1. Course description, objectives, and expectations

This course will cover key questions in political philosophy regarding classic theories of the state and of political obligation. Social contract theories account in different ways for the general idea that there is an agreement amongst the individuals of a society to be subjected to fundamental social rules, institutions, and principles, and that these contracts have normative character and can be rationally justified. These topics will be explored through the contributions of five political philosophers: Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Immanuel Kant, and John Rawls. We will also look at the feminist/intersectional critiques of social contract theories. The objective of this course is three-fold. First, to introduce students to the key topics concerning social contract theories, such as the legitimacy of the state, the nature of consent in the political context, the possibility of freedom in society, the grounds for civil disobedience, and the relationship between human nature and politics. Second, to provide students with knowledge of the contributions of classic political philosophers and their place in the development of western political thought. Third, with a combination of analysis of primary sources and secondary literature, this course has the aim of enhancing key philosophical abilities such as the analysis and commentary of primary texts, the reconstruction and evaluation of arguments, and the comparison between theories.

Students taking this course will be expected to read the parts of the primary texts required for each lecture, together with the relevant secondary literature for each topic. On completion of this course, students should be able to:

1. Demonstrate a well-rounded understanding of social contract theories in the history of western thought
2. State confidently the main doctrines presented in the primary texts
3. Engage with primary texts by identifying and assessing questions and arguments
4. Identify objections to the different views and establish comparisons between theories
5. Establish connections between classic social contract theories and contemporary philosophical views and current events
2. Lecture schedule and readings

Week 1. Introduction to the Social Contract tradition

Core readings:

Optional reading:

Week 2. Hobbes on human nature

Primary reading:

Secondary readings:

Seminar question: If human nature is as Hobbes describes it, does it follow that life in the state of nature would be ‘solitary, poore, nasty, brutish and short’?

Week 3. Hobbes on the covenant, the sovereign, and the right to rebel

Primary reading:
- Hobbes, Leviathan, Part II, chapters 17-22, 29

Secondary readings:

Optional reading:

Seminar question: How, according to Hobbes, do individuals living in the state of nature manage to arrive into political society? Is his account convincing? What are the problems with it?

Week 4. Locke on the state of nature

Primary reading:
- Locke, Second Treatise on Government, chapters 1-5

Secondary readings:

Optional reading:

Seminar question: Are Locke’s views on property defensible?
Week 5. Locke on consent, the state, and the right to rebellion

**Primary reading:**
- Locke, *Second Treatise on Government*, chapters 6-19
- Hume, ‘Of the original contract’

**Secondary readings:**

**Optional reading:**

**Seminar question:** What sort of theory of consent does Locke offer in the Second Treatise of Government? Is it plausible? Can it withstand Hume’s criticisms?

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Week 6. Flexible learning week

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Week 7. Rousseau: the state of nature, the social contract, inequality, and the general will

**Primary readings:**
- Rousseau, *The Social Contract*
- Rousseau, *Discourse on the Origins of Inequality*

**Secondary readings:**
- C. Bertram (2017) ‘Rousseau’ *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*

**Optional reading:**

**Seminar question:** Is participation in the General Will consistent with the non-renunciation of one’s freedom?

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Week 8. Kant on the state of nature, the social contract, and the right to rebel

**Primary readings:**
- Kant, *Political Writings*, Sections: ‘What is Enlightenment?’, ‘On the relationship of theory to practice in political right’ and ‘Metaphysics of Morals’

**Secondary readings:**
- F. Rauscher (2016), ‘Kant’s Social and Political Philosophy’, *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*

**Optional readings:**
- H. Arendt (1982), *Lectures on Kant’s Political Philosophy*

**Seminar questions:**
What is the point of Kant’s idea of rational possible unanimity? Is it a useful test of rightfulness? Why are revolutions illegitimate for Kant?

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Week 9. Participation session (we will talk about the details of this session in week 1)
Week 10. Rawls: the original position, civil disobedience

Primary readings:

Secondary readings:

Seminar questions:
Is Rawls’ account of the original position more plausible than traditional accounts of the state of nature?
What is Rawls’ account of civil disobedience? Is it sufficient for its purpose?

Week 11. Feminist critiques of the social contract

Core readings:

Optional readings:

3. Assessment

Undergraduate: this course will be assessed on the basis of:
- Mid-term essay (1,500 words, 40%) due on Thursday, 27th February 2020, by 12 noon (UK time)
- Final essay (2,000 words, 50%) due on Thursday, 23rd April 2020, by 12 noon (UK time)
- Participation (10%)

You can choose any of the seminar question for your essays. Alternatively, for the final essay, you can also come up with your own question. If you choose this option, you should briefly discuss the question with the course organiser.

Postgraduate: this course will be assessed on the basis of:
- Final essay (3,000 words, 100%) due on Tuesday 21st April by 12 noon (UK time)
- You will also have the opportunity to submit an optional formative essay, prior to your assessed paper. The deadline for submitting your formative paper is Thursday 5th March, 12 noon (UK time)

You can either choose any of the seminar question for your essay or come up with your own question. If you choose the later option, you should briefly discuss the question with the course organiser.
4. **Notes on primary sources**

These are some recommended editions of the primary sources, in case you want to buy them:

- Locke: *Two Treatises of Government*, Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought, Edited by Peter Laslett

5. **Online resources**


Check the ones on Hobbes, Rousseau, Locke.

Kant on the web (primary texts, translations, articles): [http://staffweb.hkbu.edu.hk/PPP/Kant.html](http://staffweb.hkbu.edu.hk/PPP/Kant.html)

Project Gutenberg:

   For Hobbes’ *Leviathan*: [https://www.gutenberg.org/files/3207/3207-h/3207-h.htm](https://www.gutenberg.org/files/3207/3207-h/3207-h.htm)
   For Rousseau’s works: [http://www.gutenberg.org/files/46333/46333-h/46333-h.htm](http://www.gutenberg.org/files/46333/46333-h/46333-h.htm)