

SOSC 152: Classics of Social and Political Thought II

University of Chicago, Winter 2016
Cobb 301

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

Course website: sites.google.com/a/uchicago.edu/classics-winter-2016/

Section 1: 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 Winter quarter of Classics of Social and Political Thought! In this quarter, we take up Thomas Hobbes' invitation to examine "that great Leviathan called a commonwealth, or state." Our investigation will be carried out with the help of three political thinkers whose writings were pivotal in the development of political thought over the course of the Early Modern Period: Hobbes himself, along with John Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Collectively, the writings of these three thinkers form the foundations of social contract theory. Our exploration of their ideas will revisit some familiar themes and introduce new ones as well: What is "natural" about the state? What is just about it? What are its origins, and how do they bear on our efforts to build a just society? In considering these questions together, 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 the social contract tradition in European political thought.

Texts

These editions are available for purchase from the Seminary Co-op Bookstore and other fine book purveyors:

Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. Edwin Curley (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1994)

John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, ed. Peter Laslett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988)

John Locke, *A Letter Concerning Toleration and Other Writings*, ed. Mark Goldie (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2010) – available online at <http://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/2375>

Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Major Political Writings of Jean-Jacques Rousseau: The Two Discourses and the Social Contract*, trans. and ed. John T. Scott (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012)

Carole Pateman and Charles W. Mills, *Contract and Domination* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007), selections to be distributed electronically as PDFs

Course Policies

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 in the manner detailed below. Along with preparation for and engagement in class discussions, students are expected to complete a series of written assignments, including three brief meditations, two longer essays, and a pair of commentaries on essay drafts written by their peers. The expectations for these assignments are outlined below and elaborated in the "Guide to Writing, Revising, and Submitting Essays," available on our course website. My goal in these documents is not only to present the mechanics of this course and my expectations of you as a student, but to make clear what I hope we can achieve together through the course as a whole. If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to get in touch, but do make sure you've read the syllabus and Writing Guide first.

Assessment

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

Class participation (attendance, preparation, and engagement) – 20%

Three short meditations (500 words each) – 10%

Feedback rendered on peers' drafts – 10%

First essay (1,500 words), including responsiveness to peer feedback – 30%

Final essay (1,500 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.

Accommodation: I am committed to helping all of my students participate fully and succeed in this class. If you have a disability that makes some aspect of our coursework more difficult for you, please let me know.¹

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, Thomas Hobbes's natural philosophy, or no agenda at all. I'm eager to talk one-on-one and hear 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?

Preparing for class: Our class discussions require the active and engaged presence of every student in order to help reconstruct and examine the author's argument. To prepare for class, your main job is to do the reading carefully and thoroughly, and to take good notes as you do. To aid in this task, I recommend underlining, scribbling in the margins, *and* keeping a notebook for notes and reflections as you read. The quality of your contributions in class will inevitably reflect the depth of your engagement with the texts outside it. 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 a passage that seems especially oblique or contradictory. In any case, please come prepared to talk about the passages you've chosen and why you find them interesting.

Participating 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 reading notes in tow. Please keep your electronic devices closed, muted, and out of sight, except by prior arrangement.² During class, it's a very good idea to take notes on the discussion 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 leave yourself enough time to do the readings well. 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. Generous speakers are those willing to take risks when they speak, by asking questions that expose their ignorance or sharing thoughts that aren't yet fully formed. These contributions may make the speaker sound less than brilliant,

¹ If you would like to request a formal accommodation, you can do so through the Office of Student Disability Services at disabilities.uchicago.edu.

² The research supporting the superiority of handwritten notes is ample and convincing. See Pam A. Mueller and Daniel M. Oppenheimer, "[The Pen Is Mightier Than the Keyboard: Advantages of Longhand Over Laptop Note Taking](#)," *Psychological Science* (April 2014), pp. 1–10.

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 take these risks in a course that deals openly with race, gender, economic relations, social power, and the divine, subjects that run perilously close to the core of what we hold sacred. Please remember that our purpose here is to help each other become better thinkers, and to have fun doing it.

Meditations: Over the course of the term, you will produce a total of three short written "meditations," one on each of the major authors we read in this course. As a prompt for these meditations, I will email you a question, or occasionally a choice of questions; your job is to send me a reply in the form of a 500-word reflection offering one possible way of answering that question, on the basis of your reading of the text. Please send your reply in the body of your email, so that I can read it easily and quickly before our next class meeting. The purpose of these meditations is to offer a low-stakes venue for written reflection on each of the major texts we read, in order to help you synthesize and critically examine its arguments and begin developing ideas that you may want to take up in a longer essay. I will also use your reflections to shape our final class discussions on each text. Don't sweat these meditation assignments too much; just be sure to leave yourself enough time to complete the reading, digest the question, and prepare a response before the deadline. *Each meditation is due by 8 p.m. on the eve of our final class on each author (marked on the course schedule below).*

Essays: In addition to these meditations, students will write a total of two longer essays of 1,500 words each, which will be submitted first as drafts for peer feedback. These essays are opportunities to reflect on some of the broader themes of the course. 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. Due dates for drafts and final revisions are listed in the course schedule below. *Please note that both your draft and the feedback you receive should be submitted along with the final essay, and your grade for that essay will reflect both its quality and the skill with which you incorporate your peer's suggestions.*

Peer feedback: 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. The goal of this exercise is to help your peer strengthen her argument and clarify her prose, and to develop your own insight into what makes for clear prose and a persuasive argument. It is also a good exercise in learning to offer (and receive) feedback that is both kind and useful. The feedback you provide on your peer's drafts will 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," available on the course website.

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 assignment 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 assignment, 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, January 5	In-class reading of Hobbes, <i>Leviathan</i> , frontispiece and “Introduction”
Thursday, January 7	Hobbes, <i>Leviathan</i> , Part I: Of Man, Chapters 1-5
Week 2	
Tuesday, January 11	Hobbes, <i>Leviathan</i> , Part I: Of Man, Chapters 6-12 (in Chapter 8, feel free to skip §§21-25; in Chapter 12, skip §§13-19)
Thursday, January 13	Hobbes, <i>Leviathan</i> , Part I: Of Man, Chapters 13-16; meditation on Hobbes due by 8 p.m. the night before
Week 3	
Tuesday, January 19	Hobbes, <i>Leviathan</i> , Part II: Of Commonwealth, Chapters 17-21 and 24-25
Thursday, January 21	Hobbes; <i>Leviathan</i> , Chapters 26-30; receive prompts for Essay #1
Week 4	
Tuesday, January 26	Hobbes, <i>Leviathan</i> , Part III: Of a Christian Commonwealth, Chapters 31-33, 42, 43, and “A Review and Conclusion”
Thursday, January 28	Locke, <i>A Letter Concerning Toleration</i>
Week 5	
Tuesday, February 2	Locke, <i>Two Treatises of Government</i> , <i>First Treatise</i> , Chapter. 4, §§41-43; <i>Second Treatise</i> , Chapters 1-5; exchange Essay #2 drafts
Thursday, February 4	Locke, <i>Second Treatise</i> , Chapters 6-8; return peer’s draft with feedback
Week 6	
Monday, February 8	Essay #1 due at noon
Tuesday, February 9	Locke, <i>Second Treatise</i> , Chapters 9-15
Thursday, February 11	Locke, <i>Second Treatise</i> , Chapters 16-19; meditation on Locke due by 8 p.m. the night before
Week 7	
Tuesday, February 16	Rousseau, <i>A Discourse on the Origin of Inequality</i> , “Epistle Dedicatory,” Preface, “Exordium,” Part I (with special attention to Notes 9, 10, 11, and 15)
Thursday, February 18	Rousseau, <i>A Discourse on the Origin of Inequality</i> , Part II (with special attention to Note 16)
Week 8	
Tuesday, February 23	Rousseau, <i>Of the Social Contract</i> , Book I; Book II, Chapters 1-3
Thursday, February 25	Rousseau; <i>Of the Social Contract</i> , Book II, 4-12; receive prompts for Essay #2
Week 9	
Tuesday, March 1	Rousseau, <i>Of the Social Contract</i> , Book III
Thursday, March 3	Rousseau, <i>Of the Social Contract</i> , Book IV; meditation on Rousseau due by 8 p.m. the night before
Week 10	
Tuesday, March 8	Readings from Carole Pateman and Charles Mills; exchange Essay #2 drafts.
Wednesday, March 9	Extra-long office hours (1-4pm)
Thursday, March 10	Reading period – no class! Exchange peer feedback electronically by noon
Week 11	
Monday, March 14	Essay #2 due at noon. Enjoy the break!