do if you're feeling unwell

1. Report your sickness to your course instructor.
2. Go home
3. If desired, Email U of T's Occupational Health Nurse (ehs.occhealth@utoronto.ca) who will conduct assessment and contact tracing, and will provide further direction

Course Description

The course will examine the relation between politics and the arts. Political ideas are often expressed in the theatre through movies, plays, through novels, through painting and sculpture. We will sample works that illustrate this relation.

The course will take the format of a weekly seminar discussion. Readings have been kept short being mainly essays or chapters from a work and will serve as an introduction to the theorists. Please come prepared to discuss the concepts raised in the texts. As this is a seminar, I will request two or three members of the class to lead discussion. A sign-up list will be distributed in our second class.

Course Objectives

The study of political ideas is the academic goal of the course. The course is also intended to satisfy partially the following competencies: in Critical and Creative Thinking by reflective examination of ideas and judgments, Communication skills in presenting written and oral arguments, Information Literacy by effective use of the library and other sources of information and Social and Ethical Responsibility by engaging in a critical reflection on your views and the views of others.

Evaluation

The evaluation will consist of:

- 1) A review of maximum two pages on Camus' *Just Assassins* or Sartre's *The Wall*. The review is due January 30. As a guide for the critical review, I would ask that you pick out what is, in your opinion, the central idea of the work you are examining. Explain the idea and indicate its strength or weakness. That is, do a critical assessment of the idea being considered. You need not examine all the ideas in the play, only what you view as the central or most interesting idea. The reviews should not be a summary of the play. The critical review is to focus on the theoretical aspect of the work. Present the ideas. You may also be asked to present, briefly in 5 minutes, your review to the class. The presentation will not form part of the mark. The review amounts to 30% of the course mark.
- 2) A term research paper of approximately 1,500 words. The paper is due Monday, March 13 amounting to 50% of your final mark. You will be asked to present your paper to the seminar on either March 20, or March 27. It will form 10% of the mark. The presentation of your essay topic should be a maximum 10 minutes in length. The seminar presentations schedule will be set after the Reading break.
- 3) Class participation 10%.

Submission of work by e mail only, preferably in Word or PDF.

Late penalties are 5% per school day.

Note: In the event of a disruption to the class or to any member of the class owing to a health or other disruption where we cannot meet the marking scheme will be adjusted to 40% for the first paper and 60% for the second. In this case as well, work is to be submitted by e mail.

Term Essay Topics

1. Justice is a cry heard today by many. As it was by the Old Women in *The Visit*. In your view, was justice served? If not, what would be justice?
2. Did Plato get the relation of politics to the arts right? If not, what would be your view of the relationship?
3. Analyze Michel Serres' natural contract. Is it an improvement on the social contracts of the past?

4. Democracy needs a rethink. Set out Lyotard's analysis of Marcel Duchamp's art. What is your view of the analysis.
5. Freedom is not a political category but rather an existential one. Comment.
6. "I rebel, therefore, we exist". Did Camus get it right?
7. What can art teach us about the political?
8. Or a topic of your choosing. Please discuss it first with me.

Readings

The number of writers concerned with politics and the arts is large. The readings highlighted here may be replaced or supplemented by others by agreement with the class. The selections may also be found on the internet though I have not checked for copyright.

La Fontaine, 'The Wolf and the Lamb' a fable.
(lafontaine.mmic.northwestern.edu)

Charles Baudelaire's, "Counterfeit Money" can be found at the end of Jacques Derrida's, *Given Time*, U of Chicago Press, 1992. (monoskop.org) or "Counterfeit Money" by Charles Baudelaire. (biblioklept.org).

Friedrich Dürrenmatt, *The Visit*, Grove Press. Also found in *Plays and Essays*, Continuum N.Y, 1982 which also contains *The Visit*, and other writings.
(advdpdrama.weebly.com >uploads> the visit)

Jean Paul Sartre, "The Wall" in *The Wall*, New Directions: N.Y., 1948, p. 1-17
<https://almabooks.com> > uploads

Jean-Francois Lyotard, Duchamp's *Transformers*, Lapis Press: Venice, 1990, p. 25-28.
Duchamp's *The Large Glass* (*The Bride Stripped Bare by her Bachelors*) can be found at WikiArt.org.
<https://www.scribd.com> > document > LYOTARD-1977-...

Plato, "Book 10", *The Republic*. There are many translations. I use the G.M.A. Grube, *Plato's Republic*, Hackett: Indianapolis, 1974 (or the 1992 revised edition), p. 239-263. The Bloom translation is also fine.
<https://d.umn.edu>. One can find book 10 in the Jowett translation which is a standard classical translation.

Ridley Scott, *Blade Runner*, 1982. Film.

Serres, Michel, *The Natural Contract*, translated by Elizabeth MacArthur and William Paulson, University of Michigan Press: Ann Arbor, 1995, p. 1-50.
<https://monoskop.org>>images>Serres_Michel_The_Natural_Contract. Pdf
The Goya painting can be found at the beginning of *The Natural Contract* or on Wikiart.

Schedule of the Seminars

JANUARY 9

Introduction

The first part of the class will focus on introducing ourselves and providing an overview of the course. Then a class discussion of 'The Wolf and the Lamb' the fable by La Fontaine. This will give you an idea of the approach the course will take.

JANUARY 16

Plato

The Case against the Poets

The classic text in the Western tradition setting out the relation of politics to the arts can be found in Book 10 of Plato's Republic. A reprise of this argument can also be found in Alan Bloom's introduction to *Politics and the Arts*, Cornell: Ithaca, 1968.

JANUARY 23

Albert Camus

The Politics of Rebellion

After Camus' early works, he takes up the question of political action notably in the lengthy essay *The Rebel*. We will explore some of the themes of historical and metaphysical rebellion from *The Rebel* in his play *The Just Assassins*. Camus' work is also interesting for what it says about terrorism and the important question about 'limits' to action. This is a play based on the uprising in Russia in 1905 some years prior to the Russian Revolution.

JANUARY 30

J. P. Sartre

The Wall and Existentialism

This short story, set in the Spanish Civil War, touches on one of the most important concepts in Sartre's politics and that is existentialism. Sartre's view was expressed in *Being and Nothingness* his long philosophical work. In *The Wall* we get a sense of his idea of death and freedom. In the second part, we will have a discussion of Pablo Picasso's painting *Guernica* which can be found at wikiart.org and depicts the violence of the Spanish War.

FEBURARY 6

Friedrich Dürrenmatt

The Visit

In classical Greece there was the 'polis', a political city, which embodied a community. What happens to this community in the late twentieth century? *The Visit of the Old Women* who returns to her 'native' city sets out a rather different 'politics. Was there justice in the end?

FEBURARY 13

The Natural Contract

Michel Serres believes that the social contract, as articulated historically, needs now to be modified becoming a 'natural contract'. We will examine this through the Francisco Goya painting 'Men Fighting with Sticks' and Serres work *The Natural Contract*.

FEBURARY 20 READING WEEK (I will be available only by e mail during the week.)

FEBURARY 27

Ridley Scott

Blade Runner

The well-known science-fiction film raises many themes including the question of technology and the question of whether we are humans or replicants.

MARCH 6

Charles Baudelaire and Jacques Derrida

The Economy, Ethics, Time, and Exchange

We will examine a reading of 'exchange', 'value', 'reason' 'time' found in the short story 'Counterfeit Money' by Charles Baudelaire. A commentary on the reflection can be found in Derrida's *Given Time* for those interested.

MARCH 13

Marcel Duchamp and François Lyotard

A New View of Democracy

Marcel Duchamp's *The Large Glass* seen from the perspective of the French philosopher Jean Francois Lyotard presents an alternate view of democracy.

MARCH 20 & MARCH 27

Presentations of Essays

APRIL 3 Last Class