Hegel, Marx, &
Universal Emancipation
Prof. Hasana Sharp

PHIL 445:
19th C. Political Theory
hasana.sharp@mcgill.ca

Territorial acknowledgement: McGill University is on land which is the traditional and unceded territory of the Kanien'keha:ka (Mohawk), a place that has long served as a site of meeting and exchange amongst nations.

Description:

This course will consist primarily in a study of two major texts in nineteenth century political philosophy: Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* and Marx's *Capital,* vol. 1. Although there are important differences between Hegel's and Marx's political theories, they both depart decisively from the methodological individualism that is commonplace in early modern social contract theory. Rather than beginning with individuals as atomic units that enter, one by one or all at once, into civil society, Hegel and Marx understand individuality as an historical achievement of modern social and political life. Their political philosophies are, first and foremost, theories of the *social*. Thinking about politics for these nineteenth-century philosophers involves an examination of the *relationships* that constitute society, individual and group agency, and state power. Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* outlines multiple domains of social relations – for example, property and exchange, work, family, and the courts – through which spiritual beings seek recognition from one another. We will spend (roughly) the first half of the course examining Hegel's rich and complex treatment of "right" as an expression of the wills of self-conscious beings struggling to find themselves reflected in a world of their making. We will also briefly consider 19th century Black American thinkers whose ideas of emancipation are influenced by Hegelianism: W.E.B. Du Bois and Anna Julia Cooper.

The second half of the course will touch on some early texts and examine Marx's monumental first volume of *Capital* in some depth*.* Although not a direct examination of state power, *Capital* analyzes a major sphere of modern life – the economy – as a system of relationships whose logic comes to pervade human existence (and, arguably, much of nonhuman existence as well). Philosophy, the law, concepts of right and freedom, and even our perception come to be organized by the imperatives of capitalist exchange relations. Whereas the social contract tradition begins with an idea of solitary and natural "man," Marx finds (mostly) men in relationship to one another. These relations are not, however, driven by the contradictions internal to self-consciousness. With Marx, the social is a domain of class struggle, the contradiction between different forms of practice. We will conclude this half as well with selections from DuBois and reflections of two 19th century women thinkers on questions of emancipation (Clara Zetkin and Rosa Luxembourg).

Note: There is a pre-requisite of at least one political philosophy course, which I am happy to interpret broadly, to include political theory and cultural studies courses taken in other departments. The main requirement is willingness to read, discuss, and persevere with difficult (and exciting) books.

Texts:

G.W.F. Hegel, *Outlines of the Philosophy of Right*, translated by T.M Know and S. Houlgate, Oxford University Press, 2008.

K. Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, translated by B. Fowkes, Penguin/Vintage.

Other texts available on *My Courses.*

Requirements:

Evaluations will be based upon contributions to the discussion board (15%); one short paper on Hegel (30%); a term paper proposal (10%), peer review (5%); and a final term paper (40% of grade). I very much want you to attend class, but I will not keep a record of attendance. Regular, informed, in-class participation will benefit your discussion board grade.

Discussion Board: You must post questions about the reading **8 times** during the semester and reply to your peers **4 times** throughout the course (you are welcome to contribute more frequently). Your questions should concern a specific passage or claim from the reading, which you are trying to understand. They should therefore take the following form: "On page X, Author says '……..' " Then you ask your question. Your question may take various forms. For example: I think it means Y, but I am not sure because… Or, if author means Y, does Z follow? Author B says something else, and so…. Etc. Replies to your peers can take any form that sincerely engages with their questions, ideas, or reflections.

Discussion will be graded based on evidence that you did the reading and reflected on it. Your understandings do not need to be correct – the point of this is to try out your first impressions of what the (notoriously difficult) authors are saying.

Short Paper: A short paper on Hegel will be due around mid-term. The assignment will be posted on *My*Courses at least two weeks before it is due. (1,000 words; plus/minus 10%)

Paper proposal: The final paper will be on a topic of your choosing, though it must engage seriously with Marx's *Capital* (since you will have already written a paper on Hegel). You are encouraged to consider the other authors we study in the course. You are welcome (but not required) to explore other authors, contemporary issues, or research questions of your own. You will be expected to consult 3-6 secondary sources (and cite them appropriately in your paper). Around 2/3 of the way through the term, you will turn in a prospective abstract describing your topic and suggesting a tentative thesis. It will also identify relevant parts of the primary texts for your argument. The proposal is not a contract, so it is okay if your final paper mutates into a different shape. This is an opportunity to receive feedback on your ideas in advance. Even though you will not be bound to its contents, it will be graded based on clarity, creativity, and appropriateness of the use of texts and source materials. (600-750 words, not including bibliography)

Peer Review: There will be a mandatory peer review over email. This is an opportunity to get feedback on your paper before you submit it, and to practice providing feedback for others. You should have a rough draft of your paper and be prepared to read and reflect critically on a paper by one of your peers. Forms will be provided and must be submitted to My Courses (comments made directly on the paper will be peer-to-peer communication). Do your best to offer suggestions about the thesis and the ideas in the paper, although you may point out some mechanical improvements to be made.

Final paper: You will submit a final thesis-driven term paper that reflects your engagement with the course material. Further instructions will be posted on My Courses no later than mid-term. (3,000 words, give or take 10%)

Paper Grading Rubric				
	A (Excellent)	**B (Good)**	**C (Adequate)**	**D (Inadequate)**
Understanding	Accurate (or well-justified), non-superficial grasp of core ideas; consideration of implications, significance, stakes.	Solid understanding of the assigned readings, of the lectures, and of the specific task of the assignment.	Displays a limited or superficial understanding of concepts and texts. Some errors. Misses or misconstrues implications of claims or ideas.	Significant errors and/ or misunderstanding of the assignment.
Argument	Non-obvious, clear, interesting, plausible, and contestable thesis.	Clear and plausible thesis; may be unsurprising or too easy to defend.	Thesis is confusing, vague, or especially obvious.	Thesis is missing, difficult to identify, or evinces significant misunderstanding of course material.
Evidence	Cites and analyses primary texts in a thoughtful, skillful, or original manner. Insightful and cogent analysis. Demonstrates depth of engagement with ideas from the course (and secondary sources for longer paper).	Cites and explains relevant textual evidence. Considers arguments from secondary sources when appropriate (i.e., for the longer paper).	Insufficient, unhelpful, and/ or unexplained use of textual evidence. Some misunderstandings of concepts, texts, or arguments.	Irrelevant, inappropriate, and/ or missing evidence.
Reasoning	Develops argument in an organized and focused way; explains textual evidence; justifies claims.	Can identify argument and follow paper, but justification of claims, organization, or focus needs improvement.	Reasoning and justification is incomplete, unclear, or underdeveloped. Lacks focus and/or organization; may be disjointed and somewhat difficult to follow.	Incoherent, confused, and unfocused. Difficult to read. Or, off-topic and not sufficiently related to the course material.
Mechanics	Clear and concise; easy to follow; correct grammar, punctuation, spelling, and citation.	Coherent, readable, and proof-read. Would benefit from some editing and polish.	Problems with word choice, grammar, spelling, and coherence. *Rough* draft.	Significant problems with presentation, organization, clarity.

Work that receives an "F" is absent, incomplete, or makes no serious attempt to meet the formal and substantial requirements. The flaws and gaps in understanding are so grave that the reader cannot detect a concerted effort to apply the course material.

Use of Artificial Intelligence and LLM technology is not permitted in this class. My aspiration as a teacher is to help you to develop and enjoy your own powers of thinking and writing (though I recognize that is sometimes arduous and not enjoyable in the moment).

Grading Scale
All work in this course will be graded on the standard letter grade scale (A to F), equivalent to the 4-point GPA scale. An A on a course component is worth 4 points, an A- is worth 3.7 points, etc. To calculate your final grade, the grade points you earn on each course component will be multiplied by the relative weight of that component, and then the scores will be added to get your final grade-point average. That average will determine your final letter grade for the course. The table below sets out the official scheme used by McGill to convert letter grades to grade points. For example, if your overall grade-point average is a 3.4, you would earn a B+ in the course. Do not rely on the calculator in MyCourses for computing your final grade, as that calculator by default aggregates grades according to the 0-100% scale and will not display the accurate final grade you have earned in this course.

Grade	Grade Points	Grade Range
A	4.0	3.85-4.00
A-	3.7	3.50-3.84
B+	3.3	3.15-3.49
B	3.0	2.85-3.14
B-	2.7	2.50-2.84
C+	2.3	2.15-2.49
C	2.0	1.85-2.14
D	1.0	1.0-1.86
F	0.0	0.00-0.99

Academic Integrity:
McGill University values academic integrity. All students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures (see http://www.mcgill.ca/integrity for more information).

Other Notes:
- In the event of extraordinary circumstances beyond the University's control, the content and/or evaluation scheme in this course is subject to change.
- In accord with McGill University's Charter of Students' Rights, students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French any written work that is to be graded.
- As instructor of this course, I endeavor to provide an inclusive learning environment. If you experience barriers to learning in this course, do not hesitate to discuss them with me and the Office for Students with Disabilities, 514-398-6009.
- I will gladly honor your request to address you by the name and pronoun you indicate.