

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

POLITICAL SCIENCE 485H/2027H

TOPICS IN POLITICAL THOUGHT II

FALL SESSION 2025

Professor C. Orwin ([clifford.orwin@utoronto.ca](mailto:clifford.orwin@utoronto.ca))

This Semester we will read Rousseau's *Social Contract*, a work of the greatest rigor and therefore of considerable difficulty. (Its central innovation and the theoretical core of its argument, the general will, has entranced and perplexed generations of readers.) Reasonable men will differ as to the greatest modern political thinker, but a strong case can be made for the *SC* as the greatest single work of modern political theory. As I will argue, it brings the preceding phase of modern political thought, that characterized by social contract theory, to an unprecedented height of perfection. At the same time its argument looks ahead to the next phase of modern political thought, with its emphasis on freedom and the centrality of the nation. No thinker so embodies the transition from the European thought of the 18<sup>th</sup> C. to that of the 19<sup>th</sup> C as Rousseau, and no work so displays it as the *Social Contract*. And yet as we will see there are aspects of his thought that overleap the 19<sup>th</sup> C. and anticipate the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup>.

Great as it is, the *Social Contract* conveys only a part of Rousseau's comprehensive political teaching. We will therefore supplement it by beginning with two other texts, the Dedicatory Letter to the *Discourse on Inequality* and the *Discourse on Political Economy*. **WE WILL DEVOTE OUR FIRST CLASS SESSION TO THE FORMER OF THESE WORKS AND OUR SECOND AND THIRD TO THE LATTER. PLEASE COME TO THE FIRST SESSION HAVING READ THE DEDICATORY LETTER AND IF POSSIBLE MICHAEL PALMER'S ARTICLE ON IT.** In Weeks Three through Twelve we will proceed through the *SC* with all deliberate speed.

**RECOMMENDED TRANSLATION (AVAILABLE AT THE TEXTBOOK STORE)**

**Rousseau, *Major Political Writings*, ed. and trans. John T. Scott. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012. ALSO AVAILABLE AS AN E-BOOK OR A PDF FROM THE PUBLISHER.**

**(This edition does not include the *Political Economy*, so I will distribute a translation of it.)**

**IF YOU CAN READ ROUSSEAU IN THE ORIGINAL FRENCH YOU SHOULD DO SO. ALTHOUGH PROFESSOR SCOTT'S TRANSLATIONS ARE GOOD, THERE IS NEVER ANY SUBSTITUTE FOR READING A WORK IN THE ORIGINAL.**

***Our course motto: The cowards never started, the weak died along the way.***

## RECOMMENDED SECONDARY READINGS

Beiner, Ronald. *Civil Religion. A Dialogue in the History of Political Thought*. Cambridge; Cambridge University Press, 2011. **AVAILABLE ONLINE**. Chapters 1, 7, and 8 are devoted to Rousseau: Prof. Beiner will attend our seminar to discuss them.

Cullen, Daniel E. *Freedom in Rousseau's Political Philosophy*. DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1993. A solid treatment of a fundamental issue. JC179 .R9 C85 1993

Cusher, Brent Edwin. "Rousseau and Plato on the Legislator and the Limits of Law." ProQuest Dissertations and Theses, 2010. **AVAILABLE ONLINE**. A University of Toronto dissertation by an alumnus who has gone on to play a leading role in the field of Leadership Studies.

Gildin, Hilail. *Rousseau's Social Contract. The Design of the Argument*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983. JC 179 .R88 G54 1983

Hanley, Ryan Patrick. "Political Economy and Individual Liberty." In Eve Grace and Christopher Kelly, ed. *The Challenge of Rousseau*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012, pp. 34-57. **AVAILABLE ONLINE** B2137 C43 2013x. An excellent discussion of the economic argument of the *Political Economy*.

Kelly, Christopher. *Rousseau as Author: Consecrating One's Life to Truth*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003. A very fine book by an alumnus of this program who went on to become one of the leading scholars of Rousseau of his generation. **PQ2056 .E85 K45 2003X**

\_\_\_\_\_. "To Persuade Without Convincing: The Language of Rousseau's Legislator." *American Journal of Political Science* 31,2 (1987), 321-335. **AVAILABLE ONLINE**.

MacLean, Lee. *The Free Animal. Rousseau on Free Will and Human Nature*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013. Based on a Toronto dissertation that I directed but which takes an approach to the question of freedom in Rousseau quite different from mine.

Marshall, Terence. "Art d'écrire et pratique politique de J.-J. Rousseau," I and II. *Revue de métaphysique et de morale* 89,2 &3 (1984). 232-61, 322-47. **B2 .R2**

Melzer, Arthur. *The Natural Goodness of Man. On the System of Rousseau's Thought*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990. Possibly the best single volume on the system of Rousseau's thought, which devotes several chapters to the *SC*. **AVAILABLE ONLINE**. B2138 .M3 M44 1990

\_\_\_\_\_. "Rousseau, Nationalism, and the Politics of Sympathetic Identification." In Mark Blitz and William Kristol, ed., *Educating the Prince*. Essays in Honor of Harvey Mansfield. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000, pp 111-129. JA 83 .E39 2000x

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Orwin, Clifford. "Rousseau on the Problem of Invisible Government. The *Discours sur l'Economie Politique*." In Mark Blitz and William Kristol, ed., *Educating the Prince. Essays in Honor of Harvey Mansfield*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000, pp. 100-110. JA 83.E39 2000x

Palmer, Michael. "The Citizen Philosopher. Rousseau's *Dedicatory Letter to the Discourse on Inequality*." In Palmer, *Masters and Slaves. Revisioned Essays in Political Philosophy*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2001, pp. 121-140. JA 81 P28 2001x

Riley, Patrick. *The General Will Before Rousseau. The Transformation of the Divine into the Civic*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014. **AVAILABLE ONLINE**

\_\_\_\_\_. "Rousseau's General Will." In Riley, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Rousseau*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001, pp. 124-153. **AVAILABLE ONLINE**.

Scott, John T., ed. *Rousseau. Critical Assessments*. New York and London: Routledge, 2006. Volume 1: *Paradoxes and Interpretations*; Volume 2: *Human Nature and History*; Volume 3: *Political Principles and Institutions*; Volume 4: *Politics, Arts, and Autobiography*. JC 179 .R9 J4337 2006. This massive compendium (ca. 1600 pages) is the most valuable collection of essays on Rousseau in English.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Rousseau's God. Philosophy, Religion, and the Natural Goodness of Man*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2023. **AVAILABLE ONLINE**.

Shklar, Judith N. *Men and Citizens. Rousseau's Social Theory*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969. **JC 179 .R9 S55**

Strauss, Leo. "On the intention of Rousseau." *Social Research* 14,4 (1947), 455-87. **H1 .S53**

Williams, David Lay, *Rousseau's Social Contract: an Introduction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014. **AVAILABLE ONLINE**.

\_\_\_\_\_, ed. *The General Will. The Evolution of a Concept*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015. **AVAILABLE ONLINE**

\_\_\_\_\_, and Matthew W. Maguire, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Rousseau's Social Contract*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2024. **AVAILABLE ONLINE**

\_\_\_\_\_, and Arturo Chang. "Rousseau and Tlaxcala: Indigenous Transfigurations, Republican Liberty, and the Transimperial Politics of the new World." *Polity* 57,3 (2025), 557-586. **AVAILABLE ONLINE**. Professor Chang, who teaches at UTM, will visit to discuss this article with us.

**These readings, except for those that are articles on journals, will be on two-hour reserve in the short-term loan area on the third floor of Robarts Library. (Journals do not circulate, so you will find the relevant issues in the stacks.) I hope you'll come to love that little reserve room, as you'll be spending so much of your time there. Note, however, that the library**

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system has multiple copies of many of these items, so you may be able to check one out. Most of the works available online are also available as hard copies if you would prefer to read them as such. And where the work is translated from the French, multiple copies of the French original are usually available for checkout.

#### **COURSE ASSIGNMENTS AND MARKING SCHEME**

**POL 485HF (the undergraduate course).** An essay of 2000 words due Thursday, October 16. (20% of the final mark), an essay of 2750 words, due Thursday, November 19 (35% of the final mark), a final exam to be administered during the December exam period (35% of the final mark). Class attendance and participation will count for 10%.

**POL 2027HF (the graduate course).** An essay of 2750 words due Thursday, October 23, a take home exam to be distributed on Friday, November 27 and due Monday, November 30; a final essay of up to 4500 words, due December 15. The first assignment will be worth 20% of the final mark and the two later ones 40% each.

In each of your essays you will be expected to cite at least six secondary sources (i.e., books or articles, at least three of which, however, must be books).

**PLEASE SUBMIT YOUR ESSAYS ELECTRONICALLY, SUBMITTING A COPY TO ME DIRECTLY ([CLIFFORD.ORWIN@UTORONTO.CA](mailto:CLIFFORD.ORWIN@UTORONTO.CA)) AS WELL AS THROUGH THE ASSIGNMENT PORTAL OF QUERCUS.**

**N.B.** In the graduate course as in the undergraduate one, no extensions will be granted on written work except for good cause. In keeping with Nietzsche's theory of punishment, however, according to which every crime has its price and punishment was originally nothing more than an exaction of that price (cf. *On the Genealogy of Morals*, Second Essay), extensions will be readily available to those willing to purchase them. The price will be 3 points, plus 2 additional points per day beginning with the first, off your mark for that assignment. (If you are one day late you will lose 5 points; two days late, 7; etc.). This proviso does not apply to the take-home exam for graduate students, which will not be accepted if late.

You are responsible for informing yourself of and abiding by the University's policies on plagiarism and other academic offenses. The Code of Behavior on Academic Matters, and revised as of July 1, 2025 and including a precise definition of plagiarism, is available at

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<https://governingcouncil.utoronto.ca/secretariat/policies/code-behaviour-academic-matters-july-1-2025> The university also publishes a series of guides on avoiding plagiarism.

**IN TAKING THIS COURSE STUDENTS AGREE THAT ALL REQUIRED PAPERS MAY BE SUBJECT TO SUBMISSION FOR TEXTUAL SIMILARITY REVIEW THROUGH THE ASSIGNMENT REVIEW FUNCTION OF QUERCUS. ALL SUBMITTED PAPERS WILL BE INCLUDED AS SOURCE DOCUMENTS IN THE DATABASE FOR FUTURE REVIEWS FOR THE SOLE PURPOSE OF DETECTING PLAGIARISM OF SUCH PAPERS.**

**MR ORWIN'S OFFICE HOURS**

Wednesdays from 12 to 3 in SS 3055.

*And, for those who missed it, our course motto: The cowards never started, the weak died along the way.*