

Classics of Social & Political Thought I

SOSC 15100 – Section 10

Autumn Quarter 2014

Instructor: Sean Hannan

Email: seanhannan@gmail.com

Time: Tuesdays & Thursdays, 3:00 p.m. – 4:20 p.m.

Room: Wieboldt 408

Office Hours: Thursday 12:00 p.m. – 2p.m. at the Smart Museum Café

For those who haven't yet been there, directions to the Smart Museum can be found at:
<http://smartmuseum.uchicago.edu/visit/directions/>

Course Overview

It's often easier for us to accuse others of being unjust than it is to reflect on why we ourselves should deserve to be called just by comparison. Recoiling from actions that appall us, we might say something along the lines of: "What an injustice! How can they get away with that?" To feel that way in the heat of the moment and to cast judgment accordingly is something we tend to do on a daily basis. Less frequently, however, are we given the chance to take a step back and think about what it is that supports our claims about what is just and what is not.

Consider this course an invitation to take that step back and reflect more deeply on what we think we're up to when we talk about justice and injustice. You won't be alone in doing so. As a group, we'll work our way through four historical texts that can help us gain some perspective on our own definitions of justice. With Plato, we'll see how difficult it can be to convince people that questioning received notions of justice resembles anything like a good idea. In fact, as Plato's Socrates will caution us, it might turn out that 'goodness' itself is not a term to be thrown around too lightly. Aristotle, for his part, will then provide us with an alternative path for getting from a singular account of virtue to a catalogue of the variety of social orders available to us. With Aquinas, we'll look more deeply into religion as a potential foundation for grounding our convictions about what is just. Finally, with Machiavelli, we'll face up to the possibility that all of our talk about justice, goodness, and virtue has been motivated by an underlying desire for power and strength.

By the end of the course, then, we will have had the opportunity to confront the challenge of justice from a number of different angles. Doing so should allow us to become more aware of how our own social lives and political orientations are in many ways rooted in these historical debates about how best to discern the just from the unjust. Our goal this quarter is not solely to introduce you to these four classic authors, but also to help you attain a more critically sharpened perspective as you continue to think your way through the history of social and political thought for yourselves.

Required Texts

Plato. *The Republic*. 2nd ed. Trans. Allan Bloom (Basic Books, 1991).
Aristotle. *The Politics*. Trans. C.D.C. Reeve (Hackett, 1998).
Thomas Aquinas. *On Law, Morality, and Politics*. Trans. & Ed. William P. Baumgarth & Richard J. Regan, S.J. 2nd ed. (Hackett, 2003).
Niccolò Machiavelli. *The Prince*. Trans. Harvey C. Mansfield. 2nd ed. (University of Chicago Press, 1998).

Course Requirements

In order to fulfill the requirements for this course, you'll be asked to attend every regularly scheduled meeting and contribute to the weekly discussion. Getting everyone to participate in our shared conversation will be one of our main goals this Autumn. So that we can create the conditions for that to happen, we'll aim to encourage an open environment that will lead to lively discussion and rigorous reflection on the texts at hand.

You'll also be asked to write three papers of varying length over the course of the term. The first should come in somewhere between 800-1000 words and will be due by the end of Friday, Oct. 17. (By 'the end of,' I mean 11:59 p.m.) The second paper should be between 1400-1600 words and will be due by the end of Friday, Nov. 14. The third and final paper should also be between 1400-1600 words and absolutely must be handed in by the crack of 11:59 p.m. on Monday, Dec. 8.

The purpose of these assignments is to gradually introduce you to expectations about writing at the college level. Starting out with a shorter piece allows you to work your way up to longer and more incisive forms of argumentation. By the end of the quarter, you should be able to say not only that you've learned more about the history of political thought, but also that you've developed more effective ways of expressing what it is you've learned about that history.

Grades

First Paper: 10%
Second Paper: 30%
Third Paper: 30%
Participation: 30%

The first paper will count for less of your overall grade and will serve as a primer on expectations of college-level writing and argumentation. Don't panic if your initial grade isn't immediately what you expected. We assign an early essay that counts for a bit less so that some room for improvement will be left over. Lessons learned from that first paper can then be applied to the following two assignments, both of which will count for the same percentage of your final grade.

Please note that participation, too, counts for a substantial portion of that final grade. Constructive contributions to class discussion will ultimately be worth just as much as a well-crafted paper.

Course Policies

Absences

Only by attending all of our regularly scheduled class meetings will you be able to earn a full participation grade. If you need to be absent for a substantive reason—such as a health issue, personal emergency, or religious occasion—please email me to let me know.

Late Assignments

Papers handed in after 11:59 p.m. on their respective due dates will be docked one third of a letter grade. That is to say: a very impressive paper handed in at 12:00 a.m. the following day will be docked from an A to an A-, and so on down the line. The letter grade will continue to go down by one third for each added day that the paper is late. In general, it's much better to hand in a paper on time than to hold on to it for an extra day in hopes of ratcheting up its quality. The daily loss in thirds of a letter grade tends to make holding on to papers no longer a worthwhile enterprise.

Formatting Papers

Please try to hand in your papers as Word documents attached to an email. Be sure to send that email to me. Please also try to stick to the allotted amount of words. There are all sorts of tricks that students can try in order to fit a good number of words onto a relatively small number of pages. Please refrain from trying these tricks out. They can easily be flouted thanks to Word's handy 'word count' feature. If you do choose to exceed the allotted amount of words by an egregious amount (in the range of, say, 200-400 words), such egregious excess will find its negative reflection in that paper's grade.

Plagiarism

Above all, please refrain from committing the intellectual crime of taking someone else's words as your own. This is known as plagiarism, and it can run the gamut from stealing a friend's paper wholesale to improperly citing a scholarly text. Papers marred by plagiarism would have to receive a failing grade. It would also be my duty to report authors of a plagiarized paper to the College. That would be a sad day for all involved. Happily, though, the University's Writing Program has prepared a useful guide to avoiding plagiarism, even during those dark nights of the soul when you're feeling most tempted to finish that paper by any means necessary. Rather than waiting for such nights, it would be best to check out their website in advance:

http://writing-program.uchicago.edu/resources/collegewriting/but_what_if_you_get_stuck.htm

Writing Assistance

When they're not busy combatting plagiarism, the Writing Program also provides a number of other services that can prove helpful to burgeoning writers in the College. If you're taking a section of the HUM core this year, then you may already be acquainted with the Writing Intern assigned to work with you throughout that course. They can aid you as you strive to sharpen your essay-writing skills as the quarter progresses. The Writing Program also employs Writing Tutors, who can take extra time to introduce you to the strategies that make for successful composition and argumentation at

the college level. Again, feel free to peruse the Writing Program's website and check out the full suite of options available to you:

<http://writing-program.uchicago.edu/>

Accommodations

If you believe you may need any kind of special accommodation when attending class or completing an assignment, please let me know right away. I will be sure to connect you with the appropriate offices in the College, so that we'll be able to arrange accommodations as soon as possible.

Laptops & Phones

Though it can be difficult to tear ourselves away from our electronic devices and the vast stores of data they hold within themselves, we should aim to prioritize interaction with our fellow humans during class time. There is nothing wrong with using a laptop or tablet to take notes, but please don't distract yourself or others by browsing extracurricular sites. Please also keep the sound switched off, even if (or, rather, especially if) you have one of those apps that makes your keyboard sound like an old-fashioned typewriter. As for phones, it's best to set those aside entirely for the duration of our meeting. Our goal, remember, is to create the conditions for a constructive conversation, and that's a goal that demands our attention if we're ever going to meet it.

Course Schedule

Week 1

Tuesday, Sept. 30: Introductory Meeting (no reading assigned)
Thursday, Oct. 2: Plato, *Republic*, I.327a-354c (pp. 3-34)

Week 2

Tuesday, Oct. 7: Plato, *Republic*, II-III.357a-417b (pp. 35-96)
Thursday, Oct. 9: Plato, *Republic*, IV.419a-445e (pp. 97-125)

Week 3

Tuesday, Oct. 14: Plato, *Republic*, V-VI.449a-511d (pp.127-192)
Thursday, Oct. 16: Plato, *Republic*, VII.514a-541b (pp. 193-220)

Friday, Oct. 17: **First Paper Due**

Week 4

Tuesday, Oct. 21: Plato, *Republic*, VIII-IX.543a-592b (pp. 221-275)
Thursday, Oct. 23: **NO CLASS** [make-up meeting on Plato to be scheduled]

Week 5

Tuesday, Oct. 28: Plato, *Republic*, X.595a-621d (pp. 277-303)
Thursday, Oct. 30: Aristotle, *Politics*, I.1-13; II.1.-7 (pp. 1-45)

Week 6

Tuesday, Nov. 4: Aristotle, *Politics*, III.1-18; IV.1-12 (pp. 65-123)
Thursday, Nov. 6: Aristotle, *Politics*, V.1, 8, 11; VI.2-4 (pp. 134-136, 152-155, 166-171, 176-182)

Week 7

Tuesday, Nov. 11: Aristotle, *Politics*, VII.1-15; VIII.1-3 (pp. 191-219, 227-231)
Thursday, Nov. 13: Aquinas, *On Law*, I-II.90-95 (pp. 10-59)

Friday, Nov. 14: **Second Paper Due**

Week 8

Tuesday, Nov. 18: Aquinas, *On Law*, I-II.96-97, 105; II-II.57-59 (pp. 59-75, 93-129)
Thursday, Nov. 20: Machiavelli, *Prince*, I-XI (pp. 1-47)

Week 9

Tuesday, Nov. 25: **NO CLASS** [make-up meeting on Machiavelli to be scheduled]
Thursday, Nov. 27: **NO CLASS** [Thanksgiving]

Week 10

Tuesday, Dec. 2: Machiavelli, *Prince*, XII-XXVI (pp. 48-105)
Thursday, Dec. 4: Final Review Session

Finals

Monday, Dec. 8: **Third and Final Paper Due**