

Power, Identity, Resistance I

SOSC 11400

Autumn 2026

Time: Tues / Thurs, 11:00am - 12:20pm

Room: Harper 104

Professor: Austin Carson, Department of Political Science, acarson@uchicago.edu

Office Hours: Tues (1-3pm). Sign up sheet at [this link](#).

Course description

This is the first course in the Power, Identity, and Resistance (PIR) sequence in the Social Sciences Core. The full PIR sequence addresses political power and reactions to it, including how to organize politics, regulate economics, ensure stability and safety, and address inequality. The Autumn course focuses on canonical works of political liberalism by Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, Jean-Jacques Rousseau and critics like Edmund Burke. The goal is to teach students to read closely, express ideas and disagreements in discussion, write clearly, and think critically about politics, power, and society. We address questions like: Where does the authority to rule others come from? What is the ideal political system? What is the role of reason, property, and nature in classical liberalism? The texts trace the evolution of liberal political theories that tend to highlight authority emerging from groups of associated individuals voluntarily forming government for their own protection as well as forms of accountable shared governance. Assignments include short papers, class participation, lightning presentation, and a final exam.

Required texts

You will spend a lot of time with these books. Books are available for purchase; I recommend checking the Seminary Co-Op first.

- Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (Hackett) ISBN 9780872201774
- John Locke, *Second Treatise on Government* (Hackett) ISBN 97801915144860
- Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality* and *On the Social Contract* (Chicago) ISBN 9780226151311
- Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (Oxford World Classics) ISBN 9780199539024

Assignments & Grade

The class grade will be based on the following:

- Attendance & discussion participation (25%)
- Two short essays (2 x 20% = 40%)
- In-class presentation (10%)
- In-person review (25%)

Attendance & discussion participation (25%). Students are expected to complete all assigned readings before class and thoughtfully contribute to discussion regularly. Preparation is critical for individual participation and for us to collectively generate fruitful and useful class discussion. The grade for participation can be reduced for both under- and over-participating. A good rule of thumb is 2-3 quality contributions per session. I will share preliminary participation grades around Week 5. I may use “cold

call” techniques, pair students for small discussion, or use small groups. Students are expected to attend every class; I may take attendance to verify.

In-class presentation (10%). Each student will present a “lightning” style presentation during class explaining in detail a passage from Rousseau (one slide, 3-4 minutes). The goal is to efficiently present in a way that shows your ability to perceptively analyze a specific passage, relate it to other themes in writings by Rousseau, and connect it to contemporary issues. Grading will be based on originality and depth of analysis as well as clarity of visuals/presentation. Further details will be provided in class.

Short essays (2 x 20%=40%). Students will write two short essays in the first month of class, one on Hobbes, one on Locke. I will share an essay prompt that will ask students to deeply probe an issue or theme in the assigned readings. Essays due dates are noted below; students will have 36-48 hours to write. Grades will be based on clarity of writing, engagement with the text, and originality of the argument. Examples from past courses will be posted on Canvas. Essays must be drafted and submitted via the procedure described below on AI policy. (Concerned about the essays? See the writing help section below.)

In-person review (25%). The “final exam” takes the form of an in-person review. Students will discuss the quarter’s readings and ideas in a one-on-one conversation with me. This is intended to ensure each student has engaged with the materials and can summarize and reflect on it. Each conversation will occur in my office, door open, for ~15 minutes. No “gotcha” questions asking for recall of specific details or passages will be included. I will ask questions about broad themes in individual authors and pose at least one question about a cross-cutting theme relevant to all. (For example, I might ask you to assess how Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, or Burke might think about the role of an independent judiciary as a check on power.) There are no “right” answers to memorize. Meetings will take place Monday-Wednesday of finals week (Dec 7-9). Each student must sign up in a calendar booking system far in advance to avoid scheduling conflicts.

Professionalism

We will create a quarter-long community with its own intellectual culture. All students should feel welcome to articulate, experiment with, and rigorously test their ideas during class. To enable this, we all must follow some basic norms of respectful exchange. Verbal contributions during seminar should be respectful of other viewpoints. Avoid a confrontational tone but do not shy from disagreement; often learning happens through thoughtful articulation of alternative ideas. Be professional. Acts of harassment or misconduct based on protected identity categories is not allowed. A useful university resource on sexual harassment and misconduct is [here](#). Reach out to me with concerns about anyone’s professionalism, including your own.

Writing Help

Writing is sacred. It is a key skill we will work on in this course and a useful skill across all parts of life. Due to AI and large language models, decent written content can now be generated by anyone. Good, creative, memorable writing is now what separates us. The [Chicago Center for Writing](#) (CCW) provides writing instruction and guidance. I highly recommend each student take 10 minutes to explore their website for information about writing coaches (available for 1:1 appointments), writing tutors, and writing groups. There will also be writing workshops led by CCW writing coaches that students are encouraged to attend and are tailored to the SOSC core. The sooner you get intentional about your approach to writing, the sooner you will begin to separate yourself from the mediocre and voiceless writing that every other human can now generate in seconds.

Technology during class

Our class meetings will be conducted “analog.” The SOSC core is designed to be taught as analog courses, meaning students will read texts on paper and engage through guided discussion that is unmediated by laptops, phones, or other digital devices. This means we will use a device-free “put it away” model. Prepare before class accordingly. I strongly recommend putting thought into a strategy for comprehending texts,

synthesizing ideas, and staying organized without access to a device during class. Any exceptions will be discussed in the first week; individual students with documented accommodations needs should reach out early in the quarter to discuss.

Email policy

Note that due to the very busy quarter structure and several non-teaching responsibilities that I hold at the university, I may not be able to read or respond to student emails for 24 hours. I do not regularly check my email on weekends. Plan accordingly.

Late policy

Deadlines are strict. Assignments received late will be dropped a full letter grade for each 24-hour period past the deadline. Exceptions can include unexpected illness or family emergencies. Advanced communication, to the extent it is possible, is always helpful.

Academic integrity / plagiarism

Language and ideas that are not your own must be properly cited. I will strictly follow the University's policy on academic integrity: "It is contrary to justice, academic integrity, and to the spirit of intellectual inquiry to submit another's statements or ideas as one's own work." More details on the policy are [here](#).

AI policy

Artificial intelligence (AI) can be a valuable tool for learning and research. Yet misuse and overuse of AI can drastically curtail essential parts of the learning process. In other courses I teach, I expressly permit the use of AI for some parts of the research process and welcome students' suggestions about other uses. This class is different and I adjust my AI policy accordingly.

Recall that this class is part of a larger series of classes (PIR sequence) in a larger Social Sciences Core (SOSC). This is a collective instructional endeavor that we do here at UChicago. It is important for instructors like me to harmonize our approach to AI with that larger collective effort. That is the first reason for a restrictive AI policy. But it is not the most important. The pedagogical goals of this class differ from other classes I teach and from most other courses on campus. The purpose of this class is to learn close reading, to learn the core ideas in historical texts of political liberalism, to learn to discuss and debate ideas, and to learn to think critically about taken-for-granted political ideas. Each goal would be limited or entirely undermined by a permissive approach to AI for summarization, for writing, or for idea generation and sharpening. (Use of AI for some tasks, like presenting ideas orally or productively disagreeing during discussion, does not even make sense in our context.)

Students at UChicago have opportunities to *think with* AI and *think about* AI in other coursework. In this class, we use an old-school, "analog" approach to *think without* AI. (On this trio, see the University President's op-ed in *Wall Street Journal* posted within Canvas.). Unless expressly excepted, we will use no devices during class and use no AI for class. Some details:

- AI may never be used to generate written content or revise manually written material.
- As a safeguard against prohibited uses of AI, each student will be required to write their essays in a Google Document shared with me which includes "version history."
- All written assignments are eligible for review through Pangram. An adverse result from Pangram will never be the sole basis for penalties given the risk of false positives. But a Pangram review can trigger a closer inspection by me, a discussion, and other steps.

I do not think scholars and students should romanticize or reflexively preserve old methods simply because that was how things were done before. Using AI may improve some intellectual tasks. But the relevant tasks *for this class* are best learned manually. Also, learning in "analog" modes better equips students and scholars to harness AI more effectively and guard against some of its downside risks.

Student disability accommodations

If you need disability accommodations, please provide me with a copy of an Accommodation Determination Letter (provided to you by the Student Disability Services office) as soon as possible so we can discuss how to make accommodations in this course.

Schedule and Readings

Week 1

Sept 29

Overview of class

Hobbes, *The Leviathan*, Part I “Of Man,” Chapters 1-9

Oct 1

Hobbes, *The Leviathan*, Part I “Of Man,” Chapters 10-16

Week 2

Oct 6

Hobbes, *The Leviathan*, Part II “Of Common-wealth,” Chapters 17-24

Oct 8

NO CLASS (professor travel)

Week 3

Oct 13

Hobbes, *The Leviathan*, Part II “Of Common-wealth,” Chapters 25-30

Hobbes short essay prompt circulated

Due before start of next class

Oct 15

Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, Chapters 1-6

Week 4

Oct 20

Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, Chapters 7-13

Oct 22

Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, Chapters 14-19

Locke short essay prompt circulated

Due before Fri Oct 23, midnight (Chicago)

Week 5

Oct 27

Rousseau, *Discourse on Inequality*, Letter to Geneva, Preface, Part 1 (pp. 41-90), Part 2 (pp. 91-117)

Oct 29

Rousseau, *Social Contract*, Book 1 (pp. 163-178)

Week 6

Nov 3

Rousseau, *Social Contract*, Book 2 (pp. 179-204)

Nov 5

Rousseau, *Social Contract*, Books 3-4 (pp. 205-248/262-272)

Week 7

Nov 10

In-class lightning presentations on Rousseau
(no assigned reading)

Nov 12

Discussion: The Role of International Relations in Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau
(review notes and previously assigned readings; no new readings)

Week 8

Nov 17

NO CLASS (professor travel)

Nov 19

Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, pp. 3-125.

Thanksgiving Break: Nov 23-27

Week 9

Dec 1

Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, pp. 125-142; 160-199.

Dec 3

Discussion: Hobbes vs. Locke vs. Rousseau vs. Burke
Mini-lecture: “Why World Government Follows from Social Contract Theory”
(no assigned reading)

Final in-person review with Professor Carson. [Schedule your time here](#)