

SOSC 153: Classics of Social and Political Thought II

University of Chicago, Spring 2015

Saieh Hall 101/102

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Office hours: Wednesdays, 1-3 p.m., and by appointment, Gates-Blake 514

Section 3: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 9:00 to 10:20 a.m.

Section 6: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 10:30 a.m. to 11:50 a.m.

Course Description and Aims

Welcome to the final quarter of Classics of Social and Political Thought! In this quarter we continue our study of European liberalism, begun last quarter with Locke and Rousseau, by following the elaboration of liberal thought in Wollstonecraft and Tocqueville. We then turn to some of liberalism's most trenchant nineteenth-century critics, Marx and Nietzsche, before moving into the twentieth century and new ways of thinking about individual and collective freedom through Du Bois, Beauvoir, and Arendt. Although these authors are quite different, they may be said to belong to the same broad tradition of social thought. In our discussions, we will revisit many of the themes that have animated past quarters, and consider some new ones as well: What is political virtue? How do the individual and the society shape each other? What is the good life, and how does history bear on our efforts to achieve it? As we take up Wollstonecraft's invitation to "reason together" by exploring these questions as a class, we will develop our capacity to interpret challenging texts, to reconstruct and analyze their arguments, and to formulate arguments of our own that engage with this tradition of thought.

Texts

The following texts are available for purchase from the Seminary Co-op Bookstore; please use these editions.

Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Men and A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (ed. Tomaselli, Cambridge, 1995)

Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (trans. Goldhammer, Library of America, 2004)

Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Marx-Engels Reader, 2nd Ed.* (ed. Tucker, Norton, 1978)

Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality* (trans. Clark and Swensen, Hackett, 1998)

W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (eds. Blight and Gooding-Williams, Bedford, 1997)

In addition to the above texts, selections from the following books will be made available as PDFs for download from Chalk, under "Course Documents"; please print them out for in-class use.

Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (trans. Borde and Malovany-Chevallier, Vintage, 2010)

Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future* (Viking, 1961)

Course Policies

Requirements

Students are expected to prepare the assigned readings in advance of each class meeting, to attend every meeting, and to contribute actively and productively to class discussions. Students are also expected to complete a total of six short (500-word) written “meditations,” one on each of the authors we read in this course, and to write a total of two longer (2,000-word) comparative essays. These essays will be submitted first as drafts for peer feedback. Thus students are also expected to provide timely and thoughtful written feedback on a fellow student’s essay draft.

Assessment

Final grades for the course will be based upon the following formula:

Class participation, including attendance and preparation – 20%

Six short meditations (500 words each) – 10%

Feedback rendered on peer’s drafts – 10%

First essay (2,000 words), including responsiveness to peer feedback – 30%

Final essay (2,000 words) including responsiveness to peer feedback – 30%

Please note that more than one unexcused absence may place you in danger of failing the course, and that all written work must be submitted in order to receive credit for this course.

Start-of-quarter meeting: To help us get to know each other, I will hold extended office hours this week and the next. Feel free to come with a question about course mechanics, Mary Wollstonecraft, or anything else that wants asking, or just come for a chat. I’m especially interested to know about your experience in the Classics sequence so far and your hopes for the quarter ahead. How are you doing with managing the reading load, taking useful notes, participating in class, and writing essays? Which parts are you enjoying, which are a struggle, and how can I help you get better? This meeting is also the time to let me know about any classes you’ll have to miss.

Preparing for class: Your main job in this class is to do the reading carefully and thoroughly, and to come to class prepared to help reconstruct and examine the author’s argument. To aid in this task, I recommend *all* of the following techniques: underlining, scribbling in the margins, and keeping a notebook for notes and reflections as you read. As part of your preparation, please pick out at least two passages from each reading that you think merit particular attention. These may be passages that crystallize some part of the author’s argument particularly well, or you may choose them because they seem especially oblique or contradictory. Please come prepared to talk about the passages you’ve chosen and why you find them interesting.

In class: We meet here twice per week for an 80-minute séance with the dead. Out of courtesy to all who gather here, whether summoned from their beds or their graves, please arrive on time, with the day’s texts and your notes in tow. Please keep your electronic devices closed, muted, and out of sight, except by prior arrangement. During class, it’s a very good idea to take notes that will supplement your reading notes and aid in essay-writing.

Beyond these baseline expectations, here are two guidelines that will form the basis for my assessment of your class participation:

1. *Be generous to the texts.* Their authors inhabited a different moment in space-time than we do,

and they speak in a different idiom. Please bear that gap in mind as you proceed, and *make time to do the readings*. The quality of your contributions in class will inevitably reflect the depth of your engagement with the texts outside it. In addition to reading closely and critically, it helps to temper your critical lens with *a disposition of active curiosity*: a fundamental openness toward new ideas, even (especially!) when they seem anathema to what you hold most dear.

2. *Be generous to your fellow students.* To create an atmosphere conducive to rich, exciting, and enjoyable discussions, we rely on each other's generosity as both speakers and listeners. We express our generosity as speakers by learning to take risks when we speak, asking questions that expose our own ignorance or sharing thoughts that aren't yet fully formed. These contributions may sound less than brilliant, but they form the grist for further insights. As listeners, we are at our best when we learn to silence the buzzing of our own minds and attend carefully to a classmate's ideas, assume each other's best intentions, and interpret each other's words in the most charitable light. Reciprocally, when our words do cause injury, generosity calls on us to recognize our mistake and endeavor to repair the harm we've caused.

All this generosity in reading, speaking, and listening may seem like a lot to ask. It is a particular challenge to remain generous and take these intellectual and social risks in a course that deals openly with race, gender, sex, and economic relations, subjects that run perilously close to the core of our own social existence. Please remember that our purpose here is to help each other become better thinkers, and to have fun doing it.

Written assignments: Over the course of the term, you will produce a short written meditation on each author we study, as well as two longer essays. The meditations are due the evening before our last class on each author, and they will inform our final class discussions on that author. These should be no longer than 500 words each, and they are meant to be reflective and exploratory rather than definitive critiques or assessments. Their purpose is to help you synthesize the major arguments in each text, and to start exploring ideas that you may want to take up in a longer essay. *Please email your meditations to me by 8 p.m. on the eve of our final class on each author (marked on the course schedule below).*

The two longer essays you will write, of 2,000 words each, are opportunities to reflect on some of the broader themes of the course by comparing the deployment of a single concept in two authors' works. Prompts will be circulated at least a week before drafts are due, and you are also welcome to write on a comparative topic of your own, provided that we get a chance to discuss it first. After you produce your draft, you will be assigned a classmate to exchange drafts with and provide substantive written feedback on each other's work. Both drafts and feedback will be submitted along with the final essay, and your grade for each essay will reflect both its quality and the skill with which you incorporate the feedback you receive.

The feedback you provide on your peer's drafts will also be assessed for its helpfulness, and it will count for 10 percent of your overall course grade. Since your peers depend on the quality and timeliness of these comments, please make it a priority to complete them on time. Further guidelines for providing feedback can be found in the "Guide to Writing, Revising, and Submitting Essays," to be distributed in class and available on Chalk.

Academic integrity: One of the fundamental expectations of this course is that the written work you submit will be entirely your own. Your job as a thinker and writer is to assimilate ideas from many sources, including the texts we read, our conversations together, and potentially other sources as well.

Contemporary standards of academic honor at this university stipulate that you acknowledge all of these sources in your text, whether you quote them directly or paraphrase their contents. Any written work you submit that fails to meet these standards will be considered *plagiarism*, a serious offense against your fellow students and the aims of this course. If you are found to have committed plagiarism, you will fail the course and face further disciplinary action. *Don't do it*. Instead, refer to the Writing Guide for help, and please feel free to contact me directly as well.

Lateness policy: Please note that late essays will be penalized by a third of a letter grade (e.g., from a B to a B-minus) for every 24-hour delay in their submission, and that all written assignments (meditations, essays, and peer feedback) must be submitted in order to receive credit for this course.

Concession to human fallibility: Each student may, at any point over the course of the term, a) miss a class, or b) submit an essay up to 24 hours late without a grade penalty. If circumstances arise that might justify a longer extension, please come to my office hours so that we can explore this possibility. This policy is intended to preserve the balance between justice and mercy by extending a certain measure of flexibility to each student, including those who would never claim such a privilege on their own. This privilege may be exercised only *once* per term, for *either* a missed class *or* a late essay, but not *both*. Please exercise it judiciously and courteously by sending me an email when you plan to use it.

Course Schedule

Week 1

Tuesday, March 31 Introduction; in-class reading of the “Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen” and sections from Burke’s *Reflections on the Revolution in France*.
Thursday, April 2 Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Men*, pp. 1-14, 23-25, 29-64.

Week 2

Tuesday, April 7 Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, Introduction, Chapters 1-3 (pp. 65-125).
Thursday, April 9 Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, Chapters 6, 9-11, and part of Chapter 13 (pp. 200-206; 230-250, and 284-294); **meditation on Wollstonecraft due by 8 p.m. the night before.**

Week 3

Tuesday, March 14 Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, Vol. 1, Introduction (pp. 3-17); Part I, Chapters 3 and 4 (52-65); Part II, Chapters 6 and 7 (264-300)
Thursday, April 16 Tocqueville, Vol. I, Part II, Chapter 10, “The Three Races,” pp. 365-403 and 416-419; **receive prompts for Essay #1 and Writing Guide.**

Week 4

Tuesday, April 21 Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, Vol. 2, Part IV, Chapters 1-8 (785-834); **meditation on Tocqueville due by 8 p.m. the night before.**
Thursday, April 23 Karl Marx, “On the Jewish Question” (pp. 26-52).

Week 5

Tuesday, April 28 Marx, “Theses on Feuerbach” and “The German Ideology” (pp. 143-200); **exchange Essay #1 drafts.**

Thursday, April 30

Marx and Engels, "Manifesto of the Communist Party" (pp. 469-500); **exchange peer feedback.**

Week 6

Monday, May 4

Essay #1 due at noon.

Tuesday, May 5

Marx, *Capital, Vol. I*, Chapter I: "Commodities" (pp. 302-329); "Marx on the History of His Opinions" (pp. 3-6); **meditation on Marx due by 8 p.m. the night before.**

Thursday, May 7

Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, Preface & First Essay (pp. 1–33)

Week 7

Tuesday, May 12

Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, Second Essay (pp. 35–66).

Thursday, May 14

Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, Third Essay (pp. 67–118); **meditation on Nietzsche due by 8 p.m. the night before.**

Week 8

Tuesday, May 19

Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, "Forethought" and Chapters 1, 3, 4, 6, 11, and 13.

Thursday, May 21

Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, Chapters 10 and 12, and "Afterthought"; "The Development of a People" (pp. 238-254); **meditation on Du Bois due by 8 p.m. the night before; receive prompts for Essay #2.**

Week 9

Tuesday, May 26

Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, "Introduction"; selections from "Biological Data," "History," and "Myths"

Thursday, May 28

Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, "Conclusion"; **meditation on Beauvoir due by 8 p.m. the night before.**

Week 10

Tuesday, June 2

Arendt, "What Is Freedom?" **Exchange Essay #2 drafts.**

Wednesday, June 3

Extra-long office hours (1-4pm)

Thursday, June 4

Reading period – no class! **Exchange peer feedback electronically.**

Week 11

Monday, June 8

Essay #2 due at noon. Have a great summer!
