

Classics of Social and Political Thought

Instructor: Gabriel Mares

Office Hours: Tuesdays, 3:15pm-4:15pm, Classics Café

This course will introduce students to a handful of foundational texts in the history of political and social thought. The course will be roughly split into three parts: the Greek tradition, the Abrahamic tradition, and the dawn of Modernity in the West. While this course is focused on the origins of the Western Canon, it is worthwhile to note that until Aquinas none of these thinkers considered themselves to be “Western,” and many of these texts deeply influenced Islamic thought as well. As Nobel Prize winning economist Amartya Sen notes, the West “is not quite as ancient as it is sometimes suggested...Alexander and other ancient Greeks were less interested in chatting with Goths, Vikings, Angles, and Saxons than they were in conversing with ancient Iranians, Bactrians, and Indians, and Julius Caesar and Mark Antony identified more readily with ancient Egyptians than with Europeans located to the north of Rome.” With this in mind, students should also be prepared to rethink how we envision communities and traditions. Overly broad appeals to “Tradition” will not substitute for methodical argument in this course.

Furthermore, students should bring an open mind to each of the texts presented in this course. While the easiest way to demonstrate one’s intelligence is often by dismissing or savagely critiquing some canonical work, I ask that your first reading of the texts be a good faith reading – assume there is something we might learn from them, grapple with those questions, try to understand why these texts have found adherents across several millennia. After that, critique away.

Week 1: Plato’s *Republic* Books I and II

Week 2: Plato’s *Republic* Book III and Aristophanes *The Clouds*

Week 3: Plato’s *Republic* Books IV and V

Week 4: Plato’s *Republic* Books VI and VII **First Paper due Friday**

Week 5: Aristotle *Politics* Books I and II

Week 6: Aristotle *Politics* Books V and VII

Week 7: Selections from *Exodus* and *Deuteronomy* (pdf available on the Chalk site)

Week 8: Aquinas, Chapter 2 (*Treatise on Law*) and Chapter 5 (On War and Killing) – **No class Thursday for Thanksgiving**

Week 9: Aquinas, Chapters 3 (Justice), 6 (Obedience and Rebellion), and 7 (Tolerance and Church-State Relations) and Machiavelli, *The Prince* **Second Paper Due Friday**

Week 10: Machiavelli, *The Prince* (there will be an optional reading group Thursday of reading period – no one is required to come, but it may be helpful if you wish to write your final paper on Machiavelli. Time and place TBD.)

Finals Week **Final Paper due Thursday**

All texts are available at the Seminary Co-Op bookstore, and can also be found in used bookstores or online. Students may substitute the C.D.C. Reeve translation of Plato (Hackett) or the Quentin Skinner translation of Machiavelli (Cambridge) if they so choose.

Aims of the course:

-Reading and Thinking: This course is demanding both due to the quantity of reading assigned as well as the style of thinking that you will cultivate. In this course, *what* you think is of significantly less importance than *how* you think.

It will be important to approach the texts in the terms they themselves present – most discussions of politics in the contemporary world rely on concepts that developed over long periods of time and may not be appropriate to the ancient texts we will be examining. Thus, describing something as Liberal (a concept that originated in the 17th century) or Conservative (originating in the 18th century) in an Ancient Greek text is problematic: both of those terms imply arguments and ideologies which may be not relevant to Plato or Aristotle, and both can serve as stopgaps, helping us categorize problems without examining them thoroughly. While we will develop a philosophical vocabulary along the way, students should try to examine the texts without reference to the ideological vocabularies of 20th and 21st century politics. That is not to say you cannot ask yourself whether the systems or analyses of political life offered in the texts are appealing or problematic – each of these texts presents a vision (or visions, in some cases) of the right form of political life, and you as an astute reader and potential citizen must evaluate the various arguments.

You may find that the reading for this course is much slower than you are used to. That's okay – these are difficult texts, and you are reading them not merely for narrative and key topics, but to understand the structure and implications of the arguments and assumptions that guide the texts. Quickly skimming the readings before class won't be sufficient.

-Writing: By the end of this course you should be able to structure a paper around an argument, rather than presenting a series of examples demonstrating something about a text. A “five paragraph essay” (bing-bang-bongo) in which the argument is made in the thesis statement and the body paragraphs are collections of examples to support the thesis statement is *not* acceptable.

Being able to sustain an argument over the course of a paper is perhaps the most important skill you will develop (both intellectually and practically) in this course.

You will be required to write three papers for this course: your first paper will be 3-4 pages, your second and third papers will be 4-6 pages (not including works cited page). Short papers are the hardest to write: make sure your arguments are succinct and you only quote the text when necessary to support your argument. One paper must deal exclusively with only one text, one paper must be a comparative paper, and one paper can be either. Comparative papers must be analytical, they cannot simply be “X says this, Y disagrees.” I will supply paper topics to help guide you, or you may come up with your own topic (students who wish to write their own topic must get approval from me at least two class sessions before the paper is due.)

Student papers must be formatted in a standard style (MLA, APA, Chicago Style, etc) which allows any reader to easily locate all citations. Papers *must* be double spaced (not one-and-a-half) have standard margins and be twelve point font in Times New Roman. When you’re grading a stack of papers, any paper that does not conform to these standards sticks out like a sore thumb.

-Grades: Final grades will be a mix of participation and paper grades: 20% participation, 20% first paper, 30% second paper and 30% final paper. I realize some students may not be as comfortable speaking in class, so I will take Chalk postings into account when weighing this – Chalk postings will not be required, but are recommended. I will cold call students in class, not as a means of testing you but to facilitate discussion – seminar classes work best when they are not simply dominated by one or two students while others observe. Late work will be penalized one third of a grade every 24 hours late. Papers are due by 11:59pm of the posted due date. I am not a stickler when it comes to exact times - 12:01am will not count as late, but much later in the hour will. Requests for extensions must be made in writing. Extensions will be granted on an individual basis (mostly limited to family emergencies or extreme health problems) – for certain extreme cases (you yourself are hospitalized, etc) it is best to contact your counselor and your counselor will contact all of your instructors. Papers which do not conform to the standards of the course (for example: does not engage the text, is too long or short, does not address the chosen prompt) may be handed back to students for a re-write. Re-writes can raise a paper grade by one full letter grade. Rewrites will be permitted solely at the instructor’s discretion (for example, if you earned a B- on a paper I will not permit a re-write). Finally, attendance is mandatory. Any student who misses three sessions without a documented emergency (hospitalization, funeral, etc.) will have his/her grade lowered by a full letter. Vacations, internship interviews, RSO events/meetings/practice do *not* constitute emergencies. Any student who misses four or more sessions will have to take the course pass/fail. Earning a “pass” in a course does *not* fulfill the requirements of the University of Chicago’s Core.

Academic Honesty

Cheating is the unforgiveable sin of academia – no instructor, administrator or counselor will have sympathy for any reasons one might have, and the consequences range from failing an individual assignment to expulsion. It is far better to turn in an assignment late and be marked down than to cheat and risk expulsion. Two spectacular examples of cheaters caught:

-recently, the University of Virginia Business School revoked the degrees of almost 30 alumni *3 years after graduation* when evidence of coordinated cheating when they were students came to light. There is no statute of limitations for cheating – it can potentially come back to haunt you long after you have left college.

-a friend of mine at UCSD had a freshman roommate who plagiarized a paper for a non-major class. After he turned it in, the professor invited the student to his office and asked the student to read the paper aloud. As the student began reading the paper, the professor walked over to a bookshelf, took down a book, and began reading along with the student. The student was expelled.

Obviously, plagiarizing a paper is academic dishonesty. However, there are more subtle forms as well. All paraphrasing in papers *must* have citations – whether you are paraphrasing a primary text or a secondary source, you cannot present the paraphrase as your own work. Lying in order to obtain an extension is also a form of academic dishonesty, as is forging a signature in order to register for a class. Counselors and the Division of Social Sciences will be notified of *all* cases of academic dishonesty. If there are any questions about citations or plagiarism, you may wish to consult one of the standard handbooks, such as *The Chicago Manual of Style* or Charles Lipson's *Doing Honest Work in College*. Ignorance (real or feigned) of what constitutes cheating will not mitigate any action against the offender.