Classics of Social and Political Thought III

Spring 2023

Daniel Epstein
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Monday-Wednesday, 3:00pm-4:20pm
Cobb 116

Office Hours: Tuesdays, 2pm-3:30pm or by appointment, Grounds of Being Cafe
Signup link: https://calendly.com/danielepstein/office-hours

Writing Advisor: Elena Schafer, elschafer@uchicago.edu

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?

The final quarter of Classics of Social and Political Thought turns to texts by nineteenth- and twentieth-century writers who developed critiques of existing social and political conditions: Alexis de Tocqueville, Karl Marx, Max Weber, W.E.B. Du Bois, Simone de Beauvoir, and Hannah Arendt. These thinkers will invite us to explore a variety of ideas about the ways in which domination appears and operates within liberal democracies and capitalist societies, as well as the requirements for overcoming it. We will also examine the meaning of values such as equality, freedom, self-reliance, thrift, morality, and truth, and we will consider how these values shape human lives. Finally, throughout the quarter we will use the assigned texts as resources for learning about the practice of social criticism. We will consider how it can serve society, as well as how we might use the concepts and models of inquiry that we find in our texts to analyze present social and political conditions. What kinds of lives do these conditions allow us to lead?

Course Requirements:

Engagement (30% of final grade): This is a discussion-based seminar. Therefore, your active engagement with the course material and with each other is an important part of making this a worthwhile intellectual experience both for you and for your classmates. Please come to class prepared to participate actively, productively, and respectfully in discussion. This said—while I encourage you to push yourself to participate at least once a week—participation in class discussions is not the only way to demonstrate your engagement with the course material. Conversations with me outside of the classroom, as well as the quality of your weekly questions, can improve your grade here if you are an infrequent participator.

Response Questions (10% of final grade): On eight occasions over the course of the quarter, you will submit a brief paragraph **developing a specific question about the day's reading assignment** by 12pm on the day of class. These paragraphs should be **at least 150 words** and should be sent to me **by email.** The questions may be about any aspect of the day's assignment,

and can pertain to narrower interpretive issues about what an author is saying or broader themes the readings surface. I may choose to use some of these questions in class discussion, in which case I will have you read your question out loud or summarize it for the class. These questions will be graded on completion.

Mid-Quarter Paper (25% of final grade): 1500-1750 words. Due Monday, April 24. Prompts will be distributed 12 days in advance.

Final Paper (35% of final grade): 2000-2500 words. Due Monday, May 22. Prompts will be distributed 12 days in advance.

Writing Advisor: Elena Schafer is the designated writing advisor for this section. You will be required to attend a small-group workshop with her (date TBD), and meet with her during the writing process of either of the two course papers. **Unexcused failure to meet either of these requirements will impact your engagement grade**. You may also make an appointment with Elena or another writing advisor at any point during the quarter by way of this link: https://voices.uchicago.edu/soscwriter/for-students/ .

Late Policy/Extensions: The default penalty for a late assignment will be one-third of a letter grade for each day late (so a B turns into a B- if the assignment is a day late). Extensions or mitigated penalties for lateness will be considered on a case-by-case basis. If you expect that a deadline will pose a problem for you, please let me know *as soon as you can*, and I will do my best to find alternative arrangements if appropriate.

Absences: Because the success of the seminar hinges on student engagement, it is very important that you make every effort to attend class. Each unexcused absence will result in losing a half-letter of your engagement grade. An excused absence will not impact your engagement grade on its own, but if you miss a number of sessions, you will be expected to meet with me in a timely manner to discuss the missed material and demonstrate your engagement with it. Tardiness may also negatively impact your engagement grade. You will not be penalized for an absence due to a religious observance. If a personal emergency arises that will cause you to miss several classes, please get in touch with me, either directly or through your advisor. In such a case, there is no need to inform me of the details of your situation, only the duration of your absence.

Academic Honesty: All work you submit for this course must be your original work. If you are ever unsure what constitutes plagiarism, please get in touch with me. Proven plagiarism will result in a failing grade on the assignment. Further consequences are possible depending on the circumstances. It is always better to submit late work or work that is not your best than to commit plagiarism.

Disability Accommodations: I am committed to doing what I can to make this course as accessible as possible. If you require an accommodation or classroom modification of any kind, please get in touch with me as early in the quarter as possible, so I can ensure it is implemented. For more information on the University's accommodation policies, please visit http://disabilities.uchicago.edu.

Electronic devices: Electronic devices will not be permitted in class unless you have written permission from the University to use a computer. *If you would prefer not to purchase the required texts, please make arrangements to get them from the library or through inter-library loan as soon as possible.*

Required Texts: The following texts are available for purchase at the Seminary Co-Op Bookstore. Please use these editions of the texts to aid in the in-class discussion of specific passages.

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

Schedule

Alexis de Tocqueville

Monday, March 20
Introductions and Syllabus Review
Democracy in America, 909–910 ("1848 Preface"), 3-17

Wednesday, March 22
Democracy in America, 31–65, 66–77, 97–110

Monday, March 27
Democracy in America, 264–302, 330–47, 352-60

Wednesday, March 29
Democracy in America, 365–71, 392–419, 685-709

Monday, April 3
Democracy in America, 581–94, 787–802, 816–34.

Karl Marx

Wednesday, April 5 ***NO CLASS TODAY* [I will be traveling on this day and cannot hold class. Instead, I will hold two makeup sessions on Thursday, April 13, as scheduled below. If you personally cannot make either makeup section, this will be an excused absence. You should plan to attend my office hours or make another meeting with me to discuss the material. My apologies for the inconvenience.]**

Monday, April 10

"On the Jewish Question," Part I, 212–top of 227.

"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…").

Wednesday, April 12

"On the Jewish Question," Part I, top of 227–34.

Letter to Arnold Ruge, September 1843, 206–209.

Thursday, April 13

ATTEND ONE: 11:30am-12:50pm, Wieboldt 103; 4:30pm-5:50pm, Cobb 106

"Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844," 282–89 (stop at section break), 322–24, 295-299

[Wednesday, April 12: Mid-Quarter Paper Prompts Distributed]

Monday, April 17

"Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844," 322–top of 337.

Wednesday, April 19

"Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844," 345–58.
"Concerning Feuerbach," 421-423

W. E. B. Du Bois

Monday, April 24

The Souls of Black Folk, 33-72, 82-102

Monday, April 24: Mid-Quarter Paper due

Wednesday, April 26

The Souls of Black Folk, 117-147, 164-184, 195

Wednesday, April 26, 5:00-6:30pm, Kent 107 (ADDITIONAL SESSION, EXTRA CREDIT)

Professors Adom Getachew and Jennifer Pitts (lecture) on the international writings of W.E.B. Du Bois.

Weber

Monday, May 1
"Science as a Vocation," in *The Vocation Lectures*, 1–31.

Wednesday, May 3
"Politics as a Vocation," in *The Vocation Lectures*, 32–94.

Simone de Beauvoir

Monday, May 8
The Second Sex, 3–17, 44–48, 62–75.

Wednesday, May 10
The Second Sex, 279–340, 638–64.

[Wednesday, May 10: Final Paper Prompts Distributed]

Monday, May 15
The Second Sex, 721–66.

Hannah Arendt

Wednesday, May 17
"What is Freedom," Assignment Posted on Canvas

Monday, May 22: Final Paper due