

# CONTEMPORARY CIVILIZATION

Spring 2018

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*Instructor:* Ignacio Ojea Quintana (ignacio.ojea@columbia.edu).

*Meeting Time:* Mondays and Wednesdays 16:10-18:00 (Carman 111).

*Office Hours:* Mondays 18:00-20:00 (Philosophy Hall 722).

## *Course Description*

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Contemporary Civilization is a course about the kinds of communities that humans imagine, create, and inhabit. It has evolved since its inception in 1919, but has consistently served two purposes. The first is to prepare students for active democratic citizenship by introducing them to many of major historical texts that have shaped the development of (mostly Western) human communities and the moral, political, and social values that inform them. To this end, you will closely examine texts both in their historical context and as related to contemporary society, in order to explore central questions about how we live together, how we decide what is right or what is knowable, and how we define human nature. Secondly, the course is designed to help students cultivate the skills needed to participate in a democracy, skills such as reasoning, critical analysis, and argument. In addition to learning how the texts construct an argument and what makes an argument persuasive, you will also be expected to construct arguments of your own, both in speech and in writing, about the issues these texts raise and how they relate to contemporary problems and attitudes.

The course will follow a seminar format: while I will lecture on the texts to an extent, it will be your questions, contributions, and discussion that primarily drive the course. In broad terms, the sorts of questions that the texts on this syllabus will confront us with are: How should we live our lives? How do we conceive of ourselves? Is there such a thing as the good life? Indeed, are there any universal values at all? How can we live well as individuals and as members of a community? What is human nature? What is the relationship between values and knowledge? Between reason and faith? Between science and society? Between Economics and Politics? Each of the texts we read offers insights into some of these questions.

## *Student Learning Objectives*

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Learning objectives can be divided between those which are content oriented and those that are skilled oriented.

Contentwise, it is unreasonable to expect students to attain mastery of every, or even any, of the texts we will be reading, given the length and depth of the readings involved. Nevertheless, you will be expected to be able to acquire and retain a very good understanding of the central ideas and arguments contained in the assigned readings and discussed in class. You will also be expected to reflect on the contributions and limitations of each text regarding the general aims of the course. You will also be expected to develop a capacity for reading a text *charitably*, as well as for clear, focused, well-structured academic writing.

A secondary goal with respect to content is for you to use critical examinations of these texts as an opportunity to engage critically with your own views. This will require an honest examination of one's own beliefs, which in turn requires a sincere attempt to grapple with the arguments and ideas presented in the readings. Over the course of the semester, you will encounter various ideas which you find absurd, unsettling, exciting, trivial, or even repugnant. Each of these encounters affords you an opportunity to reflect, in turn, on your own beliefs. Perhaps you find elements of Plato absurd: which of your beliefs are responsible for that reaction? Are these beliefs justified? If not, perhaps Plato's arguments are indeed better than you had originally thought. Through this process, you will uncover surprising features of your own beliefs, as well as obtain a better understanding of our texts. These texts are rich, and if you engage with them sincerely, they will almost always repay you tenfold.

With respect to skills, the primary concern is to cultivate the ability of critical thinking. This in turn requires mastering written and verbal skills. Student's writing should be clear, concise, and informative. They should be able to charitably reconstruct a text's argument(s), evaluate and assess them (e.g., is a particular argument good and why, and if it is not, where and how is it flawed?), raise concerns, and develop a personal view on the matter. In class, they should be able to articulate their opinions clearly and assertively, but also to learn to listen and evaluate the strength of what others are saying. Writing and class participation guidelines will be provided to this end, as well as many exercises.

With these objectives in mind, I hope students improve their understanding of the ideas and values that inform our lives and communities today; and I hope that students gain the ability to interrogate, support, and argue for their own moral, political, epistemic, theoretical, or philosophical commitments.

### ***Required Texts***

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You should buy the standard texts for Contemporary Civilization which includes:

Rousseau, *Basic Political Writings*, Hackett.  
Smith, *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (on CC Reader)  
Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (excerpts will be available online).  
Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, Cambridge.  
Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Preface to the first edition (available online).  
Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, Oxford.  
Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, Oxford.  
Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, Penguin and "Letter on Algeria," CC Reader.  
J. S. Mill, *On Liberty and Other Essays*, Oxford.  
Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*, Modern Library.  
The Marx-Engels Reader, Norton.  
Darwin, *Origin of Species*, Norton.  
Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals*, Vintage.  
DuBois, *The Souls of Black*, Norton.  
Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, Grove.  
Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj* (on CC Reader).  
Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, Vintage.  
Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, any edition.

Most readings will be drawn from the following required texts, and it is recommended that you purchase copies of them. Please make sure to get the specified edition. Books are available either at the Columbia University Bookstore [854-4136], or at Labyrinth Books, 536 West 112th St. [865-1588], as indicated below. Additional required readings will be available on the class Courseworks website, or online through the CC Reader website . All books may also be borrowed from the Reserve Desk in Butler Library.

## ***COURSE POLICIES***

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### ***Grading***

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- 19% — Attendance and Class Participation
- 16% — 4 Written Responses (4% each) [+1 exercise response]
- 30% — 2 Papers (12% the first, 18% the second)
- 15% — Midterm Examination
- 20% — Final Examination

### ***Attendance and Class Participation***

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Attendance is **mandatory**. If you must miss a class because of either a family or medical emergency or a religious holiday, please inform me in advance, either in person or by email. To have an absence excused for non-religious reasons, you must have a letter of explanation from either a doctor or a dean. Four or more absences will result in a lowered class participation grade, and may mean being dropped from the course entirely. Promptness matters as well. Excessive or frequent lateness will also result in a lowered class participation grade.

This is primarily a discussion class, and its success depends on each student's active intellectual engagement with both the texts and each other. Students must complete reading assignments in advance of the class sessions at which the readings are to be discussed, and must be prepared to contribute to and benefit from class discussion. Always bring the assigned readings to class, as our discussion will frequently involve direct references to the texts. Each reading will be accompanied by a few questions to guide the reading.

Because many of the topics we discuss involve connections to deeply held personal beliefs—whether they relate to issues involving gender, race, religious faith, cultural values, ethical beliefs, or philosophical views—students must engage with one another respectfully. You are, of course, strongly encouraged to express your views and opinions, whether they differ from other classmates or my own. Disagreements are part of what make a class like CC so great, and can help to fuel productive discussions and facilitate intellectual development. When we do discuss contentious topics or issues, students must always approach them in an open-minded, sensitive, and thoughtful way.

Some students find public speaking difficult, especially in a classroom around one's peers. For those who have this difficulty, I still strongly encourage you to take part in class discussion. In order to assuage any worries students might have about verbally articulating their views, I have forbidden the audio and video recording of lectures and class discussions.

It is relevant to mention that excellence in oral skills exceeds the circumstance of the classroom, and that the ideal we are setting for this classroom setup need not be the best response to a different situation. Awareness of the social situation and the place one occupies in it are as important as

being conscientious of personal tendencies. Some circumstances require to be extroverted, assertive or even confrontative; some others to remain silent, timid, conforming or agreeable. To distinguish them requires *Phronesis*; but students should be able to both assert themselves as individuals with opinions and to conform to the normalized consensus, depending on the situation. Train yourself to recognize the different situations and how you respond to them instinctively. Reflect on those things. If you feel strongly for or against certain view, carefully think a good argument for or against it and be confident to assert yourself in that respect. Also, if you feel strongly for or against certain view, and someone else is making a contribution about it, be sure to let them finish their point and make the best out of it. A smart person learns much from their intellectual allies, but certainly more from their rivals.

An ideal student, in this respect, is someone that makes some, but not too many, well thought and honest interventions in every class. In a nutshell, if that person contributes to the attainment of an ideal class. So here you have a rough the break down of the 19%:

+ 10: If you attend to class regularly (i.e. no more than 4.5 absences).

+ 3: If participated during several classes, honestly attempting to make a contribution.

+ 3: If you participated regularly, but possibly without virtue. This can mean that you participated too much, or that you were not making contributions to the class (because you were focused on yourself or on issues that were not connected with the text or topic that we were discussing, you interrupted others, etc.).

+ 3: If you participated systematically and with virtue.

### ***Written Responses***

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Once every few weeks, students will be required to submit brief written responses (400-500 words – not more) to one of the study questions distributed in advance. According to our schedule, there are a total of four written responses. *Students are encouraged to bring guiding questions to every class.* At the end of each weeks' meeting, I will compose the list of available questions, based on class exchange.

Written responses will be evaluated primarily on the basis of their direct engagement with the texts and questions, and direct references to the texts are encouraged, but students should not include long quotations. Secondary sources are unnecessary. Each response will receive a grade of 1, 2, 3, or unsatisfactory. If you are unable to print out a copy of your response to bring to class, you should email it to me before class. No extension will be granted.

### ***Papers***

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One of the primary goals of this course is the development and refinement of critical analysis and argument. To this end, students will write two papers. The purpose of each paper will be to demonstrate your ability to write a clear and convincing argument based upon the assigned texts. A good argument comes from the interplay between your thoughts and those of the author(s), not simply from summarizing the texts or asserting your own opinions. Secondary literature may be consulted, but its use should be limited, with any and all references clearly cited. Evaluation of papers will be based on clarity, insight, persuasiveness of argument, and the use of evidence. Be aware that style matters, including punctuation, spelling, and grammar. A more detailed guide to writing papers will be handed out before the first assignment.

Papers are due as indicated on the syllabus, and suggested topics will be distributed 2-3 weeks in advance. Papers submitted late without prior permission from the instructor will be marked down one-third of a grade (e.g. B+ to a B) for each day they are late. Students must retain a

printed copy of all written work throughout the semester.

### *Examinations*

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All students must take both a mid-term and a cumulative final examination. Both exams will be with *closed* books.

If you know of a conflict which will prevent you from taking either as scheduled, you must let me know as soon as possible. In particular, *if you require the services of the Disabilities Office, please let me know as early as possible* so that necessary arrangements can be made.

### *Academic Integrity*

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Columbia College is dedicated to the highest ideals of integrity in academia. Therefore, in Literature Humanities and Contemporary Civilization, any instance of academic dishonesty, attempted or actual, will be reported to the faculty chair of the course and to the dean of the Core Curriculum, who will review the case with the expectation that a student guilty of academic dishonesty will receive the grade of “F” in the course and be referred to dean’s discipline for further institutional action.

Note on outside sources and plagiarism: Because this course focuses on your direct interaction with the readings, there is no need to use secondary sources, but if you do choose to use them, you must always use proper citation. The unattributed use of someone else’s work and ideas, including those of other students, can lead to severe repercussions, e.g. failure of the assignment, a possible University reprimand, or even dismissal from the University. Any case of suspected plagiarism will be reported to the academic dean. Plagiarism includes:

1. Submitting of essays, or portions of essays, written by other people as one’s own;
2. Failing to acknowledge, through footnotes and bibliographic references, the source of ideas essentially not one’s own;
3. Failing to indicate paraphrases or ideas or verbatim expressions not one’s own through proper use of quotations and footnotes; and
4. Submitting an essay written for one course to a second course without having sought prior permission from both instructors.

If you are not sure about proper citation, please contact me before you turn in your paper.

### *Electronic Policy, Emails, and Drafts*

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I ask that all cell phones be turned off before class starts. **Laptops are not allowed during class.**

Please feel free to send me emails about practical matters or that raise questions that lend themselves to short answers — i.e., questions that can be answered in a few lines. For more in-depth questions, however, I ask that you either raise them in class (especially if you think they may lead to an interesting and relevant discussion) or arrange to meet me in my office hours. Intricate questions that involve the sorts of complex issues we will discuss in class don’t lend themselves to being answered over email; attempting to answer such questions, other than being quite time-consuming, can lead to more confusion than insight.

Because students tend to have many questions around the time of paper deadlines and exams, I ask that questions be sent 48 hours in advance; when this isn’t possible, please understand that I

will be unable to provide an immediate response given the sheer volume of emails that accumulate in my inbox around these times.

I unfortunately don't have the time to read a draft of every student's essay, but you are encouraged to discuss ideas and outlines in my office hours. You should feel free to come to me at any point in your paper-writing process, but I tend to think students benefit most when they meet earlier on. I also encourage you to make use of the university's Writing Center. For more details, please visit: <http://www.college.columbia.edu/core/uwp/writing-center>

### ***COURSE SCHEDULE***

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Please note that all readings and dates are open to change.

01/16: Rousseau, *Discourse on Inequality*.

01/18 - Rousseau, *Social Contract* [Basic Political Writings 141-65, 170-82, 192-208, 219-27 (Second Edition 156-183, 188-201, 212-230, 241-52)]

01/23 - Rousseau *Social Contract* [Book II, Book III, chapters 1-5 inclusive; and Book IV, chaps 1-3 inc.] **Exercise Written Response due.**

01/25 - Smith, *A Theory of Moral Sentiments* [Part 1 (all) , Part 2 (Section 1), Part 3 (chapters 1, 2)].

01/30 - Smith, *A Theory of Moral Sentiments* [Part 3, (chapter 3 paragraphs 1-25), Part 4 (chapter1), Part 6 (chapter 3)].

02/01 - Kant, *Groundwork* [Sections I and II (partial).]

02/06 - Kant, *Groundwork* [Sections II (rest).] **Written Response 1 due.**

02/08 - Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* [online excerpts]. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* [online excerpts]

02/13 - Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* [pp. 3-22,32-38, 47-53, 58-63, 75-79, 88-97,105-116,121-128, 135-142, 172-179, 195-204, 248-250]. Bentham, *Anarchical Fallacies*, CC Reader.

03/15 - Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* [Chapters 1-4, 5, (sections 1 and 4), chapter 9]. **Written Response 2 due.**

02/20 - Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* [Vol. 1, Part 1, Ch. 3-4; Part 2, Ch. 1, 4, 6-7; Vol. 2, Part 1, Ch. 1, 2, 5; Part 2, Chaps. 1, 5, 7; Part III, 12; Part IV, Ch.2-4, 6].

02/22 - Mill, *On Liberty* [Chapters 1 and 2]. **First Paper due.**

02/27 - Mill, *On Liberty* [Chapters 3-5].

03/01 - Mill, *Utilitarianism* [Chapters 1, 2, 5] and *Subjection of Women* [Chapters 1, 3, 4]

03/06 - **Midterm**

03/08 - Smith, *Wealth of Nations* [Book I, Chapter 1-4, 7-8, Book II, Chapters 1, 2, pp. 310-318, 3; Book III, chapter 1, Book IV, chapter 1, Book V, Chapter 1, pp. 819-846, Chapter 3, 981-86, 1025-1028.]

03/13 - **Spring Break**

03/15 - **Spring Break**

03/20 - Marx – Economics, History and Politics [Marx-Engels Reader 70-93, 148-200, 469-500]

03/22 - Marx *Capital* [Selections: Marx-Engels Reader 294-98, 302-336].

03/27 - Darwin, *Origin of Species* [Chapters, 3, 4, 11, 14]. **Written Response 3 due.**

03/29 - Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals* [I and II].

04/03 - Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals* [III].

04/05 - Dubois, *The Souls of Black Folk*.

04/10 - Dubois, *Souls of White Folks* (CC Reader). Frantz Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth* [1-52, 97-144].

04/12 - Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj*. **Written Response 4 due.**

04/17 - Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*.

04/19 - Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (online excerpts).

04/24 - Rawls, “Justice as Fairness”, “Outline of a Decision Procedure for Ethics”.

04/26 - Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (online selection). Closure of the class. **Final paper due.**

04/04 - **Final Exam.**