**Classics of Social and Political Thought I**

Social Sciences (SOSC) 15100 – University of Chicago, Autumn

Sequence Overview

Classics of Social and Political Thought invites students to participate in a year-long conversation about human flourishing. We will consider what it means to live a good and distinctively human life, and we will explore how we might pursue such a life. What role do our fellow human beings play in its attainment? How can our social and political arrangements support and hinder this pursuit?

We will begin in the autumn quarter by investigating the nature and purpose of political life. Why do humans form political communities? What qualifies someone for citizenship in them and who should rule? What roles do justice, virtue, and law play in our political communities? Is it ever acceptable to violate the laws that govern us? We will examine how these questions were answered by Plato, Aristotle, Aquinas, and Machiavelli. In addition to studying the substance of their political theories, we will analyze the principles and assumptions that animate them. We will pay especially close attention to how these theorists’ accounts of human nature informed their ideas about political life.

We will continue to explore theories about the nature and purpose of political life in the second part of the course, but our discussions of flourishing in the winter quarter will also begin to concentrate on questions about the ways in which political communities are organized and ruled. For instance, what is the basis of our political obligations and rights? Should people play a role in their own governance? If so, how should they navigate conflicts between their individual interests and the common good? Furthermore, is it acceptable for certain individuals or groups to have more political power and rights than others? As we take up these questions, we will also examine the meaning of concepts such as sovereignty, freedom, and equality, as well as the relationship between politics and religion. Our readings will include texts by Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, and Wollstonecraft.

In the final quarter of the sequence, we will turn to texts by nineteenth- and twentieth-century writers who developed critiques of existing social and political conditions. They include Mill, Marx, Nietzsche, Du Bois, and Beauvoir. These writers will invite us to explore a variety of ideas about the ways in which domination appears and operates within liberal democracies and capitalist societies, as well as the requirements for overcoming it. We will also examine the meaning of values such as equality, progress, self-reliance, thrift, morality, and truth, and we will consider how these values shape human lives. Finally, throughout the quarter we will use the assigned texts as resources for learning about the practice of social critique. We will consider how it can serve society, as well as how we might use the concepts and models of inquiry that we find in our texts toanalyze present social and political conditions. What kinds of lives do they allow us to lead?

Learning Objectives

Students in the Classics of Social and Political Thought Core will develop an understanding of the long and contentious history of social and political thought in the West. This body of writing forms the basis for introducing students to a variety of styles of reasoning in the social sciences. But it is also the material that we will use to enable students to develop concrete skills, which will be important to their ability to flourish in the College, whether in other social sciences courses or in their wider studies. Specifically, students will learn:

1. How to read complicated and often controversial works of social and political thought, to identify the arguments that they are making as well as the reasoning and evidence used to support those arguments.
2. How to listen carefully to their claims of their peers and to engage them in productive and constructive scholarly conversations.
3. How to present their own argumentative claims in a coherent, sustained, and persuasive fashion in their writing. A series of progressively longer writing assignments over the course of the year-long sequence will encourage students to write with their reader in mind, and to develop new styles of reasoning adequate to the needs of rigorous social science inquiry.

Accessibility

The University of Chicago is committed to ensuring equitable access to our academic programs and services. Students with disabilities who have been approved for the use of academic accommodations by [Student Disability Services (SDS)](https://disabilities.uchicago.edu/) and need a reasonable accommodation(s) to participate fully in this course should follow the procedures established by SDS for using accommodations. Timely notifications are required in order to ensure that your accommodations can be implemented. Please meet with me to discuss your access needs in this class after you have completed the SDS procedures for requesting accommodations.

Phone: (773) 702-6000

Email: [disabilities@uchicago.edu](mailto:disabilities@uchicago.edu)

Required texts

Plato, *The Republic*, trans. Bloom (Basic Books, 2016)

Aristotle, *Politics: A New Translation*, trans. Reeve (Hackett, 2017) [orange cover]

Thomas Aquinas, *On Law, Morality, and Politics*, trans. Regan, 2nd ed. (Hackett, 2003)

Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, trans. Mansfield, 2nd ed. (University of Chicago Press, 1998)

Texts marked with an asterisk (\*) can be found on Canvas.

Reading Schedule

Week 1.1 Introduction – no reading assignment

Week 1.2 Plato, *Republic*, Book I

Week 2.2 Plato, *Republic*, Book II to Book III, 394e

Week 2.3 Plato, *Republic*, Book III, 394e to Book IV, 433b

Week 3.1 Plato, *Republic*, Book IV 433b to Book V, 463a

Week 3.2 Plato, *Republic*, Book V 463a to Book VI, 497b

Week 4.1 Plato, *Republic*, Book VI, 497b to end of Book VII

Week 4.2 Plato, *Republic*, Book VIII to Book IX, 580a

Week 5.1 Plato, *Republic*, Book IX, 580a to end of Book X

Week 5.2 \*Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book I (entire).

Week 6.1 \*Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book X.6–9.

Aristotle, *Politics*, Book I.1–7, 12–13.

Week 6.2 Aristotle, *Politics*, Book II.1–5, 7–8; Book III.1–11.

Week 7.1 Aristotle, *Politics*, Book III.12–18; Book IV.1–2, 4–9, 11–12; Book V.1, 5–9.

Week 7.2 Aristotle, *Politics*, Book VI.2–5; Book VII.1–5, 7, 9–10, 13–15.

Week 8.1 Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I–II, Q. 90–93 (pp. 10–40).

Week 8.2 Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I–II, Q. 94–96; II–I, Q. 100 A.1; II–II Q. 57 and Q. 58, A. 1 and 2 (pp. 40–69; 76–77; 97–108).

Week 9.1 Machiavelli, *The Prince*, Dedicatory Letter and chapters 1–14.

Week 9.2 Machiavelli, *The Prince*, chapters 15–26.