**CONTEMPORARY CIVILIZATION IN THE WEST**

Taught Fall 2019

**Course Description**

Contemporary Civilization (CC) is a yearlong course that offers an overview of major texts and ideas that have been highly influential in the social, political, and intellectual development of the society in which we live. As such, many of the authors we will discuss belong to the so-called canon of Western philosophy. However, in this class we will not study these texts as part of a canon, but rather as part of a conversation among authors seeking to clarify important issues, such as the nature of justice, happiness, knowledge, freedom and legitimate government. For historically contingent reasons, this conversation and the authors partaking in it have become a foundational backdrop of intellectual life in the area of the world typically designated as "the West". Moreover, given the past and present dominance of "the West", these texts have also exerted influence (intellectual and otherwise) in areas outside the so-called "West".

While one aim of this course is to help you become conversant with this intellectual tradition, we will also seek to interrogate and critically examine the ideas, assumptions, and practical consequences that stem from it. Through this critical engagement with this conversation, we will develop tools to analyze important concepts such as justice, freedom, human flourishing, and political community. At the same time, we will shed light on the connections between this intellectual tradition and past and present structures of privilege, power, oppression and marginalization. Thus, another important feature of this course is to apply the ideas and concepts we discuss to the persistent problems facing our communities today.

This course functions as a seminar, which means that your preparedness and active participation is crucial for its success. For the same reason, it is important that we create a positive class environment that fosters belonging for all class participants. While I will sometimes provide small lectures to situate the text at hand, my main role will be to facilitate discussion. In addition to its focus on class discussion, this course is also structured to help you improve your argumentative writing skills. To this end, I will hold two in-class writing workshops and provide writing assignments of increasing complexity over the course of the semester.

**Learning Objectives**

By the end of this course, students will be able to…

1. Perform close readings of densely argued texts, which includes identifying the text's main arguments, supporting claims, and style of argumentation, as well as assessing the validity of the arguments presented.
2. Write argumentative college-level essays with the following features: well-developed arguments in support of central claims, engagement with relevant texts, concepts and arguments on the subject of the essay, clear and logical organizational structure, and clear and precise writing style.
3. Contribute to class discussion by formulating clear and thought-provoking questions, making connections to other texts and ideas, and offering a critical analysis of the subject at hand.
4. Apply key concepts and questions from the CC literature to the complexities of our contemporary situation.
5. Interpret and evaluate texts and ideas in (largely) Western political philosophy, ethics, and religious traditions.

**Required Texts**

Plato, *Republic* (Hackett)

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (Oxford, trs. Ross, Brown)

Aristotle, *Politics* (Hackett)

*New Oxford Annotated Bible with Apocrypha* (Oxford)

Augustine, *City of God* (Penguin)

*The Qur’an* (Oxford, ed. Abdel Haleem)

Machiavelli, *The Prince* (Hackett)

Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy* (Broadview Press)

Hobbes, *Leviathan* (Oxford)

Locke, *Political Writings* (Hackett, ed. Wootton)

Rousseau, *The Basic Political Writings* (Hackett)

*These books are available at Book Culture (536 W. 112th St.). All other assigned readings will be available on Courseworks (CW).*

**Attendance Policy**

The Core has a very strict policy on student attendance. Students are required to attend every session of their Core classes. All absences have to be justified. If you must miss class due to a family or personal emergency, religious holiday, or extracurricular conflict, you must let me know beforehand. In your next class, you must also bring a document justifying your absence. Under all other circumstances, your absence will count as unjustified. Each unexcused absence beyond the first unexcused absence will decrease your final grade by one third of a letter grade (e.g. A to A-, A- to B+). Moreover, as per Columbia College policy, if you accumulate four unexcused absences (including the first one), you will receive an F and may be dropped from the course.

**Academic Integrity**

I take all forms of academic dishonesty very seriously, and will prosecute them accordingly. 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.

The Columbia College Student Council, on behalf of the whole student body, has resolved that maintaining academic integrity is the preserve of all members of our intellectual community – including and especially students. As a consequence, all Columbia College students make the following pledge:

We, the undergraduate students of Columbia University, hereby pledge to value the integrity of our ideas and the ideas of others by honestly presenting our work, respecting authorship, and striving not simply for answers but for understanding in the pursuit of our common scholastic goals. In this way, we seek to build an academic community governed by our collective efforts, diligence, and Code of Honor.

In addition, all Columbia College students are committed to the following honor code:

I affirm that I will not plagiarize, use unauthorized materials, or give or receive illegitimate help on assignments, papers, or examinations. I will also uphold equity and honesty in the evaluation of my work and the work of others. I do so to sustain a community built around this Code of Honor.

If you ever have any questions about what constitutes plagiarism or a breach of academic honesty in general, please don’t hesitate to ask me, but it is your responsibility to familiarize yourself with, and to abide by, the school policies regarding academic integrity. Plagiarism “by mistake” or due to “confusion” about what plagiarism means will not be excused.

The Columbia Center for New Media, Teaching, and Learning has a helpful discussion of plagiarism: <http://ccnmtl.columbia.edu/projects/compass/discipline_humanities/documenting.html#plagiarism>

**Accessibility**

I recognize that there are multiple ways to learn, and I encourage you to speak with me about your learning needs. If you find yourself struggling with accessibility issues in the classroom and have not yet contacted Disability Services, I encourage you to do so. If you have a disability accommodation, please come to talk to me at the beginning of the term, or send me an email, and we will work together with the Office of Disability Services (ODS), which can provide note-takers, extra time for assignments, transcribers, and interpreters, among other services, as well as liaise between you and your professors. The ODS can be reached at 212-854-2388 and disability@columbia.edu. You can find more information on the ODS website: <https://health.columbia.edu/content/disability-services>.

**Grading Distribution**

Participation: 20%

Oral Presentation: 5%

Reading Replies: 10%

Midterm exam: 10%

Final exam: 15%

First paper: 5%

Second paper: 10%

Third paper: 25% (1-page outline 5%, 1-2 page peer review of paper outline 5%, final paper 15%)

**Assignments**

Participation (20%):

Your participation grade depends on regular and punctual attendance, as well as your contributions to class discussions. At mid-semester, I will give you a partial participation grade and give you feedback on your contribution to class discussion up until that point.

Keep in mind that active participation does not necessarily mean talking a lot or showing everyone your grasp of the material. A good participant in class discussion will also engage with others' contributions. You may build on, synthesize or ask for clarification on comments from others. You may also show appreciation for others' contributions and explain how they help you understand the material better. You may also suggest exploring a different angle of the topic at hand, even if you do not have a definitive view on the matter. In short, being a good participant in class discussion is not about showing your peers and me how much you know. Rather, it is about the quality of your contribution to the *collective* and *collaborative* enterprise of class discussion.

Of course, in order to contribute meaningfully to class discussion you will have to come to class on time and prepared (e.g. completing the assigned reading in advance, researching background information on the author or reading ahead of time, bringing the reading with you to class, reading discussion questions posted by other students).

I understand that some students find it difficult to speak up in class. If this tends be a problem for you, I encourage you to do any of the following:

1. Write down your thoughts on the reading before class and share them at the outset of our discussion.
2. After class, e-mail me any thoughts that you didn't have the opportunity to articulate during class discussion.
3. Come to my office hours to discuss the readings.

Oral Presentation (5%):

Once during the semester you will make a 10-minute oral presentation connecting the day's readings to contemporary issues or to your own life. Presentations should be ten minutes long. If you are connecting the readings to present-day social or political issues, you should cite and respond to good contemporary journalism or other substantive writing on the issues you address. If you are connecting the readings to your own life, you should provide specifics about the reading's relation to your life experiences. In both cases, your presentation must cite and discuss specific passages from the readings. You can either speak from bullet-point notes or read a speech word-for-word. At the end of your presentation, you must hand in your notes (which must include citations!) or speech.

Reading Replies (10%):

You will write a 1-or-2-paragraph reply to the day's reading a total of 10 times over the course of the semester. To this end, I will split students into two groups. Students in the first group will write their reading replies on Mondays. Students in the second group will write their reading replies on Wednesdays. In weeks when we only have one session due to academic holidays or exams, students from both groups can write a reading reply for the day in which class is held. You should post your replies on Courseworks by noon on the day of class. There is no credit for late or "make-up" reading replies. I encourage all of you to read each other's replies before class in order to make our discussion more profitable. Your replies can take the form of questions that demonstrate engagement with the text (e.g. a request for clarification on what view the author is putting forward, a question about how an argument works, a question on how the author's view connects to other claims we have discussed in class), criticism of an argument in the reading, elaborations of a point made by the author, or a comment on another reply made by one of your peers.

Midterm and Final Exams (25%)

There will be two in-class exams over the course of the semester—a midterm and a final. I will provide more details on the structure of these exams as their date approaches. In general, these exams are designed to assess your comprehension of the assigned readings, your familiarity with the content of our class discussions, as well as your ability to apply these ideas to contemporary social, political and ethical issues.

Papers (40%)

In this class, you will complete three writing assignments of increasing complexity. In the first paper (5%), you will write a 2-page long reconstruction of an argument made by one of the authors discussed in class. The second writing assignment (10%) is a 3-4 page paper in which you will explain and evaluate an argument presented in one of the CC texts. In the third and final paper, you will write a 5-7 page argumentative essay in which you will present and defend your own thesis on a topic of your choosing. Before submitting the final paper, you will be asked to submit an outline of your paper (5%), and to review a paper outline from one of your peers (5%). You will have plenty of opportunities to get feedback on your writing. Apart from the peer review assignment, I will hold two writing workshops and will give substantial feedback on all your writing assignments. All submitted papers must have the following format: 11-point font size, double space, and standard page margins (1").

**Late Papers & Grace Days**

The penalty for late papers is one-third of a letter grade for each day that the essay is late (e.g., B+ to B). However, I understand the external factors may affect your ability to submit your best work on time. So, during the semester, you will be allowed 3 total “grace days,” i.e., a solicited extension on the deadline for some paper. For example, if a paper is due on a Friday, you may request to use 2 grace days so that the deadline is extended to Sunday. If you wish to use grace days, you must indicate that you will be doing so in an e-mail sent to me no fewer than 24 hours before the paper is due. You do not need to provide a rationale to me in your e-mail; there’ll be no questions asked by me. You should just state that you will be using your grace days and specify how many you wish to use.

If you experience any long term problems outside of the classroom that interfere with your ability to perform in this course, PLEASE come and see me sooner rather than later. I would like to work with you to get you back on track and that gets harder the longer you wait to reach out.

**Office hours**

You are encouraged to come to office hours to discuss thoughts, questions, outlines, or drafts for papers, as well as your discussion questions, or any other topic pertinent to our seminar discussions and your learning in the course. You should feel free to come to me at any point in the writing process, but my experience is that students benefit most when they meet earlier on.

If there is more than one person waiting for office hours, I will ask if everyone present would be open to meeting with me in small groups. If not, I will limit individual meetings to 15 minutes each. If you cannot meet during my scheduled office hours, you can set up an appointment with me via e-mail. During the week of September 23, I will meet with each student for 10 minutes to speak about your expectations and questions about the course, your participation, and some other questions that will allow me to best help you in developing your writing. You must sign up for these meetings on a shared Google Document by September 20.

**Laptop, tablet, & cellphone use**

Most of the research suggests that the use of laptops, tablets, and phones has a negative impact on classroom learning. Students who use these devises do not learn or remember as much, take bad notes, perform worse on tests, and distract others around them. Moreover, the use of screens hinders the face-to-face conversations that are essential to the success of this class. For all these reasons, laptops, tablets, and cellphones are not allowed in this class. That said, I am willing to approve the use of laptops and tablets on a case-by-case basis. If you have a good reason for using either of these devices in the classroom, feel free to contact me to discuss your case.

**Other Student Wellness Services**

Counseling and Psychological Services (CPS)

212-854-2878 // <https://health.columbia.edu/content/counseling-and-psychological-services>

Counseling and Psychological Services supports the psychological and emotional well-being of the Columbia campus community by providing counseling, consultation and crisis intervention — all of which adhere to strict standards of confidentiality.

Sexual Violence Response (SVR)

212-854-4357 (24/7/365) // <https://health.columbia.edu/content/sexual-violence-response>

SVR provides trauma-informed, confidential support through crisis counseling/intervention, advocacy, prevention, and outreach focused on interpersonal violence and harassment. Our mission is to eradicate all forms of gender-based violence. Through collective community action, SVR is committed to social change and creating a culture of accountability.

Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action (EOAA)

212-854-5511 // eoaa.columbia.edu // eoaa@columbia.edu

The University’s Office of Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action (EOAA) has overall responsibility for the management of the University’s Employee Policies and Procedures on Discrimination, Harassment, Sexual Assault, Domestic Violence, Dating Violence and Stalking; coordinates compliance activities under these policies and the applicable federal, state and local laws; and is designated as the University’s Compliance Office for Title IX, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, and other equal opportunity, nondiscrimination and affirmative action laws.

**COURSE SCHEDULE**

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| Session | Date | To Do (important assignments in **bold**) |
| 1 | 09/04 | Appiah, "There is No Such Thing as Western Civilization"  Plato, *Republic,* Book I |
| 2 | 09/09 | Plato, *Republic,* Books II-IV |
| 3 | 09/11 | Plato, *Republic,* Books V-VII |
| 4 | 09/16 | Plato, *Republic,* Books VIII-X |
| 5 | 09/18 | Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics,* I; II: 1-6; III: 1-5; VI: 1-8, 12.  **First Writing Workshop** |
| 6 | 09/23 | Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics,* VII: 1-10; VIII-X |
| 7 | 09/25 | Aristotle, *Politics,* I: 1-9, 12-13; III: 1-13; IV: 1-5; VII: 1-3; VIII: 1-3. |
|  | 09/27 | **First paper due by 11:59 pm.** |
| 8 | 09/30 | Hebrew Bible, *Exodus* 1-24; *Deuteronomy* 1-6; *1 Samuel* 2, 8-10, 17-20; *2 Samuel,* 7, 11, 13-15, 18-19; *Ecclesiastes.* |
| 9 | 10/02 | New Testament, *Matthew* 3-7; *Galatians; Romans.* |
| 10 | 10/07 | Augustine, *City of God,* I: Preface, 1, 8-11, 16, 18, 19, 29, 35, 36; IV 1-4; V: Preface, 9-11; VIII: 6, 8, 9, 11; XI: 1, 13; XII: 1-9, 21-23. |
| 11 | 10/09 | Augustine, *City of God,* XIV: 1-7, 9-19, 24-28; XVIII: 1; XIX: 1, 12-17, 24-25; XXII: 23-24. |
| 12 | 10/14 | **Midterm Exam** |
| 13 | 10/16 | The Qur'an, *Suras* 1, 114, 112, 111, 107, 98, 96, 81, 74, 68, 63, 56, 55, 49, 45, 43, 42, 39, 30, 28, 26, 19, 17, 15, 12, 11, 10, 4, 3, 2(read in this order). |
| 14 | 10/21 | Ibn Tufayl, "Hayy ibn Yaqzan" (CW).  Al-Ghazali, "The Rescuer from Error" (CW). |
| 15 | 10/23 | Aquinas, "The Summa Against the Gentiles", pp. 3-7 (CW); "On Kingship", pp. 14-29 (CW); "The Summa of Theology", pp. 30-38, 46-53 (CW). |
| 16 | 10/28 | Machiavelli, *The Prince* (entire)*.*  **Second Writing Workshop** |
| 17 | 10/30 | Council of Castile, "El Requerimiento" (CW).  Bernardino de Sahagún & the Nahuas\*, *Florentine Codex,* Book 12 (CW).  Felipe Guamán Poma de Ayala, "Appeal Concerning the Priests" (CW).  Vitoria, "On the American Indians", pp. 231-251, 264-65, 271-272, 277-291 (CW). |
|  | 11/04 | No Class (Academic Holiday)  **Second paper due by 11:59 pm** |
| 18 | 11/06 | Luther, "Preface to Romans," (CW) "Concerning Governmental Authority," (CW) "Twelve Articles of the Swabian Peasants" (CW). |
| 19 | 11/11 | Descartes, Introduction and Preface to *The Principles of Philosophy* (CW).  Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy, '*Synopsys';Meditations 1-3. |
| 20 | 11/13 | Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy,* Meditations 4-6.  Correspondence with Princess Elisabeth of Bohemia (selections, CW). |
| 21 | 11/18 | Hobbes, *Leviathan,* 'To My Most Honor'd Friend'; 'Introduction'; ch. 1-2, 6, 8-9, 11, 13-16. |
| 22 | 11/20 | Hobbes, *Leviathan,* ch. 17-19, 21, 29-33. |
|  | 11/21 | **Final paper outline due by 11:59 pm.** |
| 23 | 11/25 | Locke, *Second Treatise,* ch. 1-9, 18, 19. |
|  | 11/27 | No Class (Academic Holiday)  **Peer review due by 11:59 pm.** |
| 24 | 12/02 | Rousseau, *Discourse on Inequality* (entire, incl. endnote 15). |
| 25 | 12/04 | Rousseau, *Social Contract,* Books I; II; III: 1-4, 10, 15; IV: 1-3, 8. |
|  | 12/06 | **Final paper due by 11:59 pm.** |
| 26 | 12/09 | **Review Session** |
|  | TBA | **Final Exam** |

All readings are subject to change. I will notify you in advance if there are any modifications.