We think of imagination as belonging to the realm of art. However, can imagination be so narrowly confined? It has been argued that imagination is intrinsic to the very possibility of thinking, to the way individuals constitute their moral self and identity, and to the constitution of the public realm. The question this course asks is: What is the relationship that imagination has/can have with the larger field of human affairs?

In the attempt to answer this question, we will explore in this course the role that imagination can play in politics and in the making of the moral judgments that are needed to guide human affairs. We will see that, on the one hand, liberals are right. Imagination can be held responsible for the success of extreme ideologies, such as racism and tribal nationalism and, in extremis, for mass murder politics. On the other hand, we will see that a politics that is true to the values of freedom and democracy requires a benign public employment of imagination, which increases the autonomy of the individuals. We will explore these different perspectives on imagination through a conversation with Hannah Arendt, a Jewish German philosopher, who immigrated to the United States in 1941.

First, we will read Arendt’s work on the origins of totalitarianism and try to understand how ideological imagination can becloud so much judgment and lead to the horrors of Stalinism and Nazism. We will also explore Arendt’s view of totalitarianism: the elements that favored its crystallization, the forms it took in the European politics of the 19th and the 20th centuries, as well as its structural components: its forms of mobilization and organization.

Second, we will go more in depth and focus on one of the participants to the orchestration of mass murder politics that Nazism made possible, Adolf Eichmann. The intention is to understand how Eichmann was capable of committing so much (banal) evil, as the orchestrator of the Final Solution (the extermination of Jews in Europe). Eichmann’s case will provide the framework for trying to understand the challenges that modern individuals face in developing their moral conscience. What we need to comprehend is that moral conscience and the ability to think and judge in ways that allow individuals to distinguish between right and wrong cannot be developed in the absence of a specific form of imagination; an activity where, obviously, Eichmann failed.

Third, we will read some pieces that Arendt wrote on the work of different writers, such as Lessing, Kafka, and Heine. We will also read the works of these artists because they are wonderful and because we want to develop our own interpretation of them, so that we can
engage Arendt’s views critically. We will wrap up the class by reading a novel written by a Jewish Romanian writer, Mihail Sebastian, who witnessed the rise of fascism in Romania. We will also read some fragments from Sebastian’s Journal: 1935-1944. The intention is to understand several facets of the role that imagination can play in politics, as an antidote to totalitarianism and to the moral blindness of its perpetrators. This last section will be prefaced by a short introduction to the role culture and art play for Arendt in the human condition, both in politics and in the acts of thinking and judgment.

**Course objectives**

In Arendt’s view, totalitarianism is the most unexpected event that shattered the foundations of modern politics, as well as the conceptual tools to think about politics and understand it. Thus, the first objective is to understand her notion of totalitarianism, both as a movement and as a political regime;

The second objective is to explore the relationship that Arendt theorizes between imagination and politics, particularly, the public ambiguity of imagination, the fact that this can enhance freedom as it can very well undermine it, thus serving projects of domination and mass murder politics;

The third objective is to understand how imagination is central to the act of thinking and to the formation of moral conscience, thus playing a central role in the prevention of evil;

The fourth objective is to grasp the meaning of Arendt’s controversial idea of “the banality of evil” that she used to describe Adolf Eichmann, the orchestrator of the extermination of the Jews during the Nazi regime in the interwar Germany;

The fifth objective is to understand how story-telling, as practiced by several modern artists, can enhance the moral and public powers of imagination.

Last but not least, the final objective is to become better readers, thinkers, speakers, and writers.

**Achieving the Course Objectives:**

We will learn about all these issues and try to reach our course objectives by carefully and closely reading different parts from the following books:  

We will also watch two movies: Leni Riefenstahl, *Triumph of the Will* and Margarethe von Trotta, *Hannah Arendt*

**Schedule of the screenings that will take place at the Gould Library:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Movie</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9/22/2018</td>
<td>7:15 PM</td>
<td>Library 305</td>
<td><em>Triumph of the Will</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9/23/2018</td>
<td>7:30 PM</td>
<td>Library 305</td>
<td><em>Triumph of the Will</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10/6/2018</td>
<td>7:15 PM</td>
<td>Library 305</td>
<td><em>Hannah Arendt</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10/7/2018</td>
<td>7:15 PM</td>
<td>Library 305</td>
<td><em>Hannah Arendt</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Course Requirements:**

1. **Two short (four page) essays:**

   **Topic for the first essay:**
   a) In Arendt’s view, totalitarianism governs through ideology and terror. Explain why this is the case and also show what public employment of imagination facilitates the use of total terror and ideology. Do you think that Arendt’s analysis of totalitarianism can still help us to understand contemporary political phenomena and developments? Justify your answer. (The essay is due on **October 14 by 10 PM** (20%))

   **Topic for the second essay:**
   b) Arendt thinks that imagination is central to the act of thinking. Explain why this is the case and, particularly, why imagination is central to the development of moral conscience. Moreover, do you agree with Arendt that Eichmann, as someone who lacked imagination and thus was incapable of thinking, was just a bureaucrat
doing his duty or do you think that, in order to be able to do what Eichmann did, one needs to really be a fanatic who fervently believes in the leading ideology? (The essay is due on **November 5 by 10 PM** (20%)

2. **Class presentations** (in connection with the movies and the novels, plays, and short stories that we will be reading in our class) (15%)
You can choose one of the two movies. You can also choose Kafka’s *Castle*, Lessing’s *Nathan the Wise*, Arendt’s piece, “The Jew as a Pariah: A Hidden Tradition,” or Sebastian’s *For Two Thousand Years* and the fragments from his *Journal*. The assignment requires you to present the main ideas of the artistic work, as well as to situate it within a larger context (of the artist’s work and of his historical time) and then lead class discussion in ways that show how the artistic work helps us understand Arendt’s ideas about the political role of imagination.

3. **Final Take Home Exam** (35%) The exam will be posted on Moodle on November 17 at 10 AM and will be email to mlupp@carleton.edu no later than November 18 at 5 PM.

4. **Active and informed class participation:** This includes: (i) attending classes; (ii) doing the readings for the day; and (iii) in class assignments that will test your degree of familiarization with and understanding of the reading that you were requested to prepare for the current day (10%).

**What is Expected from the Students?**

Students will be expected to read, think, form arguments and counter-arguments, understand the fundamental concepts, and participate (in a critical and creative manner) in class discussion. That means that students must keep up in their reading assignments and attend class regularly. Students must be fully prepared *at all times* to discuss the arguments and concepts from the previous readings. The best students will be knowledgeable, critical but balanced in their critical assessments, and will develop coherent and sound arguments that they can defend in their essays, in their exams, and in class discussion.

**Academic dishonesty:**

"All assignments, quizzes, and exams must be done on your own. Note that academic dishonesty includes not only cheating, fabrication, and plagiarism, but also includes helping other students commit acts of academic dishonesty by allowing them to obtain copies of your work. You are allowed to use the Web for reference purposes, but you may not copy material from any website or any other source without proper citations. In short, all submitted work must be your own."
Cases of academic dishonesty will be dealt with strictly. Each such case will be referred to the Academic Standing Committee via the Associate Dean of Students or the Associate Dean of the College. A formal finding of responsibility can result in disciplinary sanctions ranging from a censure and a warning to permanent dismissal in the case of repeated and serious offenses.

The academic penalty for a finding of responsibility can range from a grade of zero in the specific assignment to an F in this course.”

**SCHEDULE OF CLASSES AND READINGS:**

**Why imagination?**

**September 11:** Why imagination in politics? Who was Hannah Arendt?
*Reading:* Hannah Arendt, “What Remains? The Language Remains”: A Conversation with Günter Gauss” (Moodle)

**September 13:** Imagination in human life: political dangers and promises

**Ideological Imagination: Antisemitism, Imperialism, Nationalism, and Totalitarianism**

**September 18:** Anti-Semitism

**September 20:** Imperialism and racism
*Reading:* Hannah Arendt, The Origins of Totalitarianism, Race-Thinking Before Racism and Race and Bureaucracy

**September 25:** Imperialism and tribal nationalism
*Reading:* Hannah Arendt, The Origins of Totalitarianism, Continental Imperialism: The Pan-Movements and The Decline of the Nation-State and the End of the Rights of Man

**September 27:** Propaganda and organization
*Reading:* Hannah Arendt, The Origins of Totalitarianism, The Totalitarian Movement Discussion of Leni Riefenstahl’s movie, The Triumph of the Will

**October 2:** Total domination
*Reading:* Hannah Arendt, The Origins of Totalitarianism, Totalitarianism in Power
October 4: Ideology and terror

Moral Judgment, Politics, and Imagination

October 9: Eichmann in Jerusalem
Reading: Hannah Arendt, Eichmann in Jerusalem, pages 3-151

October 11: The Banality of Evil
Reading: Hannah Arendt, Eichmann in Jerusalem, pages 151-280
Discussion of Margarethe von Trotta’s movie, Hannah Arendt

October 16: Where did Eichmann Fail? Thinking and Imagination
Reading: Hannah Arendt, “Some Questions of Moral Philosophy” and The Life of the Mind, Thinking, pages 166-193 (Moodle)

No class on October 18!

Artists and Politics

October 23: The human condition and the role of culture in politics
Readings: Hannah Arendt, “Labor, Work, Action” (Moodle) and “Culture and Politics” in Reflections on Literature

October 25: Pariahs and the power of their imagination

October 30: The power of Kafka’s imagination

November 1: The power of imagination in dark times
Readings: Hannah Arendt, “On Humanity in Dark Times: Thoughts about Lessing” (Moodle) and Lessing, Nathan the Wise (Moodle)
November 6: The power of imagination of dark times
Readings: Mihail Sebastian, For Two Thousand Years, Parts One and Two and Mihaela Czobor-Lupp, “Being Jewish in Interwar Romania: From Pariah’s Isolation to Resistance” (The Case of Mihail Sebastian) (Moodle)

November 8: The Power of Imagination in Dark Times
Reading: Mihail Sebastian, For Two Thousand Years, Parts Three, Four, Five, and Six and Journal selections (Moodle)

November 13: Final Reflections and Discussion: How shall we understand the political and moral role of imagination?