



**Course ID and Title:** IR318 – Violent Conflict (section 37808D)

**Units:** 4

**Term:** Fall, 2023

**Day and Time:** Wednesday, 5:30-8:20 p.m.

**Location:** ZHS 163

**Instructor:** Ronald E. Osborn

**Office:** by arrangement

**Office Hours:** by appointment

**Contact Info:** rosborn@usc.edu

### I. Brief Course Description

This course examines the origins and evolution of violent conflict among humans; modern efforts to end conflict; and recent research into violence in archaeology, anthropology, biology, economics, political science and psychology.

### II. Required Books

- Glover, Jonathan, *Humanity: A Moral History of the Twentieth Century* (Yale University, 2001)
- Pinker, Steven, *The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence Has Declined* (Penguin, 2011)

### III. Assessment

You will be assessed based on your choice of one of these three options:

#### Option A

15% = Participation

35% = Reading quizzes

50% = Final exam

#### Option B

50% = Reading quizzes

50% = Final exam

#### Option C

100% = Final exam

### IV. Course Outline/Reading Schedule

Wk. 1	Glover, <i>Humanity</i> , pp.1-11 (Intro., 11 pages)
Wk. 2	Glover, <i>Humanity</i> , pp.11-47 (Part I, 36 pages)
Wk. 3	Glover, <i>Humanity</i> , pp.48-119 (Part II, 71 pages)
Wk. 4	Glover, <i>Humanity</i> , pp.119-155 (Part III, 36 pages)
Wk. 5	Glover, <i>Humanity</i> , pp.155-237 (Part IV, 92 pages)
Wk. 6	Glover, <i>Humanity</i> , pp.237-317 (Part V, 80 pages)
Wk. 7	Glover, <i>Humanity</i> , pp.317-415 (Parts VI-VII, 98 pages)
Wk. 8	Pinker, <i>The Better Angels of Our Nature</i> , pp.1-59 (Ch.1-2, 59 pages)
Wk. 9	Pinker, <i>The Better Angels of Our Nature</i> , pp.59-129 (Ch.3, 70 pages)
Wk. 10	Pinker, <i>The Better Angels of Our Nature</i> , pp.129-189 (Ch.4, 60 pages)
Wk. 11	Pinker, <i>The Better Angels of Our Nature</i> , pp.189-295 (Ch.5, 106 pages)
Wk. 12	Pinker, <i>The Better Angels of Our Nature</i> , pp.296-378 (Ch.6, 82 pages)
Wk. 13	Pinker, <i>The Better Angels of Our Nature</i> , pp.378-482 (Ch.7, 104 pages)
Wk. 14	Pinker, <i>The Better Angels of Our Nature</i> , pp.482-571 (Ch.8, 89 pages)
Wk. 15	Pinker, <i>The Better Angels of Our Nature</i> , pp.571-697 (Ch.9-10, 126 pages)

## V. Full Course Description

There may be no more pressing dilemma in human affairs than the problem of violence. Despite the best efforts of diplomats, scientists, human rights advocates, religious leaders, and others, no society in human history has lived free of the threat of violence, whether at the level of interpersonal conflict or full-scale wars between states. What are the sources of violent conflict? Is violence a deep-rooted and “essential” aspect of human nature rooted in our evolutionary past? Or is violence more often the result of contingent social forces and cultural dynamics that have gained particular force in the modern world? What historical patterns or trends can we detect when we examine violence across time? And what moral, ethical, and psychological resources are needed to build a more peaceful world?

In this course, we will address these and other questions through close readings of works by two authors who in some ways offer opposing perspectives on violent conflict. Jonathan Glover’s book, *Humanity: A Moral History of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century*, confronts the staggering brutality of the past 100 years and some of the worst atrocities in human history (including the Holocaust, the Soviet Gulags, the Vietnam War, and the Rwandan genocide). He warns that our present situation is fragile and that the 21<sup>st</sup> century might prove to be as disastrous as the 20<sup>th</sup>. In *The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence Has Declined*, Steven Pinker, by contrast, offers a more optimistic view. Through a wealth of empirical data, he makes the case that the 20<sup>th</sup> century was in fact one of the *least* violent periods in human history. But how persuasive are Pinker’s arguments? By the end of this course, you should be well equipped to enter into these discussions.

## VI. Learning Objectives

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

- Explain major theories and debates in different disciplines related to violent conflict
- Analyze empirical data and evidence, including trends and magnitudes of violence
- Evaluate problems of violence from the point of view of moral and ethical theory
- Critique ideas and arguments that are practically, empirically, or morally unsound

## VII. More About Required Readings

There are two required books for this course (both of which can be purchased used for very low prices online, or new through the USC bookstore).

- Glover, Jonathan, *Humanity: A Moral History of the Twentieth Century* (Yale University, 2001)
- Pinker, Steven, *The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence Has Declined* (Penguin, 2011)

In addition to these books, I might periodically assign some articles or other supplementary materials for you to read. Any additional readings will be sent to you as either a link or a PDF attachment, or else distributed as paper copies in class. We will also regularly read material together in class.

\*Note: In this course we will read some highly disturbing material about many different kinds of violence and crimes against humanity.

## VIII. Study Expectations

As a general rule-of-thumb, most universities recommend that students spend at least 1-2 hours of study time outside of class for every credit unit of a course. This is a four-unit course. You should therefore plan to spend at least 4-8 hours outside of class every week on this course doing the readings and fulfilling all assignments. Your reading time will depend on your reading speed but should not normally exceed 1 hour per day (with weekends off!) for most students. (The audiobook version of Pinker's book is approximately 37 hours long, which spread over eight weeks averages 4.6 hours of listening time per week.)

Average amount of reading per week	Estimated Average Reading Time Per Week			
	Very methodical (70 words/min)	Normal Audiobook (150 words/min)	Normal Proof-Reading (200 words/min)	Speed Reading (260 words/min)
80 pages, 40,000 words	9.5 hours	4.4 hours	3.3 hours	2.5 hours

In addition to reading all of the assigned texts, I highly recommend that you type or write notes on the readings. Your notes should take the form of a structured outline of key ideas in each chapter along with page numbers in case you need to refer back to relevant passages. Your notes will not be collected or graded; however, they will be invaluable to you when it is time to prepare for the final exam.

## IX. Grading Scale

The grading scale for this course is as follows: A = 95-100%; A- = 90-94%; B+ = 87-89%; B = 83-86%; B- = 80-82%; C+ = 77-79%; C = 73-76%; C- = 70-72%; D = 65-69%; F = < 65%.

## X. General Attendance Policies

Attendance might be taken at either the start or the end of class, or both. A student who is not present for any roll call will be marked absent for the day. Three recorded late arrivals or early departures will count as an absence. It is your responsibility to notify me after class if you arrived late and missed a roll call.

\*Minimum Attendance Requirement: All students are required to attend a minimum of 80% of all classes in order to receive a passing grade. Any student who misses more than three classes will receive an automatic failing grade and should withdraw from this course.

## XI. More on Assessment: Three Options

Your grade for this course will be based on both your academic performance and your choice of the grade you desire to receive (see Academic Commitment Forms at the end of this syllabus).

- If you aspire to receive a grade in the A-range, you will be evaluated on three things: 1) participation; 2) Reading quizzes, and 3) a final exam.
- If you aspire to receive a grade in the B-range, you are not required to actively participate in this course beyond attending a minimum of 80% of classes (12 out of 15 weeks). Students

who select the B-range option will be evaluated on two things: 1) reading quizzes, and 2) a final exam.

- Students who choose to pursue a grade in the C-range are not required to participate beyond attending a minimum of 80% or 12 out of 15 classes, and are not required to take any weekly reading quizzes. They will be evaluated on one thing: the final exam. To receive a C-range grade, they must receive at least a B grade on the final exam.

\*Academic Commitment Form Requirement: By Week 2 of this course, you are required to sign and submit by uploading on Blackboard one of the attached Academic Commitment Forms indicating which grade you plan to pursue in this course. Note: you are not guaranteed the grade you select.

## **XII. What Participation Means in this Course**

Students who sign Academic Commitment Form A will be evaluated in part on their participation. Participation for the purposes of this course means the following:

- 1) Being here: First and foremost, to participate one must show up. Students who desire to receive a grade in the A-range should be present for 90% of the course (or 13 out of 15 classes). Out of consideration for the vicissitudes of university life and emergency situations, you are allowed to miss up to two classes without any grade penalty.
- 2) Zero screens: Screens are powerful tools but also forces of distraction and separation in our lives. For this class, you should come prepared to fully engage with others. For this reason, students who are pursuing an A-range grade will not use their phones, computers, tablets, or any other electronic devices at any time once class begins.<sup>1</sup> Ever. They will come to class each week with a notebook and pencil, pen, or quill to take down any notes during course discussions and lectures. If you sign Academic Commitment Form A and are observed looking at phone or other screen device during class time, this will be considered a violation of your commitment and will be noted by the instructor without interruption of the class or notification of the student.
- 3) *Ad fontes*—back to the (paper) sources: The best scientific evidence shows that your understanding and retention as a reader will be greater if you read with a physical, paper copy of the book in your hands.<sup>2</sup> Students who aspire to an A-range grade in this course are required to borrow, barter, or purchase physical copies of the assigned books, AND bring the physical copies of the books to class each week since we might read from them during our discussions. Note: you might be asked to show your physical copy of the book in class as part of your participation or reading quiz grade.
- 4) Joining the conversation: In addition to the above minimum expectations for strong participation in this course, students who wish to be evaluated in part on their participation should come to class prepared to actively join in dialogue with the instructor and with their

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<sup>1</sup> The only exception to this requirement will be for students who provide documentation that they have a special assistance need that absolutely requires technological aids. In this case, we will work to find an appropriate solution in coordination with the Office of Student Accessibility Services.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Nicholas Carr, *The Shallows: What the Internet is Doing to Our Brains* (W. W. Norton, 2020).

peers. Your contributions to our discussions should reflect your thoughtful reading of the assigned texts and your deep engagement with the ideas that you encounter.

### **XIII. What You Can Expect on the Reading Quizzes**

Reading quizzes will have one goal in mind—confirming that you have carefully read the assigned books with a reasonable level of retention. On different weeks, quizzes might take the form of either short answer or short essay questions. It is my hope that students find the quizzes to be surprisingly easy if they have done the readings but exceedingly difficult if they have not.

### **XIV. What You Can Expect on the Final Exam**

The final exam will be comprehensive of the ideas covered in this course. It will be a hand-written, in-person exam. The instructor will provide more information about the format of the exam closer to the exam date to help you prepare.

### **XV. Academic Integrity**

*\*\*From the USC Handbook: The University of Southern California is foremost a learning community committed to fostering successful scholars and researchers dedicated to the pursuit of knowledge and the transmission of ideas. Academic misconduct is in contrast to the university's mission to educate students through a broad array of first-rank academic, professional, and extracurricular programs and includes any act of dishonesty in the submission of academic work (either in draft or final form). This course will follow the expectations for academic integrity as stated in the [USC Student Handbook](#). All students are expected to submit assignments that are original work and prepared specifically for the course/section in this academic term. You may not submit work written by others or "recycle" work prepared for other courses without obtaining written permission from the instructor(s). Students suspected of engaging in academic misconduct will be reported to the Office of Academic Integrity. Other violations of academic misconduct include, but are not limited to, cheating, plagiarism, fabrication (e.g., falsifying data), knowingly assisting others in acts of academic dishonesty, and any act that gains or is intended to gain an unfair academic advantage. The impact of academic dishonesty is far-reaching and is considered a serious offense against the university and could result in outcomes such as failure on the assignment, failure in the course, suspension, or even expulsion from the university. For more information about academic integrity see the [student handbook](#) or the [Office of Academic Integrity's website](#), and university policies on [Research and Scholarship Misconduct](#).*

### **XVI. USC Course Content Distribution and Synchronous Session Recordings Policies**

*\*\*USC has policies that prohibit recording and distribution of any synchronous and asynchronous course content outside of the learning environment. Recording a university class without the express permission of the instructor and announcement to the class, or unless conducted pursuant to an Office of Student Accessibility Services (OSAS) accommodation. Recording can inhibit free discussion in the future, and thus infringe on the academic freedom of other students as well as the instructor. ([Living our Unifying Values: The USC Student Handbook](#), page 13). Distribution or use of notes, recordings, exams, or other intellectual property, based on university classes or lectures without the express permission of the instructor for purposes other than individual or group study. This includes but is not limited to providing materials for distribution by services publishing course materials. This restriction on unauthorized use also applies to all information, which had been distributed to*

students or in any way had been displayed for use in relationship to the class, whether obtained in class, via email, on the internet, or via any other media. ([Living our Unifying Values: The USC Student Handbook](#), page 13).

## **XVII. Accommodations**

*\*\*USC welcomes students with disabilities into all of the University's educational programs. [The Office of Student Accessibility Services \(OSAS\)](#) is responsible for the determination of appropriate accommodations for students who encounter disability-related barriers. Once a student has completed the OSAS process (registration, initial appointment, and submitted documentation) and accommodations are determined to be reasonable and appropriate, a Letter of Accommodation (LOA) will be available to generate for each course. The LOA must be given to each course instructor by the student and followed up with a discussion. This should be done as early in the semester as possible as accommodations are not retroactive. More information can be found at [osas.usc.edu](http://osas.usc.edu). You may contact OSAS at (213) 740-0776 or via email at [osasfrontdesk@usc.edu](mailto:osasfrontdesk@usc.edu).*

## **XVIII. Support Systems**

[Counseling and Mental Health](#) - (213) 740-9355 – 24/7 on call

Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention.

[988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline](#) - 988 for both calls and text messages – 24/7 on call

The 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline (formerly known as the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline) provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, across the United States. The Lifeline is comprised of a national network of over 200 local crisis centers, combining custom local care and resources with national standards and best practices. The new, shorter phone number makes it easier for people to remember and access mental health crisis services (though the previous 1 (800) 273-8255 number will continue to function indefinitely) and represents a continued commitment to those in crisis.

[Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services \(RSVP\)](#) - (213) 740-9355(WELL) – 24/7 on call

Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender- and power-based harm (including sexual assault, intimate partner violence, and stalking).

[Office for Equity, Equal Opportunity, and Title IX \(EEO-TIX\)](#) - (213) 740-5086

Information about how to get help or help someone affected by harassment or discrimination, rights of protected classes, reporting options, and additional resources for students, faculty, staff, visitors, and applicants.

[Reporting Incidents of Bias or Harassment](#) - (213) 740-5086 or (213) 821-8298

Avenue to report incidents of bias, hate crimes, and microaggressions to the Office for Equity, Equal Opportunity, and Title for appropriate investigation, supportive measures, and response.

[The Office of Student Accessibility Services \(OSAS\)](#) - (213) 740-0776

OSAS ensures equal access for students with disabilities through providing academic accommodations and auxiliary aids in accordance with federal laws and university policy.

[USC Campus Support and Intervention](#) - (213) 740-0411

Assists students and families in resolving complex personal, financial, and academic issues adversely affecting their success as a student.

[Diversity, Equity and Inclusion](#) - (213) 740-2101

Information on events, programs and training, the Provost's Diversity and Inclusion Council, Diversity Liaisons for each academic school, chronology, participation, and various resources for students.

[USC Emergency](#) - UPC: (213) 740-4321, HSC: (323) 442-1000 – 24/7 on call

Emergency assistance and avenue to report a crime. Latest updates regarding safety, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible.

[USC Department of Public Safety](#) - UPC: (213) 740-6000, HSC: (323) 442-1200 – 24/7 on call

Non-emergency assistance or information.

[Office of the Ombuds](#) - (213) 821-9556 (UPC) / (323-442-0382 (HSC)

A safe and confidential place to share your USC-related issues with a University Ombuds who will work with you to explore options or paths to manage your concern.

[Occupational Therapy Faculty Practice](#) - (323) 442-2850 or [otfp@med.usc.edu](mailto:otfp@med.usc.edu)

Confidential Lifestyle Redesign services for USC students to support health promoting habits and routines that enhance quality of life and academic performance.

## ACADEMIC COMMITMENT FORM

### OPTION A

I have chosen to pursue a letter grade in the A range. I commit to doing my utmost to earn this grade by doing the following work as a critically engaged student:

**15% Participation:** I will attend class on time every class period, unless prevented from attending by a serious emergency. I not miss more than two classes this semester. I will treat the classroom space as a “Screen Free Zone”—at no time ever will I use or look at my phone or computer for any purpose while class is in session. I will have a notebook and writing tool (e.g., a pen or pencil but not a typewriter) on my desk at the start of each class and will take active notes when appropriate. I will bring a physical copy of the assigned book with me to each class period. I will regularly raise my hand and ask a relevant question or make a comment that helps to advance the discussion. I will engage in respectful but vigorous dialogue with peers when appropriate, being sure to listen as well as to speak.

**35% Reading Quizzes:** I will take reading quizzes weekly or whenever given and will complete all of the assigned readings in order to be well prepared for these quizzes.

**50% Final Exam:** I will take a final exam at the end of the quarter that is comprehensive of the contents of this course.

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Full Name (print as listed on your student ID)

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Signature

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Date



**ACADEMIC COMMITMENT FORM**

**OPTION B**

I have chosen to pursue a letter grade in the B range. I commit to doing my utmost to earn this grade by doing the following work as a critically engaged student:

**Attendance:** I will miss no more than three classes during this semester.

**50% Reading Quizzes:** I will take reading quizzes weekly or whenever given and will complete all of the assigned readings in order to be prepared for these quizzes.

**50% Final Exam:** I will take a final exam at the end of the quarter that is comprehensive of the contents of this course.

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Full Name (print as listed on your student ID)

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Signature

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Date

**ACADEMIC COMMITMENT FORM**

**OPTION C**

I have chosen to pursue a letter grade in the C range. I commit to doing my utmost to earn this grade by doing the following work as a critically engaged student:

**Attendance:** I will miss no more than three classes during this semester.

**100% Final Exam:** I will take a final exam at the end of the quarter that is comprehensive of the contents of this course. I understand that in order to receive a grade in the C range I must receive a grade B or higher on the final exam.

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Full Name (print as listed on your student ID)

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Signature

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Date