

WESTERN UNIVERSITY
DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY
Undergraduate Course Outline 2021-22

Philosophy 3180G: Topics in the History of Political and Legal Philosophy
The Social Contract from Plato to Rawls

Winter Term 2022
Tuesday 10:30-12:30, Thursday 11:30-12:30
FNB 1240

Instructor: Dennis Klimchuk
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DESCRIPTION

The dominant approach to political philosophy in the early modern period was social contract theory, according to which the only basis on which coercion can be legitimately exercised is through a set of institutions to which each has consented (or would or could consent), and is limited by the terms that structure such an agreement. We will focus the rise of social contract theory in the seventeenth century, starting with Grotius, to the beginning of its decline in the eighteenth, with Kant. Between the two we will also read Locke and Rousseau and some early modern critics of social contract theory such as Filmer and Hume. We will begin with a dialogue of Plato's that anticipates many ideas in this tradition and, after Kant, read Rawls, who followed it in many ways. We will conclude by considering some contemporary scholarship on the tradition and ask what we can learn from it today.

TEXTS

Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (Hackett)
John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government* (Hackett)
Jean Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract* (Hackett)

A number of other readings will be made available on the course OWL page..

OBJECTIVES

The goal of this course is to acquaint students with the social contract tradition and through it the issues and ideas that were engaged at the foundation of modern political thought. Through written assignments students will have the opportunity to develop skills in the interpretation and analysis of historical texts in philosophy.

REQUIREMENTS

Two short papers (5pp.), worth 35% each. There will be four topics for you to choose from, each with its own due date. You may instead, **with my approval**, write on topics of your own devising. You may also write a third paper and, if you choose, a fourth, in which case your best

two grades will count toward your final grade.

A **final exam** worth 30%. You will answer three essay-type questions from a list of six, in two

COURSE ASSIGNMENT

The last day of scheduled classes in any course will be the last day on which course assignments will be accepted for credit in a course. Instructors will be required to return assignments to students