

Philosophy/PPE 008
Summer 2017

MWF 12-2:30 pm
Classroom TBD

The Social Contract Class Syllabus

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Office location: TBD
Office hours: TBD

Course description

This course is a historically-oriented introduction to political philosophy, spanning roughly the period from Hobbes to Rawls. One of the major strands of political thought is the idea of the social contract. According to this view, society is best understood as an arrangement in which its members agree to certain rules to organize social life. A fair system of social rules, or a political system that rightly imposes obligations on its members, is one that citizens would (actually or hypothetically) accept under suitable conditions. This course charts the development of this idea in its many forms, as well as its critics from rival traditions such as Marxism and Utilitarianism. We'll also discuss foundational issues in political philosophy and philosophical ethics, including coercion, consent, fairness, distributive justice, and freedom.

Required texts

All of the readings for this course will be posted on Canvas.

Optional texts

We'll read parts of several books for this class. You may wish to acquire academic editions of these texts, either to read on your own or for writing your term paper. Here are the editions I use, and so would recommend. Feel free to bring these to the class if you have them, but note that doing so is not required.

Hobbes, Thomas. *Leviathan*. Edited by J. C. A. Gaskin. New York: Oxford University Press, 2009.

Locke, John. *Two Treatises of Government*. 3rd ed. Edited by Peter Laslett. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988.

Astell, Mary. *Political Writings*. Edited by Patricia Springborg. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. *The Social Contract and Discourses*. Translated by G. D. H. Cole. London: Dent, 1973. [This is the Everyman Library edition.]

Hume, David. *Enquiries Concerning Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals*. 3rd ed. Edited by L. A. Selby-Bigge and P. H. Nidditch. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975. [N.b., “Of the Original Contract” is in Hume’s *Essays*, not this book.]

Kant, Immanuel. *Practical Philosophy*. Translated by Mary J. Gregor. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999. [Contains most of Kant’s works on moral philosophy. Could be a good investment if you plan on majoring in philosophy or a related field.]

Marx, Karl and Friedrich Engels. *The Marx-Engels Reader*. 2nd ed. Edited by Robert C. Tucker. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1978.

Mill, John Stuart. *Utilitarianism*. 2nd ed. Edited by George Sher. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 2002.

Rawls, John. *A Theory of Justice*. Revised ed. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999.

Assessment

There are basically three things I’m looking for in your performance in the class: (1) How good of an understanding do you exhibit of the course material? (2) Have you successfully constructed arguments responding to the ideas discussed in class? (3) Do you exhibit or have you improved upon basic academic skills such as writing a high quality essay, making clear and precise points, managing your time, and conducting academic research?

Your grade will be based on three areas:

1. One essay, due date TBD. You’ll be graded mainly on your understanding of the course material and the quality of your arguments. I’ll distribute information on writing a good philosophy paper as well as a qualitative rubric. Topics will be provided, although you may use your own topic so long as I approve it.
2. Two take-home exams, dates TBD. You’ll be graded mainly on your understanding of the course material. Expect to have about a weekend (Friday through Monday) to complete each of these.
3. Participation, including quizzes, reading responses, in-class participation, and possibly brief presentations of the course material.

You’ll have received a grade and comments on at least one of the exams before July 28th, the last day to withdraw from the course.

Grading Breakdown

Essay: 35%
Exams: 50% (25% each)
Participation: 20%

Preliminary Schedule

This schedule is subject to change.

1. Friday, June 29th: *Introduction and historical antecedents*

Brief introduction to the course
Plato, *The Republic*: Glaucon's challenge
Epicurean contractualism

2. Monday, July 2nd: *Hobbes's account of the human condition*

The state of nature & the prisoner's dilemma
Human motivation
The laws of nature
Hobbes's account of freedom

Wednesday, July 4th: Holiday, so no class

3. Friday, July 6th: *The Hobbesian Social Contract*

The Sovereign as an artificial person
How could we possibly trust one another in order to contract to form the state?
How does the Sovereign solve the problem of the state of nature?
Why sovereign's power must be indivisible
Why not free ride? Hobbes's reply to the Foole

Note that July 7th is the last day to add or drop the class without financial liability.

4. Monday, July 9th: *Locke's account of the state of nature*

Locke & Filmer
Judging the law for oneself
The labor-mixing theory of ownership
Agreeing to economic inequality and the use of money
The problem of the state of nature

5. Wednesday, July 11th: *Locke's voluntary contract*

Agreeing to form a state
Agreeing to live in a state
What would a Lockean state look like?

Macpherson's "dictatorship of the bourgeoisie" reading
Astell on marriage and the contract

6. Friday, July 13th: *Rousseau's account of the state of nature and human nature*
Rousseau's response to Hobbes and Locke
Rousseau on the origin of inequality
The origin of property rights
Amour-propre vs. *amour de soi*

7. Monday, July 16th: *Rousseau's social contract*
Civil equality
The general will and democracy
Berlin on positive vs. negative freedom
Rousseau on education: *Emile*, *Sophie*, and Wollstonecraft on Rousseau

8. Wednesday, July 18th: *Hume's conventionalism and his critique of the social contract*
Hume's "Of the Original Contract"
Gaus on state of nature arguments
Justice by convention: a coordination problem instead of a prisoner's dilemma

9. Friday, July 20th
This is a placeholder on the schedule. We'll definitely do something this day, but I'm leaving it here in case we fall behind or I decide to use a class meeting for something else (e.g., an essay-writing workshop).

10. Monday, July 23rd: *Kant: willing the law for oneself*
Kant's response to Hume and the hypothetical contract
Rousseau's influence on Kant
Autonomy & heteronymy
The necessity of the state to keep us out of a condition of heteronymy
Willing the moral law

10. Wednesday, July 25th: *Bentham, Mill, and the Utilitarian tradition*
Bentham on natural rights
Utilitarianism in general
Mill's Utilitarianism
Justice as rules that promote utility

11. Friday, July 27th: *Marx's critique of justice and liberalism*
Political vs. social equality
Marx's account of the human good
Justice and the contract device as ideology
Marxist feminism

Note that July 28th is the last day to withdraw from the course.

12. Monday, July 30th: *Rawlsian contractualism*

Rawls's critique of Utilitarianism

The basic structure

The original position and the veil of ignorance

The difference principle

The claim that being relatively talented does not make people more deserving

Institutional choice

Reconciliation and the problem of stability

13. Wednesday, August 1st: *Nozick's critique of Rawls*

Unpatterned vs. end-result theories of distribution

The Wilt Chamberlain argument

Taxation and slavery

Nozick's entitlement theory

14. Friday, August 3rd: *Public reason and the political turn*

Rawls's account of public reason

Gaus and public reason

Enoch's critique of public reason