

Classics of Social and Political Thought III

SOSC 15300-6

Spring 2022

Tu + Th, 02:00 pm – 03:20 pm

Cobb 203

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

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

WRITING ADVISOR

Allison Zhou

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Office Hours: every Friday from 11am-1pm at <https://tinyurl.com/allisonofficehours>

Harper Hours: every Thursday from 3:30-5:45pm at <https://tinyurl.com/zhoulharperhours>

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 or hinder this pursuit? In the Spring Quarter, we will focus on texts by nineteenth- and twentieth-century writers who developed critiques of existing social and political conditions. As you will see, during these two centuries, social thought changed dramatically, from thinking in terms of abstractions to what the legal and political theorist Carl Schmitt called “critique of the age.” The texts that you will read will therefore concentrate primarily on how the individual is shaped and restricted by the conditions into which he is born. Some of the themes we will explore include: equality, modernity, freedom, the relationship between politics and economics, nihilism, atheism, race, and gender.

REQUIRED TEXTS

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

Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. Goldhammer (Library of America, 2004)
ISBN: 9781931082549

Karl Marx, *Early Writings*, ed. Livingstone (Penguin, 1992) ISBN: 9780140445749

Max Weber, *The Vocation Lectures*, eds. David Owen and Tracy B. Strong, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Hackett, 2004) ISBN: 9780872206656

W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, eds. Blight and Gooding-Williams (Bedford, 1997) ISBN: 9780312091149

Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. Board and Malovany-Chevallier (Vintage, 2011) ISBN: 9780307277787

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Participation (15%)

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.

Meetings with myself and the Writing Advisor will be counted towards participation.

Reflections (15%)

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.

Essays I (“Midterm”, 30%) and II (“Final”, 40%)

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, April 30 (midnight). Length: 1300-1600 words.

Essay II (“Final”) will be due by Sunday, May 28 (midnight). Length: 1700-2000 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.

GENERAL POLICIES

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 (e.g., never begin with “Hi”).

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. 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

Tuesday, March 21	No readings	
	<u>Alexis de Tocqueville</u>	
Thursday, March 23	<i>Democracy in America</i> , 909–910 (“1848 Preface), 3–17, 31–77	A
Tuesday, March 28	<i>Democracy in America</i> , 66–77, 97–110, 264–302	B
Thursday, March 30	<i>Democracy in America</i> , 330–47, 360–91	C
Tuesday, April 4	<i>Democracy in America</i> , 392–419, 455–61, 479–80, 483–93	A
Thursday, April 6	No Class (Passover)	
Tuesday, April 11	<i>Democracy in America</i> , 581–94, 787–802, 816–34 + Nietzsche, “Zarathustra’s Prologue” (Canvas)	B
	<u>Karl Marx</u>	
Thursday, April 13	“On the Jewish Question,” Part I, 212–top of 227	C
Tuesday, April 18	“On the Jewish Question,” Part I, top of 227–34; “A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right. Introduction,” 243–top of 245, 251 (just the big paragraph in the middle of the page), 256–7 (starting from “So where...”)	A
Thursday, April 20	“Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844,” 282–89 (stop at section break), 322–top of 337	B
Tuesday, April 25	“Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844,” 345–58; “The Communist Manifesto” (Canvas)	C
	<u>W.E.B. DuBois</u>	
Thursday, April 27	<i>The Souls of Black Folk</i> , Forethought, I-II	A
	<i>Essay I (“Midterm”) Due on Sunday, April 30</i>	
Tuesday, May 2	<i>The Souls of Black Folk</i> , III, V-VI, XII-XIII, Afterthought	B

Max Weber

Thursday, May 4	“Science as a Vocation,” in <i>The Vocation Lectures</i> , 1–31	C
Tuesday, May 9	“Politics as a Vocation,” in <i>The Vocation Lectures</i> , 32–94	A

Simone de Beauvoir

Thursday, May 11	<i>The Second Sex</i> , 3–17, 44–48, 62–75	B
Tuesday, May 16	<i>The Second Sex</i> , 638–64, 721–66	C

Hannah Arendt

Thursday, May 18	“What is Freedom,” in <i>Between Past and Future</i> 148–69 (Canvas)	[]
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Essay II (“Final”) Due on Sunday, May 28th

ADDITIONAL SESSION

Wednesday, April 26 th , 5pm - 6:30pm	Professors Adom Getachew and Jennifer Pitts (lecture) on the international writings of W.E.B. Du Bois (Offered as Extra Credit)
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* This syllabus may be subject to some minor revisions