

## Philosophy 3350: Early Modern Social Contract Theory



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**Office hours: Mondays and Wednesdays 11:00-12:00, or by appointment**

Social contract theory is an early expression of what is now referred to as contractarianism, a view according to which the legitimacy of political systems rests upon a mutual agreement amongst free, rational and equal people. A defining feature of early contractarianism is the belief that human beings are motivated, in some degree, by self-interest. Another defining feature is the characterization of the “state of nature”—a world without justice (and in some cases without any system of morality). Humans are driven to contractual agreement with others to escape an otherwise overly competitive or untenable situation. Humans cede decision-making power to the authority of government as a result of enlightened self-interest: we benefit, on balance, from cooperation with others.

This theory of political authority provides the basis for modern liberal systems of government. Without the works of such thinkers as Thomas Hobbes, John Locke and Jean Jacques Rousseau, modern systems of government may well have looked very different and the perception of the relationship between the interests of individuals and that of the state would likely be radically different.

In studying these early thinkers, we come to appreciate the fundamental assumptions that drove the rise of modern Western governments. We are also driven to consider the nature of human motivation, the role of moral rules and rules of justice in state legislation, as well as to reflect upon the ways in which governmental structures shape our individual sense of rights, responsibilities and social duties.

### **Required Texts:**

Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, edited by Edwin Curley (Hackett Publishing, 1994)

John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, edited by Peter Laslett (Cambridge University Press, 1988)

Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Basic Political Writings*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, edited by Donald A. Cress (Hackett Publishing, 2011)

## Coursework requirements:

### **Weekly write-ups**                      20% (10 x 2%)

1-2 pages. You will submit one every week in class.

The write-up is an opportunity for you to raise interpretive points and critical observations of the text. What point or points struck you as particularly interesting (i.e. that raises some interesting ideas that you think are relevant or innovative in some way), troubling (i.e. implying something worth worrying about), or problematic (perhaps inconsistent with other aspects of the text).

You may be asked to contribute your ideas to the class, as a way of opening up some discussion.

Each write-up will be graded out of 2 points on the basis of the following three criteria:

1. How well you've understood the text
2. The clarity of your writing
3. The quality of your critical engagement with the text.

### **Critical Summary**                      15%

2-3 pages. A critical summary is a method of critical analysis, which requires a precise formulation of the argument of an assigned text, in your own words, along with a critical analysis of its relative strength or weakness. Detailed guidelines on writing critical summaries, along with grading guidelines, will be handed out in class and made available on CourseLink.

**Due: Friday October 10<sup>th</sup>** (*Assignment to be submitted electronically via Dropbox. Late assignments will not be accepted, except on medical or compassionate grounds. You must speak to Professor Sheridan to arrange for late submission of assignments*)

### **Paper**    30%

8-10 pages. The paper can be on a topic of your own choosing, but I will also hand out some topics for you to choose from. The paper should take an interpretive position. A paper writing guideline and a grading guideline will be handed out.

**Due: Friday, November 14<sup>th</sup>** (*Assignment to be submitted electronically via Dropbox. Late assignments will not be accepted, except on medical or compassionate grounds. You must speak to Professor Sheridan to arrange for late submission of assignments*)

### **Take-home exam**                      35%

This exam will be in two parts: Part I: 10 short answer questions: Part II: one essay question. The exam will be distributed on the last day of classes, November 28<sup>th</sup>.

**Due: TBA, but some time within the exam period in December** (*This exam will be submitted electronically via Dropbox. This is a final exam- late assignments may be accepted except on medical or compassionate grounds, but may require more official arrangements with an administrative office*)

## **\*\*Important Information\*\***

### **E-mail Communication**

As per University regulations, all students are required to check their <uoguelph.ca> e-mail account regularly: e-mail is the official route of communication between the university and its students.

### **When You Cannot Meet a Course Requirement**

When you find yourself unable to meet an in-course requirement because of illness or compassionate reasons, please advise the course instructor (or designated person, such as a teaching assistant) in writing, with your name, id#, and e-mail contact. See the Undergraduate Calendar for information on regulations and procedures for Academic Consideration:

<http://www.uoguelph.ca/registrar/calendars/undergraduate/current/c08/c08-ac.shtml>

### **Drop Date**

The last date to drop one-semester Fall 2012 courses, without academic penalty, is **Thursday November 1**. For regulations and procedures for Dropping Courses, see the Undergraduate Calendar:

<http://www.uoguelph.ca/registrar/calendars/undergraduate/current/c08/c08-drop.shtml>

### **Copies of out-of-class assignments**

Keep paper and/or other reliable back-up copies of all out-of-class assignments: you may be asked to resubmit work at any time.

### **Student Rights and Responsibilities**

Each student at the University of Guelph has rights which carry commensurate responsibilities that involve, broadly, being a civil and respectful member of the University community. The Rights and Responsibilities are detailed in the Undergraduate Calendar: <http://www.uoguelph.ca/registrar/calendars/undergraduate/current/c14/c14-strightsrespon.shtml>

### **Academic Misconduct**

The University of Guelph is committed to upholding the highest standards of academic integrity and enjoins all members of the University community – faculty, staff, and students – to be aware of what constitutes academic misconduct and to do as much as possible to prevent academic offences from occurring. The Academic Misconduct Policy is detailed in the Undergraduate Calendar:

<http://www.uoguelph.ca/registrar/calendars/undergraduate/current/c08/c08-amisconduct.shtml>

### **Recording of Materials**

Presentations which are made in relation to course work—including lectures—cannot be recorded in any electronic media without the permission of the presenter, whether the instructor, a classmate or guest lecturer.

### **Resources**

The Undergraduate Calendar is the source of information about the University of Guelph's procedures, policies and regulations which apply to undergraduate programs. It can be found at:

<http://www.uoguelph.ca/registrar/calendars/undergraduate/current/>

If you find yourself in difficulty, contact the undergraduate advisor in your program, or the BA Counselling Office:

<http://www.uoguelph.ca/baco/contact.shtml>

## Course Schedule

September 8: *Introduction*

September 15: *Some Aristotelian background and the Divine Right of Kings*  
(these texts can be found online via a link on our Courselink site)  
Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics*, Book I, Chapters 2; 4-7; 13  
Aristotle, *Politics*, Book I  
King James I of England, *On the Divine Right of Kings* (1609)

### Section I: Hobbes's *Leviathan*

September 22: *Humans as mechanisms; our natural state; rights and freedoms*  
*Leviathan*, Introduction (Hobbes's, not the editor's: p. 3-5)  
*Leviathan*, vi; xiii-xvi  
**\*Critical Summary topic handed out**

September 29: *The rights of the sovereign and the rights of subjects*  
*Leviathan*, xvii-xxi

October 6: *Laws, crimes, punishments, and how it can all fall apart*  
*Leviathan*, xxiv; xxvi-xxix  
**N.B. Friday, October 10<sup>th</sup>: Critical Summary Due**

### Section 2: Locke's *Two Treatises of Government*

October 13: *Holiday, no classes*

October 20: *The Divine Right of Kings and the State of Nature*  
Filmer, *Patriarcha* (1680), Selections TBA; e-text link on Courselink site  
Locke, *Two Treatises*, Bk I, Chapters I-II; Bk II, Chapters I-3

October 27: *The Rise of the Political State*  
Locke, *Second Treatise*, Bk II, Chapters V; VII-IX

November 3: *The Extent of Sovereign Power and how it can all fall apart*  
Locke, *Second Treatise*, Book II, Chapters XI; XV; XVIII-XIX

### Section 3: Rousseau

November 10: *The State of Nature and the formation of Political Society*  
Rousseau, *On the Social Contract*, Book I  
**N.B. Friday November 14<sup>th</sup>: Paper Due**

November 17: *The General Will and Sovereign Authority*  
Rousseau, *On the Social Contract*, Book II; 1-4, 6; Book III, 9-14

November 24: *Political Participation and the Health of the State; how it can all fall apart*  
Rousseau, *On the Social Contract*, Book IV; 1-3; 6-9

November 28: *Catch-up and Wrap-up*