

**(Un)Common Read: Political Writings of Rousseau**  
IDH2930 (Spring 2023)

Class #: 29572

Mondays, Period 5 (11:45 AM – 12:35 PM)

Little Hall 0117

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**Course Description**

Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) is one of the most important and interesting political philosophers in the Western tradition. He was the first major thinker in Western history to argue that democracy is the best form of government, indeed the only legitimate form of government—something we Americans tend to take for granted nowadays—and his formulation of basic democratic theory remains unparalleled to this day. Along with Thomas Hobbes and John Locke, he was one of the three great “social contract” theorists of the Enlightenment.

However, he was also the first great critic of Enlightenment philosophy and the kind of society he saw it producing. He characterized the latter as “bourgeois”—a term which would later become indelibly associated with Marx, but which Rousseau was perhaps the first to use in its modern sense. Relatedly, he was a major influence on the French Revolution. (Reportedly, Robespierre slept with a copy of *On the Social Contract*, which he would quote from while sentencing people to public execution by guillotine.) In fact, Rousseau is the grandfather of modern leftism, from classical Marxism to contemporary “wokeism”.

He also wrote the first modern autobiography (*Confessions*), the most popular novel of the 18<sup>th</sup> century (*Julie, or the New Heloise*), and some very successful operas. His cultural influence can be discerned today in phenomena as disparate as ethical veganism, on the one hand, and “paleo” and “carnivore” diets, on the other. Social constructionism, critiques of modernity and progress, and “get back to nature” movements all owe much to Rousseau, whether they realize it or not.

In this reading- and discussion-based course, we will focus on Rousseau’s theory of democracy and his political philosophy more generally, as presented in his *Discourse on the Arts and Sciences*, *Discourse on Inequality*, and *On the Social Contract*. Our text for this course will be the volume titled *The Major Political Writings of Jean-Jacque Rousseau: The Two Discourses and the Social Contract*, translated and edited by John T. Scott (University of Chicago Press, 2012).

This is an (Un)Common Read course in the University of Florida Honors Program. (Un)Common Read courses are one-credit courses for honors students which tackle one book in-depth in a discussion format.

## **Course Objectives and Student Learning Outcomes**

Students will read a major classic of Western political thought, Rousseau's *On the Social Contract*, as well as two related but less widely read texts by the same author. Students will learn how to read, write, think, and speak critically about historical and philosophical texts like these, including their applicability to contemporary society and current events. Students will also have ample opportunity to practice civil discourse and intellectual cooperation throughout our semester-long joint exploration of Rousseau's political thought.

## **Required and Recommended Texts**

Because this is an (Un)Common Read course, there is only one required text, which all students must purchase a hard copy of (which they must bring with them to every class):

- Rousseau, Jean-Jacques (2012). *The Major Political Writings of Jean-Jacques Rousseau: The Two Discourses and The Social Contract*. Trans. John T. Scott. Ed. John T. Scott. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.

Links for more information and/or purchase:

- Amazon page: <https://www.amazon.com/Major-Political-Writings-Jean-Jacques-Rousseau/dp/022615131X>
- Publisher's page: <https://press.uchicago.edu/ucp/books/book/chicago/M/bo14059658.html>
- UF Bookstore page: <https://www.bkstr.com/floridastore/course-materials-results?shopBy=course&divisionDisplayName=&departmentDisplayName=IDH&courseDisplayName=2930&sectionDisplayName=29572&programId=945&termId=100077949>
- UF Course Textbook Requirements page: <https://www.bsd.ufl.edu/textadoption/studentview/displayadoption1sect.aspx?SECT=29572&YEAR=23&TERM=1>

Because of the nature of this course, it is crucial that all students complete the assigned readings before the class for which they are assigned—and come prepared to discuss them.

While only the above text is required, students may find the following recommended readings helpful for context and further information:

- *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* entry on Rousseau: <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/rousseau/>
- *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy* entry on Rousseau: <https://iep.utm.edu/rousseau/>
- *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy* entry on Social Contract Theory: <https://iep.utm.edu/soc-cont/>
- Durant, Will, & Durant, Ariel (1967). *Rousseau and Revolution: A History of Civilization in France, England, and Germany from 1756, and in the Remainder of Europe from 1715, to 1789 (The Story of Civilization, Volume 10)*. New York, NY: Simon and Schuster.
- Hobbes, Thomas (2016). *The Essential Leviathan*. Ed. Nancy A. Stanlick. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc.
- Locke, John. (2016) *Two Treatises of Government*. Ed. Lee Ward. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc.

## Course Schedule

	<b>Reading Assignments</b>	<b>Deadlines (essays TBD)</b>
Monday, January 9	D1 Notice, Preface, Intro (3pp)	
Monday, January 16	<i>NO CLASS</i> (University Holiday)	
Monday, January 23	D1 First Part (10pp)	Short Writing #1 due 11:59pm Sunday (1/22)
Monday, January 30	D1 Second Part (13pp)	
Monday, February 6	D2 Letter, Preface, Intro (18pp)	Short Writing #2 due 11:59pm Sunday (2/5)
Monday, February 13	D2 First Part (25pp)	
Monday, February 20	D2 Second Part #1 (30pp)	Short Writing #3 due 11:59pm Sunday (2/19)
Monday, February 27	D2 Second Part #2 (30pp)	
Monday, March 6	SC Book I (all chapters) (15pp)	Short Writing #4 due 11:59pm Sunday (3/5)
Monday, March 13	<i>NO CLASS</i> (Spring Break)	
Monday, March 20	SC Book II #1 (Chapters 1-6) (11pp)	
Monday, March 27	SC Book II #2 (Chapters 7-12) (13pp)	Short Writing #5 due 11:59pm Sunday (3/26)
Monday, April 3	SC Book III #1 (Chapters 1-8) (20pp)	
Monday, April 10	SC Book III #2 (Chapters 9-18) (17 pp)	Short Writing #6 due 11:59pm Sunday (4/9)
Monday, April 17	SC Book IV #1 (Chapters 1-4) (15pp)	
Monday, April 24	SC Book IV #2 (Chapters 5-9) (15pp)	Short Writing #7 due 11:59pm Sunday (4/23)
Monday, May 1	<i>NO CLASS</i> (Exam Days)	

## Assignments and Assessment

This course has four categories of assessment:

- (1) Class attendance (weekly)
- (2) Participation in class discussion (weekly)
- (3) Short writing assignments (every other week)
- (4) Essays (two per semester)

Requirements for class attendance and make-up exams, assignments, and other work in this course are consistent with university policies. You can read the university attendance policies by clicking this link: <https://catalog.ufl.edu/UGRD/academic-regulations/attendance-policies/>. In particular, please consult what this webpage says about “planned” vs “unplanned” absences. For this class, it is important that you attend as many classes as possible. All excused absences must include documentation (e.g., a doctor’s note if you are absent due to illness). Each unexcused absence will result in a deduction of 10 points from your class attendance grade (out of 100).

Because this is a reading- and discussion-centered small seminar, it is crucial that all participants complete the readings before class and come to class prepared to discuss them. This *should* be the easiest part of the class for you to get an “A” on (besides class attendance), since I will only deduct points from this part of your grade if you don’t participate in class discussions or come to class without having done the reading.

Every other week, you will complete a short writing assignment (not less than half a page single-spaced, not more than 1.5 pages single-spaced) in which you will either make an argument or develop an inquiry which you would like to see thematized in class discussion. The topics for these assignments will be up to you, though I may make suggestions. They must relate to the course text and/or our discussions of it. I may select one or more each week to bring up in class to help start or direct class discussion. These short writing assignments are your opportunity to think through the material in writing and to get feedback from me on both your thinking and your writing. If there is something you are confused about or don't understand in the text or in our discussions, these are a good place to develop your inquiry. On the other hand, if there is something you strongly agree with or disagree with in the text or our discussions of it, you can use these assignments to make your case. Assessment of these short writing assignments will focus on your understanding and articulation of the material, though excessive grammatical or citational mistakes may result in a deduction if this is repeated, as will any submissions that are less than half a page or more than two pages.

There will be two essays for this course, one due in the middle of the semester and one at the end of the semester. Students will vote on the exact deadlines for these essays (i.e., whether the first will be due at the start or at the end of Spring Break, and whether the second will be due at the start or end of Exam Days). Each essay should be 2000-4000 words (approximately 5-10 pages double-spaced). Grammatical and citational issues will be assessed more strictly than for the short writing assignments. Further information on the essays, from topics to formatting, will be given in class. Because the second essay will be written after you have received my feedback on the first essay, it will count for more.

Short writing assignments and essays submitted after the 11:59pm deadline will be penalized 2/3 letter grade per 24 hours late. Hence, if you submit a short writing assignment (due Sunday by 11:59pm) at 12:00am-11:59pm on Monday, the *highest* grade you will be able to receive on it would be an A-; if 12:00am-11:59pm on the Tuesday following class, a B; if Wednesday, a C+; etc.

Short writing assignments and essays should be submitted as Microsoft Word (.docx) files. If you cannot do that, you must submit them as PDFs. Other file formats (e.g., .pages) will not be accepted.

Here is the breakdown of your final/total grade for the course:

- Class attendance – 15%
- Class participation – 15%
- Short writing assignments – 30%
- Essay #1 – 15%
- Essay #2 – 25%

I will be using a letter-grading system (A+, A, A-, B+, B, B-, C+, C, C-, D+, D, D-, F) for class participation, short writing assignments, and essays. Your attendance grade will be numeric (100 by default, -10 for each unexcused absence). To calculate your final grade, I will convert all letter grades to numbers, calculate your total grade, and re-convert to a letter grade. I will use the following letter-number conversion scheme (defaulting to the highest value when converting from letters to numbers—e.g., if I am converting an A- to a numeric grade, it would default to a 92):

A+	A	A-	B+	B	B-	C+	C	C-	D+	D	D-	F
≥97	≥93	≥90	≥87	≥83	≥80	≥77	≥73	≥70	≥67	≥63	≥60	<60

Information on current UF grading policies for assigning grade points can be accessed by clicking this link: <https://catalog.ufl.edu/UGRD/academic-regulations/grades-grading-policies/>.

## **Free Speech and Civil Discourse**

The First Amendment to the United States Constitution reads as follows:

*Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.*

As a public land-grant institution, the University of Florida is a governmental entity for First Amendment purposes. Students, staff and faculty at UF thus possess First Amendment rights that may protect their right to engage in speech. To learn more about freedom of speech and expression at UF, students may consult [freespeech.ufl.edu](https://freespeech.ufl.edu).

Freedom of speech is one of the hallmarks of modern liberal democracies like the United States. In our study of Rousseau’s political theory, we will have ample opportunity to discuss the philosophical underpinnings of this core democratic ideal.

Free speech is not absolute in the United States. For example, while the First Amendment protects offensive speech, it does not protect “true threats”, i.e., “statements where the speaker means to communicate a serious expression of an intent to commit an act of unlawful violence to a particular individual or group of individuals” (*Virginia v. Black*, 538 U.S. 344).

Moreover, free speech can only truly flourish in a context of civil discourse, in which participants who hold a variety of viewpoints converse together in good faith and with respect for certain norms designed to ensure civility. This is especially important for a discussion-centered class like this one. In this class, all students will be expected not only to respect their fellows’ First Amendment rights, but also basic norms of civil discourse. For example, insulting fellow students may be constitutionally protected speech, but it is inappropriate in the context of an academic discussion in the classroom and may even constitute “disruption” of the class’s academic activity.

In this class, all students should feel not just free but also comfortable in expressing their viewpoints, exploring historical and conventional (and unconventional!) viewpoints, and interrogating the viewpoints of others—regardless of whether they are controversial, offensive, etc. There is no expectation that students will agree with each other’s views or those of the instructor, with one exception, namely, regarding the norm of civil discourse. In other words, we must all agree to respect each other in the classroom and in our academic interactions with each other. I cannot say it better than Prof. Robert P. George:

*My philosophy of teaching is straightforward and rather simple: My job is not to tell students what to think or induce or encourage them to think as I do; it is, rather, to help students to think more deeply, more critically, and for themselves. What I ask of students is open-mindedness, tolerance of those whose opinions differ from yours, a willingness not only to challenge others but to be challenged in turn, and a genuine and deep desire to learn--and to learn by seriously engaging authors and fellow students whose ideas differ, even radically differ, from your own.*

For further information on the sort of behaviors considered unacceptable in a UF classroom environment, students should consult the Regulations of the University of Florida ([https://regulations.ufl.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/4-040\\_2021-12-06.pdf](https://regulations.ufl.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/4-040_2021-12-06.pdf))—in particular, section (3)(d) (“Interference with an Academic Activity”) and section (4)(c) (“Disruptive Conduct”).

## **Electronics Policy**

In order to encourage participation and focus attention, electronics are prohibited in the classroom unless explicitly permitted by the instructor on a case-by-case basis.

Moreover, this is a seminar-style class in which the bulk of class time will be devoted to discussion, and in which there is only one required text, which all students are required to purchase a hard copy of and bring to each class. Thus, there should be no need for a student to use an electronic device in the classroom. Any note-taking in class should be done by hand.

If a student feels they need to use an electronic device for some reason, they should consult with me in advance of class. That includes students with relevant disabilities (see the Disability Statement below) and students who wish to record class (see the statement on In-Class Recording below).

## **Disability Statement**

Students with disabilities who experience learning barriers and would like to request academic accommodations should connect with the disability Resource Center. Click this link to get started with the Disability Resource Center: <https://disability.ufl.edu/get-started/>.

It is important for students to share their accommodation letter with their instructor and discuss their access needs as early as possible in the semester.

## **Course Evaluations**

Course evaluations are an extremely important part of the university's assessment of teachers and classes, and they can have a great impact on instructors' future ability and opportunities to teach.

Students are expected to provide professional and respectful feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing course evaluations online via GatorEvals. Guidance on how to give feedback in a professional and respectful manner is available at <https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/students/>. Students will be notified when the evaluation period opens, and can complete evaluations through the email they receive from GatorEvals, in their Canvas course menu under GatorEvals, or via <https://ufl.bluera.com/ufl/>. Summaries of course evaluation results are available to students at <https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/public-results/>.

## **UF Conduct Code**

UF students are bound by The Honor Pledge which states, "We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honor and integrity by abiding by the Honor Code. On all work submitted for credit by students at the University of Florida, the following pledge is either required or implied: "On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment." The Conduct Code specifies a number of behaviors that are in violation of this code and the possible sanctions. Click here to read the Conduct Code: <https://sccr.dso.ufl.edu/process/student-conduct-code/>. If you have any questions or concerns, please consult with the instructor or TAs in this class.

## **In-Class Recording**

Students are allowed to record video or audio of class lectures. However, the purposes for which these recordings may be used are strictly controlled. The only allowable purposes are (1) for personal educational use, (2) in connection with a complaint to the university, or (3) as evidence in, or in preparation for, a criminal or civil proceeding. All other purposes are prohibited. Specifically, students may not publish recorded lectures without the written consent of the instructor.

A “class lecture” is an educational presentation intended to inform or teach enrolled students about a particular subject, including any instructor-led discussions that form part of the presentation, and delivered by any instructor hired or appointed by the University, or by a guest instructor, as part of a University of Florida course. A class lecture does not include lab sessions, student presentations, clinical presentations such as patient history, academic exercises involving solely student participation, assessments (quizzes, tests, exams), field trips, private conversations between students in the class or between a student and the faculty or guest lecturer during a class session.

Publication without permission of the instructor is prohibited. To “publish” means to share, transmit, circulate, distribute, or provide access to a recording, regardless of format or medium, to another person (or persons), including but not limited to another student within the same class section. Additionally, a recording, or transcript of a recording, is considered published if it is posted on or uploaded to, in whole or in part, any media platform, including but not limited to social media, book, magazine, newspaper, leaflet, or third party note/tutoring services. A student who publishes a recording without written consent may be subject to a civil cause of action instituted by a person injured by the publication and/or discipline under UF Regulation 4.040 Student Honor Code and Student Conduct Code.

## **Campus Resources**

### **Health and Wellness**

- *U Matter, We Care*: If you or someone you know is in distress, please contact [umatter@ufl.edu](mailto:umatter@ufl.edu), 352-392-1575, or visit U Matter, We Care website (<https://umatter.ufl.edu/>) to refer or report a concern and a team member will reach out to the student in distress.
- *Counseling and Wellness Center*: Visit the Counseling and Wellness Center website (<https://counseling.ufl.edu/>) or call 352-392-1575 for information on crisis services as well as non-crisis services.
- *Student Health Care Center*: Call 352-392-1161 for 24/7 information to help you find the care you need, or visit the Student Health Care Center website (<https://shcc.ufl.edu/>).
- *University Police Department*: Visit UF Police Department website (<https://police.ufl.edu/>) or call 352-392-1111 (or 9-1-1 for emergencies).
- *UF Health Shands Emergency Room / Trauma Center*: For immediate medical care call 352-733-0111 or go to the emergency room at 1515 SW Archer Road, Gainesville, FL 32608; Visit the UF Health Emergency Room and Trauma Center website: <https://ufhealth.org/emergency-room-trauma-center>.
- *GatorWell Health Promotion Services*: For prevention services focused on optimal wellbeing, including Wellness Coaching for Academic Success, visit the GatorWell website (<https://gatorwell.ufsa.ufl.edu/>) or call 352-273-4450.

## **Academic Resources**

- *E-learning technical support*: Contact the UF Computing Help Desk (<http://helpdesk.ufl.edu/>) at 352-392-4357 or via e-mail at [helpdesk@ufl.edu](mailto:helpdesk@ufl.edu).
- *Career Connections Center*: Reitz Union Suite 1300, 352-392-1601. Career assistance and counseling services. <https://career.ufl.edu/>
- *Library Support*: Various ways to receive assistance with respect to using the libraries or finding resources. <https://cms.uflib.ufl.edu/ask>
- *Teaching Center*: Broward Hall, 352-392-2010 or to make an appointment 352- 392-6420. General study skills and tutoring. <https://teachingcenter.ufl.edu/>
- *Writing Studio*: 2215 Turlington Hall, 352-846-1138. Help brainstorming, formatting, and writing papers. <https://writing.ufl.edu/writing-studio/>
- *Student Complaints On-Campus*: Visit the Student Honor Code and Student Conduct Code webpage for more information: <https://sccr.dso.ufl.edu/policies/student-honor-%20code-student-conduct-code/>.
- *On-Line Students Complaints*: View the Distance Learning Student Complaint Process: <https://distance.ufl.edu/state-authorization-status/#student-complaint>.

## **Syllabus Change Policy**

This syllabus is only a guide for the course and is subject to change with advance notice.