

Classics of Social and Political Thought I

SOSC 15100-12

Autumn 2022

M+W 3-4:20, SS 108

Instructor: Dr. Yiftach Ofek, email: yiftach@uchicago.edu

Office Hours: by appointment, via Zoom*
(*may change to in-person during the quarter)

COURSE DESCRIPTION

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.

REQUIRED TEXTS

The following texts are available for purchase at the Seminary Co-Op Bookstore:

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

Aristotle, *The Politics*, 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)

Please use these editions of the texts to aid in the in-class discussion of specific passages (especially Aristotle's *Politics*!)

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

PARTICIPATION

Students should come to each class prepared to participate in a discussion of the reading assignment. Class participation requires you to read and take notes on the text that we are studying, and to be willing to contribute questions and comments to our conversations. It also requires you to listen carefully to what your classmates have to say: the most successful participants will advance the discussion by directly engaging the contributions of others. I expect you to give your full attention to our discussions during class time.

Students are also expected to meet with me and the writing advisor at least twice this quarter. These meetings will be factored into your participation grade.

REFLECTIONS

The students will be divided into three sections of six students each (A, B, and C). Each section will be assigned to write several short reflections on the readings (200-300 words) throughout the quarter (see distribution below). These should be submitted by 9:00 am, before class, on the Discussion Board on Canvas. Late submissions will not be accepted. You may be asked to discuss your thoughts in class.

Begin by selecting a specific (and small) section of the text that you believe merits our attention. Then, ask yourself, what is it about this specific passage, or passages, you find especially thought-provoking and why? What does this passage or passages help us understand about the text, the author's perspective, or about the particular context in which the text was written?

Your reflections should then raise a question, identify a tension, or expose something interesting about a particular section of the text. As we progress through our readings, you will want, as much as possible, to make connections to other texts we have read in class. Nonetheless, you should keep your paragraphs focused on a narrow passage (or passages) that we can read together. Be careful not to simply provide a summary of text. Your reflections are meant to help you, and the class, think through various aspects of the text and what might be our thinkers' concerns.

You may build on the ideas expressed here in later assignments, provided that you note this in the footnotes. (E.g., "This analysis is based on the reflection I submitted to the class discussion board on Canvas on September 27th"). You should also note that each assignment will be treated, and graded, separately.

CLOSE READING EXERCISES

During the quarter, you will be asked to write two short pieces of close reading.

First, select a small section from one of the texts we have read. You may choose from any text that has been discussed up until that point (do not choose a text that will be read in the class afterwards).

Second, consider the thinker's main points and conclusions. How or why did they arrive at these conclusions (what were the steps of the argument)? Retrace the progression of the argument in the text paying close attention to the form (rhetorical strategy) as well as what is said. (Note that in the case of the Republic you will need to pay close attention to who is speaking.) What do you take the thinker to be trying to argue, workout, dismiss, or show, and why?

Exercise I will be due by Sunday, Oct. 23 (midnight)

Exercise II will be due by Sunday, Nov. 20 (midnight)

Length: no more than 350 words.

ESSAYS I ("MIDTERM") AND II ("FINAL")

During the quarter, you will be asked to write two essays pertaining to the material studied in class. The instructor will provide the essay questions 12-14 days before the due dates.

Essay I ("Midterm") will be due by Sunday, Nov. 6 (midnight). Length: 1300-1600 words.

Essay II ("Final", 30%) will be due by Thursday, Dec. 8 (midnight). Length: 1500-1700 words.

You will be assessed primarily on three categories:

- Knowledge of the text
- Clarity of exposition; and
- Originality and perceptiveness / ability to draw connections between different texts.

I will discuss expectations more in detail in class.

GRADE DISTRIBUTION

Participation:	20%
Reflections:	10%
Close Reading Exercise I:	10%
Essay I ("Midterm"):	20%
Close Reading Exercise II:	10%
Essay II ("Final"):	30%

WRITING ADVISORS

Designated SoSc Writing Advisers are available to meet with you by appointment. You can find a schedule from writing advisors [here](#), along with information on additional writing workshops that can help you to grow as a writer.

All students are **required** to make use of these resources on the first paper assignment and are strongly encouraged to do so when working on the second paper assignment.

GENERAL POLICIES

COVID-RELATED ISSUES

We will be following standard university protocol. The instructor will not mandate the use of masks, but students should feel free to wear one if they choose to.

SPECIAL NEEDS

If you have documented special needs, please let me know as soon as possible. Keep in mind that accommodations cannot normally be applied retroactively. In order to receive an accommodation, you must register your requirements with Student Disability Services.

POLICY ON ABSENCES

Please try to email instructor in advance, or as soon as you can, about any absences. You need not to specify the nature of your absence if you prefer not to. If a medical or family emergency arises during the quarter that will cause you to miss several classes, please have your advisor contact me. Again, no details are required, only the duration of your absence. If you wish, you may also email me directly in addition. In accordance with University policy, you will not be penalized for an absence due to a religious observance, as long as the instructor is notified in advance.

POLICY ON ELECTRONIC DEVICES AND NON-PURCHASED BOOKS

Cellular devices are forbidden in class. It is my preference that students do not use a computer during class, but I will not forbid you from doing so. Naturally, if you choose to use a computer during class, you should refrain from using it for other purposes, and maintain your engagement with class discussion at a maximum.

COMMUNICATIONS WITH THE INSTRUCTOR

Please note that I do not check emails between Friday and Saturday evenings.

Otherwise, I will attempt to get back to you within 24 hours on weekdays and by Monday on weekends. Please address your emails properly and remember that they are formal and official correspondence between us, in our capacities as professor and student.

FORMATTING

Please follow standard formatting: 12-point font, double-spaced.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

To the point: do not plagiarize. Any instance of plagiarism may result in the failure of the relevant paper, withdrawal or failure of the course, and referral to university administration. Whenever you draw on or allude to ideas other than your own, you must reference the original source, whatever it may be (a book, a website, a lecture, an introductory essay, a conversation with a classmate, etc.). This rule applies not only to formally assessed work, but to all of your contributions in this class. Nor is it exclusively applicable in the case of quotations; all distinctive ideas you borrow from others, even where you paraphrase them in your own words, should be referenced.

Students are allowed to consult with each other about class readings throughout the quarter. The work you submit, however, should be your own. Again, I emphasize: please credit your classmates whenever credit is due.

If you have any questions about this while writing your papers, please ask me either via email or in person. If you are unsure about what counts as plagiarism or academic dishonesty, you can consult Charles Lipson's book *Doing Honest Work in College*.

POLICY ON LATE PAPERS AND EXTENSIONS

Extensions will be granted on an individual basis. If you need an extension, please contact me as soon as you can. Late papers will be deducted 2/3 of a letter grade every 24 hours after the designated due date.

SCHEDULE OF READINGS AND ASSIGNMENTS

REFLECTIONS

Wednesday, Sept. 28	Introduction + Plato, <i>Republic</i> I 327a-336a	
Monday, Oct. 3	Plato, <i>Republic</i> I 336b to II 367e	A
Wednesday, Oct. 5	**NO CLASS** (<i>Yom Kippur</i>)	
Monday, Oct. 10	Plato, <i>Republic</i> II 367e through end of Book III	B
Wednesday, Oct. 12	Plato, <i>Republic</i> IV	C
Monday, Oct. 17	Plato, <i>Republic</i> V-VI	A
Wednesday, Oct. 19	Plato, <i>Republic</i> VII	B
<i>Close Reading Exercise I Due Sunday, Oct. 23 (Midnight)</i>		
Monday, Oct. 24	Plato, <i>Republic</i> VIII-IX 580a	C
Wednesday, Oct. 26	Plato, <i>Republic</i> IX 580a through end of Book X	A
Monday, Oct. 31	Aristotle, <i>Politics</i> I.1-7, 12-13; II.1-5, 7-8	B
Wednesday, Nov. 2	Aristotle, <i>Politics</i> III.1-4, 6-9, 13-18	C
<i>First Essay ("Midterm") Due Sunday, Nov. 6 (Midnight)</i>		
Monday, Nov. 7	Aristotle, <i>Politics</i> IV.1-2, 4-12	A
Wednesday, Nov. 9	The Book of Amos (King James Version)	B
Monday, Nov. 14	Aquinas, <i>Summa Theologica</i> , I-II, Q. 90-95 (pp. 10-59)	C
Wednesday, Nov. 16	Machiavelli, letter to Vettori of December 10, 1513 (in <i>The Prince</i> , 107-111); <i>The Prince</i> , Dedicatory Letter & chapters 1-6	A
<i>Close Reading Exercise II Due Sunday, Nov. 20 (Midnight)</i>		
Monday, Nov. 21	**NO CLASS** (<i>Thanksgiving</i>)	
Wednesday, Nov. 23	**NO CLASS** (<i>Thanksgiving</i>)	
Monday, Nov. 28	Machiavelli, <i>The Prince</i> Chapters 7-14	B
Wednesday, Nov. 30	Machiavelli, <i>The Prince</i> chapters 15-26	C
<i>Final Essay Due Thursday, Dec. 8 (Midnight)</i>		